**Omega Graduate School**

**Dissertation Research Prospectus (Pre-Proposal)**

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**Problem Statement**

The problem is the functioning dissatisfaction among Antiguan men living in St. Mary’s Parish in Antigua in their intimate partner relationships. This issue results from personal circumstances and a complex interplay of societal factors, particularly parental upbringing. Men residing in St. Mary’s Parish, Antigua, experience dissatisfaction in their intimate partner relationships, and this can be traced back to the parental upbringing practices that have shaped their understanding of relationships.

Parental influence is a powerful force that significantly impacts children’s behavior. Parents play a pivotal role in shaping their children's behavior as the primary caregivers and teachers during a child’s formative years. Often considered the primary source of socialization, family is a critical factor in shaping people’s behavior. Family members serve as role models for each other, and their actions, beliefs, and attitudes can shape the child’s behavior and worldview through direct and indirect means. (Dhiman, Dr. Bharat, 2023). This underscores the importance of parental upbringing practices in the context of our study.

**Purpose Statement**

This study holds significant importance as it delves into the relationship between functioning dissatisfaction in intimate partner relationships of Antiguan men living in St. Mary’s Parish, Antigua, and the parental upbringing practices or the socialization they experienced growing up. Research has consistently shown that having a satisfying intimate relationship is one of the great pleasures in life. Understanding the complexity of relationships and sexual satisfaction is a matter of personal happiness and is crucial in helping couples avoid significant relationship discord. Relationship health has a profound influence on physical and emotional health, and with reported rates of divorce at 40-50%, relationship health is undeniably a critical public health issue. (Rice et al., 2023). Thus, identifying mechanisms that encourage healthy relationship functioning is of utmost importance.

**Background of the Problem (1-2 pages)**

Forming and maintaining satisfying and lasting social relationships is not just a desire but a fundamental human need. (Szabolcsi, 2023). The great philosopher Aristotle astutely characterized the nature of humans as “social beings. Today, more than two thousand years after Aristotle’s claim, empirical studies have continued to underscore the profound impact of social relationships on well-being.” Modern research defines social relationships as direct, repeated, and dynamic interactions between two individuals, which are mentally represented and recognized as a relationship by both interaction partners. Research also suggests that people with satisfying relationships live longer and are generally healthier, happier, and more satisfied with their relationships. (Szabolcsi, 2023).

In Antigua, parents socialize their male and female children differently, and parental socialization influences how children behave in their intimate partner relationships. The words of a popular Antiguan social commentator, Torianna ‘Onku’ Edwards, capture the socialization in these lines in his calypso “Tie your hen, my cock let go.” He colloquially suggests that the hen, namely the female child, should be tied and tamed, and protected, while the cock, the male child, is free to roam and do damage. This attitude provides a particular perspective for both men and women to view themselves in relationships. This perspective of a subdued, tamed hen in a relationship with a wild, roving cock often provides the photoplay for problematic intimate partner relationships.

Parenting determines children's cognitive, emotional, and social growth, especially during early childhood. Thus, parenting plays a significant role, whether directly or indirectly, in the children’s development of intimate partner relationships. According to Erik Erikson (1950), the developmental crisis of children at this stage is initiative versus guilt. Children at this stage usually have the classic oedipal struggle, which they resolve through social role identification. Serious conflicts in close personal relationships can be highly distressing, and attempting to ignore or avoid conflict is maladaptive. (Britton et. Al, 2024)

This issue of functioning dissatisfaction in male-female relationships continues to be identified at various levels in Antigua and Barbuda society. Men previously involved in intimate partner relationships have indicated their disinterest in continuing such relationships. One young man stated, “Women are stressful to be in relation with.” Concurrently, some women in long-standing, significant relationships have left these relationships, citing their partners’ attitudes and behaviors as the reason for the separation. One woman affirmed, “Men are just little boys parading in grown men’s bodies.” These statements point to the challenging complexities of male-female relationships and suggest that people in relationships must be aware of effective conflict-reflection interventions to promote constructive engagement with conflicts.

Additionally, in Antigua, there has been an increase in reported incidents of women being shot or stabbed to death by their intimate partners, and some of these happened in the presence of children. These brutal deaths sent shock waves through the community because the accused perpetrators were young men aged 20-30. The researcher, living in the community and having been directly involved with some of these cases, can cite the detrimental effects these relationship fractures have caused in the family.

Expectedly, probing questions emerged from the population: What is happening in our little community? Why are so many male-female relationships toxic? Why do some relationships end in violent deaths and young men incarcerated? Reflections on these questions provided the writer’s interest and desire to examine male socialization in general and male parental upbringing and determine if there is any correlation to how Antiguan males function in intimate partner relationships. Research suggests that parental upbringing impacts how adults function in romantic relationships. Studies also suggest that children exposed to social adversity or hardship as a result of social circumstances such as poverty or intergenerational trauma are at increased risk of poor outcomes across the life course. (Gartland et al., 2019). The formation of bonds during development influences the state of connection in adult relationships. If early connections are frail and insubstantial, trouble may ensue regarding adult relationship satisfaction. (Gartland et al., 2019).

Researchers also found that secure attachment could significantly and positively impact self-esteem and romantic relationship satisfaction. The internal working model of self and others serves as an individual’s lifelong schema and impacts self-concept and romantic relationship satisfaction. The self-model significantly and positively contributed to self-esteem and romantic relationship satisfaction. A childhood of negative experiences may lead to more negative attitudes toward close relationships, oneself, and emotion-laden interpersonal events. (Chui, W. Y., & Leung, M. T. (2016). Understanding what promotes resilient outcomes is essential for developing correct intervention strategies that promote healthy relationships. (Szabolcsi, V. 2023).

Encouraged by these reflections and the conscious desire that advancing God’s kingdom requires wholeness in relationships, the writer intends to explore the functioning satisfaction of the intimate partner relationships of Antiguan men living in St. Mary’s Antigua. The writer believes there is immense value in understanding functioning dissatisfaction in male intimate partner relationships (IPR) and any correlational factors that affect these relationships. Determining whether parental upbringing contributes to how Antiguan males function in intimate partner relationships could catalyze better relationship functioning in Antigua. To provide the parameters for this study, the writer must explain some of the critical terms used in the research. These terms include functioning dissatisfaction, Antiguan men, intimate partner relationships, and parental upbringing practices.

What is functioning dissatisfaction in intimate partner relationships, and how do parental upbringing practices influence them?

Functioning dissatisfaction refers to an individual's basic needs or desires not being adequately met, leading to discontentment or unhappiness despite their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. Unlike severe psychological disorders or major life crises, functioning dissatisfaction may not necessarily disrupt one's ability to function in society or perform daily tasks. Instead, it manifests as a persistent dissatisfaction, often related to work, relationships, or personal fulfillment. This dissatisfaction can impact overall well-being and prompt individuals to seek changes or improvements. Complaining, avoidance of social interaction, lack of self-care, irritability, procrastination, feelings of emptiness, loss of enthusiasm, negative outlook, and withdrawal from loved ones. Potential indicators of someone wrestling with dissatisfaction. (Kim & Kwon, 2024). Where functioning dissatisfaction occurs, males remain in relationships without feeling content or satisfied.

Cornell’s University Legal Information Institute defines the term “intimate partner” as a person, their spouse, former spouse, parent of a child, and an individual who cohabitates or has cohabited with the person. From this definition, one could infer that an intimate relationship is an interpersonal relationship that involves physical, emotional, or sexual intimacy. Although commonly a sexual relationship, it may also be a non-sexual relationship involving family, friends, or acquaintances. For this study, the writer references an Intimate Partner Relationship (IPR) as a sexual relationship between a man and a woman.

Socialization may be understood as the lifelong process of internalizing society’s norms and ideologies. Individuals acquire culture and assimilate into society by practicing its customs and traditions. Language, attitudes, parental upbringing, values, and roles form part of one’s socialization. Parental socialization or upbringing encompasses parental practices and processes that impact the development of a child’s emotion-related skills, understanding, expression, and regulation through parent-child exchanges. They can be overt or covert, physical, sexual, or emotional. (Martins et al., 2018). Parental socialization practices influence these intimate partner relationships significantly. (Porta et al., 1998.)

Studies conducted on intimate partner relationships indicate that cultural and social norms acquired through socialization highly influence an individual’s attitudes and behaviors, including violent ones. Corporal punishment and witnessing violence in the family, media, or other settings contribute to social tolerance of violent behaviors. Sometimes, violence is regarded as the only method of resolving conflicts or rearing children, increasing the risk factor for interpersonal violence ([Krug et al., 2002](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0886260517692336?casa_token=ypmG1ZyCPCEAAAAA%3ACws6eCQ_vylPOSHPW7vPq5j7UoFoebeqnvQiPSbJMxiY_BonB-zQ4l_ZGPr85x6itLgK8RKpDg)).

Studies also point to parents’ relationship, parenting philosophy, and how their child selects their child’s “ideal partner.” This new dynamic plays a role in developing the image of the perfect partner for the child. Studies further indicate that exposure to violence during childhood has been linked to dating violence victimization and perpetration. (Harned, 2002). Also known as the intergenerational transmission of violence, the link between violence during childhood and dating violence has traditionally focused on physical violence. Researchers have estimated that between 9% and 87% of high school and college students are involved in violent dating relationships (Harned, 2002). Although most research has focused on physical violence, other studies have examined psychological or emotional abuse, threats of violence, verbal abuse, and sexual violence. Experiencing and perpetrating dating violence is linked to exposure to violent atmospheres in the family of origin.

Since relationships are foundational to us as humans, and we cannot exist without these nurturing relationships in the social context, we must be supplied with the requisite tools to engage in these relationships safely and securely. (Gover, et. al. 2008). The writer believes that understanding how our background and parental upbringing influence us can provide the knowledge and impetus to make necessary adjustments and advance our freedom.

**Significance**

This study will contribute to the gap in the literature by identifying how parental socialization factors, namely factors associated with parental upbringing, contribute to the functioning dissatisfaction of Antiguan men living in St. Mary’s Antigua in their intimate partner relationships. This study may also contribute to positive social change by increasing the success of intimate partner relationships among Antiguan men. Dissatisfaction with relationship functioning is often associated with escalation in negative affect and deterioration in positive affect above and beyond the typical daily mood. (Brock et al., 2018). Adverse childhood experience is frequently considered a predictive element in adult interpersonal success. It is essential to examine childhood factors and how they impact a person’s relationship health as an adult. Increasing relationship success will contribute to a more stable family structure, improving family well-being by providing a framework for healthier intimate partner relationships. A greater understanding of relationship functioning will ensure that God’s kingdom’s purposes for families come to pass. Family members will achieve self-efficacy and enjoy better well-being when they are well. (Rice et al., 2023).

**Research Questions**

RQ1: What relationship exists, if any, between parental upbringing practices and satisfaction in intimate partner relationships among young men aged 18-30 living in St. Mary’s Parish, Antigua?

What relationship exists, if any, between parental upbringing practices and the functioning satisfaction in intimate partner relationships of men living in St. Mary’s Parish, Antigua?

**Research Methodology**

This study will utilize quantitative methodology because hypotheses derived from research questions will be tested using statistical analysis.

**Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

Both Social Learning Theory and Behaviorism Theory frame this study.

Burrhus Frederic Skinner, an American psychologist behaviorist, proposed Behaviorism. He is considered the Father of Behaviorism. Skinner believed human free will is an illusion, but human action depends on the consequences of previous actions.

If the consequences of an action are dire, there is a high chance that the action will be avoided. If the consequences are good, the probability of the action being repeated becomes stronger.

Additionally, social learning theory suggests that people learn social behavior by observing and imitating others' behavior. Psychologist Albert Bandura developed the Social Learning Theory, emphasizing the importance of monitoring, modeling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Social learning theory considers how environmental and cognitive factors influence human learning and behavior.

Albert Bandura (1977) agrees with the behaviorist B.F. Skinner and his theories of classical conditioning and operant conditioning in social learning theory. However, he adds two important ideas:

1. Mediating processes occur between stimuli and responses.
2. Behavior is learned from the environment through observational learning.

**Instrumentation**

Validated survey instrument that measures attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, or behaviors… (quantitative)

This study will utilize.

1. The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) is an instrument that measures general relationship satisfaction in intimate partner relationships. It is appropriate for use with individuals in personal relationships, such as married couples, cohabiting couples, engaged or dating couples. The instrument consists of 7 questions.

1. The**Parenting Scale** ESPA29 was designed to measure dysfunctional discipline practices in parents of young children. It precisely measures three factors of dysfunctional discipline style: (a) laxness, (b) overreactivity, and (c) verbosity. (Arnold et al., 1993)

**Research Design**

Correlational Design: examines the relationship between two continuous variables within the same group from a validated instrument (quantitative, deductive)

This quantitative study will utilize a correlational design because it will examine the relationship between parental practices of socialization and intimate partner relationships among young Antiguan men 18-30 living in St. Mary’s Antigua.

This quantitative study will utilize a correlational design to examine the relationship between the satisfaction in intimate partner relationships of men living in St. Mary’s Parish, Antigua, and those who experienced parental discipline practices as a child.

**Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study will be Antiguan men in St. Mary’s Parish, Antigua.

**Hypotheses (Quantitative Only)**

Correlational:

H0: No statistically significant relationship exists between functioning dissatisfaction and parental upbringing scores among Antiguan men living in St. Mary’s Parish, Antigua.

H0: No statistically significant relationship exists between satisfaction in intimate partner relationship scores among Antiguan men living in St. Mary’s Parish, Antigua, and scores of parental upbringing practices experienced as a child.

Ha: A statistically significant relationship exists between parental upbringing scores and functioning dissatisfaction relationship scores among Antiguan men living in St. Mary’s Parish, Antigua.

**Data Analysis Plan**

Quantitative:

This study will test data for normality and relevant assumptions of appropriate statistical procedures. If data do not meet assumptions for parametric procedures (results apply to the population), nonparametric procedures (results apply only to the sample) will be utilized.

This study will utilize Pearson’s Product Moment of Correlation (parametric) or Spearman’s Rank Correlation (nonparametric) to test the hypotheses for statistically significant relationships.

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