

# INTERPERSONAL ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION



**INTERPERSONAL ACCEPTANCE  
AND REJECTION**  
**SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS**

*Edited by*

**ELIAS KOURKOUTAS & FATOS ERKMAN**



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*Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection:  
Social, Emotional, and Educational Contexts*

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## FOREWORD

It is with pleasure that I write this Foreword to *Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection: Social, Emotional, and Educational Contexts*. The book contains a sampling of papers given at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress on Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection held in Rethymno, Crete, from July 3 to 6, 2008. Approximately 240 researchers and practitioners from 27 nations participated in the Congress.

This is the second book in what we expect to be a long series of volumes to appear regularly following international Congresses sponsored biennially by the International Society for Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection. The first volume on *Acceptance: The Essence of Peace* was published in 2008 by the Turkish Psychology Association. That volume followed the 2006 meetings in Istanbul, Turkey, where the Society was founded. We expect the next volume to be published following the 2012 international Congress in India.

Chapters in this volume are representative of the major concerns of the more than 2,200 researchers and practitioners in 73 nations worldwide who have indicated an interest in the topic of interpersonal acceptance and rejection. Such widespread interest clearly reveals that issues of interpersonal acceptance-rejection are recognized the world over as being important and worthy of study. Indeed, more and more people are beginning to recognize that perceived acceptance-rejection by significant others and attachment figures throughout life appears to account for more variability in psychological functioning than any other single experience. Chapters in this volume help to provide evidence about this conclusion.

RONALD P. ROHNER  
Past President and Executive Director  
International Society for Interpersonal  
Acceptance and Rejection



# Introduction:

## Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory, and Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection in Social, Emotional, and Educational Contexts

Elias Kourkoutas & Fatos Erkman

### Overview of the Volume

This volume includes a selection of studies on interpersonal relations. The studies were completed by researchers from around the world who submitted their work for peer review. The papers were initially presented at the 2nd International Congress on interpersonal acceptance and rejection jointly organized by the International Society for Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection and the Department of Primary Education at the University of Crete. The conference was entitled *Acceptance, Rejection, and Resilience within Family, Interpersonal, and School Context*. It was held at Rethymno, Crete in the summer of 2008.

Our primary goal for this book was to develop three major thematic areas covering a wide spectrum of theoretical and research issues on interpersonal acceptance-rejection. Specifically, areas that are explored in this book concern interpersonal acceptance and relationships in educational settings, within the family, and in adult intimate relationships. Each of the authors in the volume advances in an important way our knowledge of interpersonal acceptance-rejection. Their investigations focus on different questions dealing with distinct theoretical and research issues. More specifically, the following topics are addressed:

- Behavior genetics, family acceptance, and child development
- Children's and parents' perceptions of acceptance-rejection
- Children's psychological adjustment
- Adolescents' psychosocial maladjustment and eating disorders
- Child abuse and resilience
- Parental control and child resilience
- Self-concept and emotional intelligence
- Intimate adult relationships
- Violence against women, and intervention programs
- Family-school relations, and academic failure
- Family and school acceptance of children with disabilities and special educational needs
- Educational practices for children with disabilities or at-risk in other respects

Contributions such as these have significant implications for teachers, parents, educators, and clinicians. Many of these topics are guided by parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory), which we briefly describe next.

### Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory): Key Concepts and Findings

PARTheory is an evidence-based theory of socialization and lifespan development that attempts to predict and explain major causes, consequences, and other correlates of interpersonal—especially parental—acceptance and rejection worldwide (Rohner, 2004; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer,

2005). It attempts to answer five classes of questions divided into three subtheories. These are personality subtheory, coping subtheory, and sociocultural systems subtheory (Rohner et al., 2005).

According to both PARTheory and attachment theory, parents' love-related (i.e., accepting-rejecting) parenting styles affect the development of offspring's mental representations about themselves and about how sensitively and reliably they can expect their caregivers to respond to their emotional needs (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2010). Both theories speculate that these representations are likely to generalize to other close relationships, influencing offspring's appraisals and behaviors in intimate relationships throughout life (Rohner, Melendez, & Kraimer-Rickaby, 2008).

Parental acceptance and rejection are said in PARTheory to form the *warmth dimension of parenting*. This is a dimension or continuum on which all humans can be placed because everyone has experienced in childhood more or less love at the hands of major caregivers (Rohner et al., 2005). Thus, the warmth dimension has to do with the quality of the affectional bond between parents and their children, and with the physical, verbal, and symbolic behaviors parents use to express these feelings. One end of the continuum is marked by parental acceptance, which refers to the warmth, affection, care, comfort, concern, nurturance, support, or simply love that children can experience from their parents and other caregivers. The other end of the continuum is marked by parental rejection, which refers to the absence of or significant withdrawal of these feelings and behaviors, and by the presence of a variety of physically and psychologically hurtful behaviors and affects.

Extensive cross-cultural research over the course of nearly half a century reveals that parental rejection can be experienced by any combination of four principal expressions: (1) cold and unaffectionate, the opposite of being warm and affectionate, (2) hostile and aggressive, (3) indifferent and neglecting, and (4) undifferentiated rejecting (Rohner et al., 2005). Undifferentiated rejection refers to individuals' beliefs that their parents do not really care about them or love them, even though there might not be clear behavioral indicators that the parents are neglecting, unaffectionate, or aggressive toward them (Rohner et al., 2005; Rohner et al., 2007).

One of PARTheory's central postulates states that perceived rejection by a significant other at any point in life is likely to be associated with a specific cluster of personality dispositions that together compose the *acceptance-rejection syndrome* (Rohner, 2004). This syndrome is characterized by a cluster of 10 social, emotional, and cognitive dispositions. These include (1) hostility, aggression, passive aggression, and problems with the management of hostility and aggression; (2) dependence or defensive independence depending on the form, frequency, intensity, duration, and timing of the perceived rejection; (3) negative self-esteem; (4) negative self-adequacy; (5) emotional unresponsiveness; (6) emotional instability; (7) negative worldview, (8) anxiety, (9) insecurity, and as already noted, (10) social cognitive distortions (mental representations). Ample cross-cultural evidence documents the presence of these dispositions among rejected individuals on every continent where they have been studied (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Rohner, 1986, 2007; Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner & Khaleque, 2010).

After more than three thousand studies—many inspired directly by PARTheory—at least one conclusion is clear: *Children everywhere need a specific form of positive response—acceptance—from parents and other attachment figures* (Rohner et al., 2005). When this need is not met satisfactorily, children worldwide—regardless of variations in culture, gender, age, ethnicity, or other such defining conditions—tend to report the constellation of personality problems cited above in the acceptance-rejection syndrome. In turn these psychological issues tend to become associated with behavior problems and conduct disorders, depression and depressed affect, drug and alcohol abuse, and other such issues (Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner et al., 2005).

In recent years, PARTheory has undergone a paradigm shift away from its original emphasis on perceived *parental* acceptance-rejection to acceptance-rejection in all important *interpersonal* relationships throughout the lifespan. These relationships include but are not limited to parental acceptance-

rejection, peer and sibling acceptance-rejection, teacher acceptance-rejection, acceptance-rejection in adult intimate relationships, and acceptance-rejection in other attachment relationships. Despite this paradigm shift in theory and research-focus, the theory continues to be known as PARTheory because that label has become so widely recognized internationally.

As noted earlier, studies included in this volume explore interpersonal acceptance and rejection issues across three major thematic areas: a) Family, b) mainstream school, special educational and clinical contexts, and c) adult intimate relationships. Each of these topics is discussed next.

### **Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection in Family Context**

Studies in this section explore associations and mediations between perceived parental acceptance-rejection and various forms of child and adolescent adjustment or dysfunctional behaviors such as eating disorders. Studies also focus on developmental outcomes in domains such as adolescent self-concept, resilience, and moral reasoning. In addition, the first study in this section focuses on the association between social and genetic factors, and their impact on child development.

More specifically, even though the parental role is still considered to be a major factor affecting child outcomes in various developmental domains, contemporary views of child development also tend to attribute an important role to children's innate (genetic) characteristics or propensities, which might have a considerable impact on parents' practices and their capacity for caring relationships.

Contributing to this theme, the chapter by Ariel Knafo, sought to explore the genetic and environmental contributions to two aspects of parenting, namely maternal intrusiveness and maternal warmth. Even though his sample was small, data in the study reinforced past research findings and pointed to the importance of considering both environmental and genetic influences as determinants of parental behavior.

The second chapter, by Alberto Alegre and Mark Benson, deals with adolescents' emotional insecurity, parental behavior and adolescent problems of adjustment. Drawing upon the model of two leading researchers in family dynamics—Mark Cummings and Patrick Davies (see Cummings, Davis & Campbell, 2000)—the authors explored the significance of parental availability in predicting both internalizing and externalizing aspects of adolescent adjustment, as well as the way in which emotional insecurity mediated this adjustment. Alegre and Benson confirmed that emotional insecurity helped explain the process of parent availability influencing adolescent adjustment. They concluded that insecure emotional reactions mediated the link between parent availability and adolescent externalizing.

Next, Fatos Erkman and Ayşen Ekmekei explored in Turkish families the level of congruence between parents' (mothers and fathers) perceptions of parental acceptance and behavioral control and their early adolescent children's perceptions. Comparative evaluations were conducted among families classified as loving and less than loving. Results showed that, overall, children perceived their fathers in a more positive way than they did their mothers. Another major finding was associated with the low level of agreement between children's and mothers' as well as between children's and fathers' reports of acceptance and behavioral control.

The fourth chapter of this section, by Coby Gerlsma, Nynke Groenewold, Lotte Houwing et al., addresses the issue of the relationship between parenting styles and eating disorders as mediated by maladaptive core beliefs. Eating disorders constitute one of the most challenging issues in adolescent psychopathology, and in the study of family relations affecting the development of internalizing disorders. Existing evidence supports the hypothesis of a mediation model in which high parental overprotection and low parental care are related to core beliefs regarding defectiveness/shame and mistrust/abuse which, in turn, predict disordered eating. The authors replicated this mediation model, further refining it by examining the role of parental rejection, as well as the specificity of the model—

i.e., the extent to which the model applies to other psychological problems such as depression and social anxiety as well.

The next chapter, by Abdul Khaleque, Ronald P. Rohner, and Tania Rahman, focuses on a comparative study of perceived parental acceptance and its relation to children's adjustment within the United States and Bangladesh. More specifically, this study explored relationships among perceived parental acceptance-rejection, parental behavioral control, and psychological adjustment among children across these two cultures. Results of the study supported conclusions already advanced by PARTheory about the existence of cross-cultural and global trends in PARTheory research.

In the chapter that follows, Rukhsana Kausar and Asima Rasheed sought to explore whether living in an orphanage—and consequently experiencing a less nurturing and caring environment—has an impact on two main dimensions of psychosocial development, i.e., self-concept and emotional intelligence. The authors compared a sample of adolescents living in orphanages with a sample of adolescents living in intact families. Results showed significant difference between the two samples only on the dimensions of self-concept and adaptability. Unexpected was the finding showing that adolescents living in orphanages scored higher on the adaptability scale than did those adolescents living in intact families. The authors' conclusions highlight the importance of a nurturing parental presence for developing a stable and satisfactory self-concept and a capacity for relatedness in adolescence.

Resilience is not a static possession of adequate coping abilities within an adverse family environment. Rather, it appears to be the result of at least one supportive relationship in early childhood. Anna Laura Comunian, in the last chapter of this section, focused her study on unexplored aspects of resilience, namely on relations among parental control, resilience, and moral development among Italian children. She used the Italian adaptation of the Parental Control Scale (PCS, Rohner & Khaleque, 2005). Results of this study showed a high positive correlation between resilient behavior and moral judgment development in children. More specifically, findings from cluster analysis supported a conceptual and empirical link between moderate/firm parental control and resilience behavior. The findings also indicated that both mothers' and fathers' behavioral control appear in Italian culture to have the same impact on children's development of resilience.

### **Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection in Mainstream School, Special Educational, and Clinical Contexts**

As noted earlier, many chapters in this volume pertain to school caring (acceptance) and inclusive practice, as well as to teacher support (acceptance) as a protective factor for students with and without specific forms of disability. It is worth mentioning that prior research has also been completed within the PARTheory framework regarding this issue (e.g., Rohner, 2010). Studies conducted in this area seek to explore various associations and mediations between perceived parental acceptance-rejection, perceived teacher acceptance-rejection, perceived peer acceptance-rejection, and student outcomes in several domains. Evidence suggests strong associations between the perceived quality of teacher-student relationships and developmental outcomes for children such as school adjustment, school achievement, peer acceptance, and school engagement (see also Blankemeyer et al., 2002).

The first chapter in this section, by Tiia Tulviste, addresses the issue of relations among perceived parental acceptance-rejection and perceived teacher acceptance-rejection. Specifically, the author explores in a sample of Estonian adolescents the question whether the youths' perceptions of parental acceptance-rejection and behavioral control are related to their perception of teacher acceptance-rejection and behavioral control. Results revealed a high correlation among these two classes of phenomena. In particular, those adolescents who perceived their parents to be less accepting than others also tended to see their teachers to be more rejecting. Moreover, perceived parental rejection was related to less positive psychological adjustment, whereas teacher rejection was associated with school

conduct problems. Conclusions from this study have significant implication for school policy, school counselors, teachers, and family counseling for students coming from at-risk or dysfunctional families.

In the chapter that follows, Piedade Vaz-Rebello and Gracietes Franco-Borges sought in a large sample of Portuguese adolescents to investigate the relationship between the perception of parental rearing attitudes and academic failure. Applying logistic regression and interpreting data from an interactional perspective, the authors proposed a multidimensional, hermeneutic model of school failure. They employed variables such as adolescents' intellectual level, family socioeconomic status, and perceptions of parental rearing attitudes. Findings from this research showed the direct and indirect influence of adolescents' perceptions of parental rearing attitudes on academic failure, family social variables and subject variables. Implications of this study are important for educational policy and school practices for the support of students at risk for academic failure.

In a qualitative research study, Mariana Abreu and Maria Raul Xavier used semi-structured interviews to allow "resilient" and "non-resilient" adolescents to talk about their own life experiences in order to gain insight into their internal views and representations from a personal perspective versus an externally-imposed adult-centric model. The goal of the study was to identify possible individual features of the resilient and non-resilient group, as well as to reveal contextual factors that might account for protective mechanisms among students at-risk for interruption of social and interpersonal bonds. School as a site for living and learning as well as relations with teachers was valued by all adolescents as important protective factors. The authors noted, however, that further research is needed to get better insight into subtle differences between the two groups. Implications of this study imply a more active involvement of schools and teachers in their relations to non-resilient adolescents, as well as the development of school-based services to support school-family communication and relations with peers for at-risk students.

In the next chapter, Elias Kourkoutas and Maria Tsiampoura focus on the risks of abuse and maltreatment of children with disability and various forms of impairment. Children with disabilities were more likely than children without disabilities to experience a wide range of neglectful or abusive behaviors within family, school, and social contexts. The authors reviewed and analyzed maltreatment, resilience, and disability through the risk and protective model. In light of an ecological systemic perspective, they also discussed issues related to school and teacher roles and to best intervention practice on the individual and contextual level for children at-risk for social and interpersonal isolation.

Issues raised by Georges Manolitsis and Maria Kypriotraki in the chapter that follows have to do with barriers to school inclusion of children with special educational needs. According to international classification systems and current educational policy, the term *special educational needs* covers a wide range of inherent or acquired difficulties in childhood. The authors of this article examined the impact of story-reading in preschoolers' rejection beliefs and attitudes toward children with disabilities. Findings of this study showed that the beliefs and attitudes of children in the experimental group were significantly modified while beliefs and attitudes of children in the control group remained unchanged. Implications of this study for the development of appropriate school-based practices to help children with special educational needs were also important.

In the same vein, authors of the next chapter—Amalia Fillipaki and Marianna Kalaitzidaki—sought to combine programs inspired by Environmental Education with the philosophy and practice of Inclusive Education. In particular, they discussed the possibility of implementing environmental programs within mainstream school contexts as a tool to promote social and academic inclusion of children with special educational needs. Results from their study showed significant improvement in the social-interpersonal acceptance of these children as well as improvement of their social skills.

Developmental disorders constitute one of the main risk factors for the social and school exclusion of children. In particular, children within the autistic disorder spectrum are at high risk of encountering interpersonal rejection, and often problems of acceptance within the family as well. Based

on long-term clinical work with one autistic child and his family, Elias Kourkoutas and Maria Georgiadi attempted to investigate factors that might help promote school and social inclusion among children with serious developmental deficits, as well as improve family functioning. Data were discussed in light of the ecosystemic approach.

The next study by William Divale, Moldovan, Faures et al. was conducted in a psychiatric hospital within the former Soviet Republic, Moldova. The study was designed to combine cross-cultural, psychological, and social venues of inquiry. The authors sought to explore the perception of parental acceptance-rejection among chronically mentally ill patients, as well as the potential relation of these perceptions to the presence of serious mental difficulties. By tackling this issue, Divale et al. challenged prevailing conceptions of mental disorders as exclusively originating in innate, biological deficits. The authors suggested the important speculation that early parental rejection may have a bearing on the onset of schizophrenia symptoms during the teenage years.

### **Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection and Adult Intimate Relationships**

Studies presented in this section explore aspects of intimate relationships across a wide spectrum. Some studies deal with issues such as parental acceptance and intimate adult relationships. Other studies deal with marital violence and abuse.

Drawing from a phenomenological perspective and qualitative methodology, Slocum, Mc Killop, Allan et al. in the first chapter of this section, sought to explore the question: What constitutes an authentic apology in the specific context of relationship transgressions? The authors investigated experiences of apology, and identified apology aspects within intimate partner relationships that led to the belief that the transgressor was truly sorry for the offense. Conclusions of this study highlight the value of further research for the construction of a clinical and theoretical framework for considering various aspects of intimate partnership apology within the context of couples therapy.

In the next chapter, Ricky Finzi-Dottan, Dov Har-Even, and Galit Raz examined the contribution of attachment patterns, narcissistic traits, and fear of intimacy to prediction of rejection and acceptance expectancy among young Israeli adults. Rejection sensitivity (both rejection and acceptance expectancies) among young adults was predicted by their attachment characteristics, narcissism, and fear of intimacy. Results suggested that fear of intimacy underlies rejection sensitivity among those who are insecurely attached and show narcissistic traits. Implications of this study for clinical work with young adults expressing various difficulties in forming intimate relations are very important.

In the chapter that follows, Fatos Erkman and Mustafa Öztürk developed a new version of the Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire to evaluate the impact of parents-in-law on marital relationships and on the psychological well-being of sons-in-law and daughters-in-law. This area of research seems very promising for the comprehension of couple and family relations in specific cultural contexts. Findings from this study showed that the positive or negative contribution of in-law relationships is dependent upon spouses' perceptions of their in-laws' warmth and acceptance. Additionally, analyses of the results indicated high internal consistency reliability of the measure.

Drawing from PARTheory and attachment theory, Shaila Khan explored in the next chapter the issue of the nature of relationships that may exist among perceived intimate-partner acceptance, remembrances of parental acceptance in childhood, and the current psychological adjustment of adults. Results of this study showed the way in which remembrances of maternal acceptance in childhood were associated with men's psychological adjustment. Likewise, both perceived partner acceptance and remembered maternal acceptance were significantly and uniquely associated with women's adjustment.

Partner violence in intimate relationships is a compelling issue with negative social and individual consequences. In the chapter that follows, Enrique Gracia, Juan Herrero, and Marisol Lila focus on partner violence against women among Latin-American immigrants in Spain. The authors interpreted

the higher rates of partner violence against immigrant women as being related to cultural representations of tolerance toward aggressive acts against women. The authors proposed educational measures to modify these views and to prevent such incidents.

In the same vein, authors Marisol Lila, Enrique Gracia, and Juan Herrero sought to explore attributions of responsibility among male offenders regarding domestic violence against women. Available data demonstrated that batterers' attribution of responsibility was a key factor in explaining their involvement in intervention programs that attempted to enhance their capacity for connectedness and that attempted to reduce violence as well as the drop-out frequency from these programs. The authors identified two types of male offenders in relation to responsibility attribution: The first group comprised offenders with medium levels of victim-blaming and a low level of self-defense; the second group were offenders with high levels of both victim-blaming and high self-defense. Implications regarding effectiveness of court-mandated intervention programs are discussed in light of these findings. According to the authors, conclusions of this research may be useful to help identify priority areas of intervention among males convicted of domestic violence against women.

Overall, this volume provides research data and theoretical questions on a wide range of issues related to the contemporary study of interpersonal acceptance and rejection. In particular, the volume draws attention to subtle and diverse aspects of this process during childhood and its impact on adult life. Many of the studies have clinical, educational, and social policy implications for the improvement of schooling, clinical and special education techniques, couples therapy, programs for batterers, and the like. As such, the book should constitute a useful reference source for academic researchers, clinicians, teachers, special educators, school counselors, and many others.

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**PART ONE**

**INTERPERSONAL ACCEPTANCE AND  
REJECTION IN FAMILY CONTEXT**



# Gene-environment Correlation Applied to Parenting: Maternal Warmth and Intrusiveness

Ariel Knafo

## Abstract

There is ample evidence that children's adjustment and wellbeing are associated with the interpersonal acceptance and rejection they experience from their social environment. In this paper I argue for the important role children have in this process. I provide some evidence that parenting is in part influenced by the genetic propensities of the child, in a process termed *gene-environment correlation* (rGE). One hundred pairs of twins and their mothers participated in a videotaped play session as part of the Longitudinal Israeli Study of Twins (LIST) at 3.5 years of age; mothers' warmth and intrusiveness towards each child were scored. For intrusiveness, results suggested an evocative rGE in which some children's genetic factors evoke mother's intrusiveness. Mothers' warmth showed no evidence for rGE in this parenting variable. The results point to the importance of considering both environmental and genetic influences on how parents treat their children.

## Gene-environment Correlation Applied to Parenting: Maternal Warmth and Intrusiveness

There is ample evidence that children's adjustment and wellbeing are associated with the interpersonal acceptance and rejection they experience from their social environment (Erkman & Rohner, 2006). One of the key factors in children's environment involves the degree of acceptance provided by parents. Accepting, warm parents tend to have children who are well-adjusted and happier. In contrast, negative, rejecting parenting is associated with lower adjustment (Rohner, 2004). For example children of intrusive mothers do poorly academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally as compared to control children (Egeland, Pianta & O'Brien, 1993). In this paper I argue for the important role children have in this process. I provide some evidence that parenting is in part influenced by the genetic propensities of the child, in a process termed gene-environment correlation (rGE).

Recent years have shown an increase in the awareness that, in addition to parent influence, children influence their parents (Komsis et al., 2008; Kuczynski, et al., 1997; Rubin et al, 1999). However, a cardinal question remains (Knafo & Galansky, 2008): where do child influences come from? Research on child effects is still in its infancy, mainly due to methodological issues and to the complexity of detecting child-parent influences. A major obstacle for understanding family influences lies in the simple fact that in most families, children and parents both influence each other and at the same time share half of their genetic heritage.

Consider the example of warm, accepting parenting, and children's' prosociality. Parents' warmth and their use of reasoning, induction and autonomy support as opposed to power-assertive discipline are related to children's empathy and prosocial behavior (Clark & Ladd, 2000; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996). One possibility is that positive parenting makes children more prosocial, for example, by providing a prosocial model for them. Another possibility is that the effects attributed to parenting may represent in part the reaction of parents (e.g., warm behavior) to children's partially genetically-influenced prosocial behavior (e.g., prosocial behavior). This process has been termed an evocative rGE (Plomin, DeFries, & Loehlin, 1977).

The possibility that parents' behavior is influenced by their children's (genetically influenced) behavior is an important developmental research question (Reiss & Leve, 2007). Gene-environment cor-

relations are an important part of children's development and may actually be the reality of the socialization process.

### **Gene-environment Correlations**

Decades of research in child development have yielded two seemingly contrasting general findings. On the one hand, research has shown that parental behavior, characterized by parenting styles and practices, is meaningfully associated with a wide array of child behavioral and emotional outcomes (e.g., Flouri, 2008; Rubin et al., 1999). For example, corporal punishment positively relates to children's antisocial behavior (Jaffee et al., 2004) while parental positivity is associated with children's prosociality (Knafo & Plomin, 2006b). On the other hand, behavior genetic research, relying on twin and adoption studies, has repeatedly shown that the heritability (the proportion of inter-individual variation attributed to genetic effects in a certain context) of many traits is substantial and often increases with age, while the environmental influences shared by family members become increasingly weak as children grow up (Knafo & Plomin, 2006a; Turkheimer, 2000; Plomin et al., 2001). This has led some researchers, mainly from the behavioral genetics perspective, to describe the long-term influences of parenting as negligible (e.g., Harris, 1998).

One way to reconcile these contrasting findings is by establishing an understanding of the role of rGE. Genes and environment can be correlated. Applied to parenting, over a long series of parent-child interactions both children's genetically influenced behaviors and parents' behaviors are involved in development. Thus, ignoring either process undermines our understanding of the complexity of development. The relationships between parental behavior and children's development stem from either genetic influences common to parents and child (described below as passive rGE) or from parents' reaction to the child's genotype (evocative rGE). Statistically speaking, these rGEs are subsumed in the heritability coefficient in behavioral genetic research, but referring to these effects as purely heritable ignores the involvement of the environment.

### **Gene-environment Correlations and Parenting**

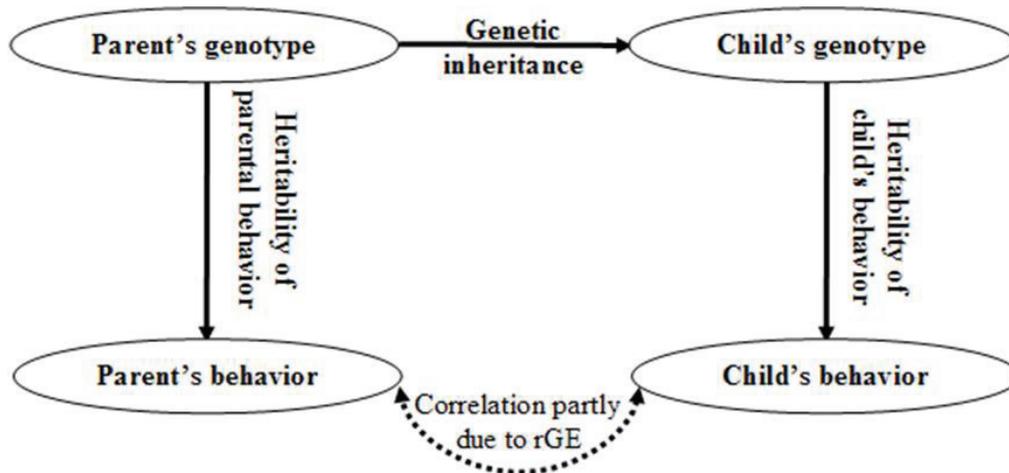
Plomin and colleagues (1977) have proposed three types of processes through which environmental measures such as parenting can reflect genetic effects, that is, gene-environment correlations: passive, reactive (or evocative), and active. Applied to parenting, in passive rGE the correlations of partially heritable traits such as child behavior and parenting are explained by the common genetic inheritance between parent and child. In evocative rGE, children as active agents in the family evoke parental responses in reaction to their behavior. In active rGE, children actively create environments that foster their genetic propensities. Because active rGE is more likely in later childhood and adolescence (Scarr & McCartney, 1983) I will focus here mainly on active and evocative rGE.

Passive rGE, as it applies to parental behavior, necessitates four main conditions (See Figure 1a). First, parents and children should be genetically related, as is the case for most families. Second, children's genetic variability should provide a basis for individual differences in their behavior and temperament. There is ample evidence from twin and adoption studies (e.g., Plomin et al., 1993; Saudino, 2005), and more recently from molecular genetic studies that this is the case. For example, variations in the dopamine receptor D4 gene (DRD4) and in the serotonin transporter (SLC6A3) have been associated with infants' negative emotionality (the tendency to experience negative feelings) (Auerbach et al., 1999). Third, parental behavior itself should be heritable to a certain degree. Recent research provides novel evidence for this proposition (e.g., Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2008). For example, Neiderhiser et al., (2004) note that Monozygotic (MZ) twin mothers are more similar in their parenting behavior towards their children than Dizygotic (DZ) twin mothers. Fourth, the genes affecting variability in parenting should overlap with those affecting children's characteristics. To the

extent that all conditions are fulfilled, a parent-child correlation can be found regardless of socialization efforts.

### A Schematic Depiction of Passive and Evocative Gene-Environment Correlations (rGE) Applied to Parenting

#### a. Passive rGE



#### b. Evocative rGE

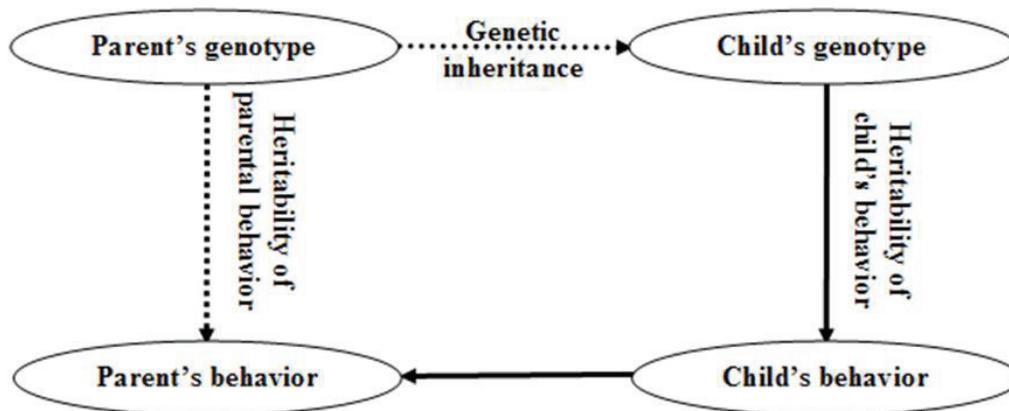


Figure 1.

Evocative rGE as it applies to parental behavior does not necessitate a genetic relatedness between the parent and the child, or that the parent's genotype be related to the parents' behavior (hence the broken lines in Figure 1b). Rather, in cases of evocative rGE, it's the child's genotype (and consequent behavior) that influences parenting style. In one study, parents' coercive behavior towards their adoptive child was associated with the behavior of the biological parent (considered a proxy for children's genetic heritage) (O'Connor et al., 1998; see also Ge et al., 1996). The shortcomings of adoption research notwithstanding (e.g., higher prevalence of behavior problems in biological

parents), this is a compelling example for a process in which children's genetically influenced behavior evoked coercive responses from parents.

### **Parental Acceptance, Rejection, and rGE**

Twin research, comparing the similarity in the parenting received by MZ and DZ twins (Plomin, 1994; Rowe, 1981) has also shown that parenting is determined in part by the child's genes (McGuire, 2003; although some studies report no genetic influence on certain dimensions such as parental control, Deater-Deckard, 2000; Rowe, 1981). Positive aspects of parenting can also be influenced by children's genetically influenced tendencies. For example, individual differences in early "cuddliness" or other positive reactions of infants to social touch may be rewarding to parents, thereby increasing their affection towards their child. However, research seems to have shown a higher genetic component for negative aspects of parenting, such as rejection, than for positive aspects such as acceptance. The negative aspects of parenting may reflect in part the child's genotype, whose influence may be mediated by the child's behavior (Ge et al., 1996).

In a previous twin study (Knafo & Plomin, 2006b), parental positivity (positive feelings towards the child, such as closeness and happiness, and positive discipline practices such as reasoning and being firm and calm) was influenced mainly by environmental influences, although 19-30% of the variance was nonetheless accounted for by genetic factors. These environmental influences were mostly of the "shared environment" type, meaning that they applied to both twins growing up in the same family. Knafo and Plomin (2006b) interpreted this finding as indicating that factors in the shared environment are more important for parental positivity than factors in the child's genetic disposition. Because they also found that positive parenting predicted children's prosocial behavior longitudinally over and above stability in prosociality, the results indicated a family-wide effect of positive parenting that is common to children within the same family and has similar effects on them, increasing their prosocial behavior.

In contrast, there is evidence for higher heritability for parental negativity (negative feelings towards the child, such as anger and frustration, as well as negative discipline practices such as smacking and shouting). For example, genetic effects accounted for about 70% of the variance in parents' conflict and negativity in relation to their adolescent children (Neiderhiser et al., 1999). In another study, genetic effects were found for parental hostile-reactive behavior, but not for parental self-efficacy, perceived parental impact, or parental overprotection (Boivin et al., 2005). This pattern was replicated in the Knafo & Plomin (2006b) study, as individual differences in parental negativity towards children were strongly influenced by the children's genes, which accounted for over 50% of the variance. Knafo and Plomin (2006b) attributed this to the idea that that parental negativity is more conditional upon the child's (negative) behaviors. When a child behaves in a disruptive manner (e.g., tantrums or refusal to share with a peer), he or she is highly likely to elicit negative behavior from parents (evocative gene-environment correlation). This is less likely to happen with regard to positive parental behaviors in response to the child's positive behavior.

The negative relationship between parental negativity and children's prosocial behavior was found by Knafo and Plomin (2006b) to be mainly mediated by bivariate heritability, that is, for effects of the child's genes common to the two traits (low prosocial behaviour and parental negativity). In other words, behaviors characteristic of less prosocial children that are influenced by their genetic tendencies contribute to their parents' negative feelings and discipline towards them. As in the study by Ge et al. (1996), this could indicate an evocative rGE, in which children's partially heritable low prosociality increases parental negativity in response. But developmentally speaking, this may indicate a circular process, as children may then become increasingly less prosocial in response to their parents' negative feelings and discipline towards them (Knafo & Plomin, 2006b). Therefore,

the role of parents is important in this process, although they may not initiate the process but only react to the child's behavior.

### **The Current Study**

The evidence regarding the influence of children's genetic propensities on parenting suggests the existence of rGEs (Neiderhiser et al., 2004; Plomin et al., 1994). The twin design is used to investigate the genetic and environmental influences on parenting as an indicator of rGE. This design compares monozygotic (MZ) twins, who share all of their genetic sequence, with dizygotic (DZ) twins, who share on average half of their genes. Higher similarity in MZ versus DZ twins indicates genetic influences. Similarity that is beyond this genetic effect can be attributed to the environment shared by twins, and any further differences between twins are ascribed to non-shared environment or to measurement error (Plomin, DeFries, McClearn, & McGuffin, 2001).

Most of the past evidence comes from questionnaire studies, in which parents or children describe parents' behaviors towards each twin. This study provides preliminary evidence from laboratory observations of a small sample of twins and their mothers. We address two aspects of parental acceptance and rejection. A positive acceptance dimension concerns mothers' warmth towards their children. Maternal intrusiveness, indicating lack of respect towards the child's needs at a certain point in time, may indicate low acceptance, if not rejection. Based on past research on parental negativity and positivity, stronger evidence of genetic influence on mothers' behavior (i.e., evidence for evocative rGE) was expected for intrusiveness, the more negative aspect of parenting.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Families in this study were participants in the Longitudinal Israeli Study of Twins (LIST), whose focus is on children's social development as influenced by genetics, abilities, and socialization (see Knafo, 2006; Knafo & Israel, 2009; Knafo et al., in press). All Hebrew-speaking families identified as having twins by The Israeli Ministry of the Interior were contacted with mail surveys regarding children's development close to the twins' 3rd birthday. The questionnaire included information on twins' zygosity and their behavior problems, as well as additional information described by Knafo (2006). At 3.5 years of age, families in which mothers answered the questionnaire mailed at twins' 3rd birthday, identified as living in the Greater Jerusalem area, were invited to the lab to participate in an experimental session, in which developmental aspects such as children's prosocial behavior and cognitive abilities were assessed.

Twin zygosity was assessed through a parent questionnaire of physical similarity, which has been shown to be 95% accurate when compared to DNA testing (Price et al., 2000). In the current study, DNA results from a partial sample ( $N=40$  pairs) were again in 95% agreement with assessments made using mothers' reports. In families where zygosity was uncertain from the questionnaires, DNA was used to identify zygosity. When DNA information was not available, zygosity was estimated from videos of the twins (this video assessment was in 94% agreement with DNA results). Here data are reported from a partial sample of 25 monozygotic and 75 dizygotic twin pairs, for which parenting data were available at the time of preparation of this paper.

### **Procedure**

Around age 3.5 years (mean age in months, 43.75,  $SD = 3.37$ ), families (the mother and the twins, sometimes accompanied by additional family members) came to the lab, where they met two female examiners. Visits were scheduled at a time when mothers estimated children were likely to be at their best. Most visits were completed in less than 2 hours. In the visit, each twin was asked to enter a test-