

# EXPANDING HORIZONS



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## Current Research on Interpersonal Acceptance

Selected Papers from the Third International Congress on  
Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection

Held in Padua, Italy  
July 2010

*Edited by*

**Karen J. Ripoll-Núñez, Anna Laura Comunian, & Carrie M. Brown**



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*Expanding Horizons:  
Current Research on Interpersonal Acceptance*

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## Introduction

It is our pleasure to present this book of selected readings on interpersonal acceptance-rejection. Chapters in this volume represent a sampling of the papers given at the Third International Congress on Interpersonal Acceptance held in Padua, Italy in July 2010. The Congress was organized by the International Society for Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection (ISIPAR).

The book is divided into four sections. The first section comprises seven chapters that focus primarily on the relation between acceptance-rejection experienced in significant relationships and individuals' psychological adjustment. We think it is worth highlighting a few methodological and theoretical strengths of the research presented in these chapters. First, some of the chapters aim to establish the unique contributions of perceived acceptance in significant relationships to both youths' and adults' psychological well-being. Also, research presented in some of these chapters specifically looks at the relative influence of significant figures on youths' psychological adjustment, depending on individuals' gender and the specific outcomes evaluated (e.g., depression and drug use). A second strength has to do with the evaluation of mediational models to account for the relationship between perceived acceptance-rejection and youths' psychological adjustment. We believe that this kind of research on interpersonal acceptance-rejection will help advance our understanding of the different pathways through which interpersonal acceptance-rejection influences individuals' psychological functioning. Third, some of the studies in this section reveal an interest in evaluating the role of contextual variables (e.g., family size and family composition) in the association between perceived parental acceptance-rejection and youths' psychological adjustment. Lastly, it is worth mentioning the interest of several researchers in exploring variations in the association between perceived acceptance and psychological adjustment based on different reports (e.g., mothers and children).

The second section of the book is composed of five chapters on issues regarding: a) acceptance-rejection in educational contexts, and b) individuals with developmental problems. Three research papers relate to issues of acceptance-rejection and education. One paper deals with issues of rejection and social exclusion within the school context (i.e., bullying behavior). The other two papers explore the effect of either perceived parental acceptance-rejection or parenting style on youths' academic achievement and adaptation to the academic context. One of these papers focuses on school-aged children, while the other deals with the academic adjustment of college students. Papers on developmental problems concentrate on issues of social and school inclusion or exclusion of children with disabilities and the impact of such behaviors on their families.

The third section in the book is dedicated to methodological issues in the study of interpersonal acceptance-rejection. The four chapters included in this section specifically focus on issues of validity and reliability of self-report measures typically used in cross-cultural research on interpersonal acceptance-rejection. It is worth mentioning the use of advanced statistical tools in the evaluation of the validity of these measures (e.g., confirmatory factor analysis with structural equation modeling, and differential item function analysis) in most papers in this section.

The fourth and last section is comprised of two comparative studies that deal with differences between ethnoracial groups in specific nations. One paper explores the association between dimensions of parenting and youths' psychological adjustment in three ethnic groups in the United States. The other paper examines the association between parental practices and children's perception of parental warmth in different regions in Italy.

The chapters compiled in this volume reflect the ways in which the horizons of interpersonal acceptance-rejection research continue to expand. As mentioned in the brief description of each section, the research papers presented in this book deal with new questions, empirically test new associa-

tions between variables, explore issues of acceptance-rejection in different contexts, use advanced statistical tools to evaluate the psychometric properties of instruments, and compare the experiences of different ethnic/racial groups. These papers are an important sampling of the work presented by researchers from all over the world at the last International Conference on Interpersonal Acceptance. We believe readers will be stimulated as they learn about the theoretical and methodological issues explored in these chapters. It is our hope that many readers will become interpersonal acceptance researchers themselves, and join ISIPAR in its efforts to advance knowledge about human relationships.

We would like to thank Dr. Ronald P. Rohner and ISIPAR for entrusting us with the task of editing this book. It has been a truly enriching experience. We also want to thank the authors of these chapters for working with us throughout this past year, and for responding positively and patiently to our feedback in each revision of their work. Special thanks go to the team of reviewers who provided insightful comments and suggestions that elevated the quality of the papers. Lastly, we would like to thank Rachel Cook, of Agnes Scott College, for her valuable support in the editing of the manuscripts.

Karen J. Ripoll-Núñez  
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Editors

**SECTION I**  
**PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT**



# Relations Between Psychological Adjustment and Perceived Parental, Sibling, Best Friend, and Teacher Acceptance Among Kuwaiti Adolescents

Ramadan A. Ahmed, Ronald P. Rohner, & Miguel A. Carrasco

## Abstract

This study explored the extent to which perceived maternal, paternal, sibling, best friend, and teacher acceptance each made an independent contribution to the psychological adjustment of both males and females in a sample of 249 Kuwaiti adolescents. The study also assessed the magnitude of the total contribution to psychological adjustment of significant classes of variables for the males and females. Results of correlational analyses showed that all the attachment relationships were significantly associated with the adjustment of both males and females. Stepwise multiple regression analyses, however, showed that only perceived sibling acceptance, best friend acceptance, and paternal acceptance—in that order—accounted for independent portions of the variance in males' psychological adjustment. Neither perceived maternal acceptance nor teacher acceptance explained unique portions of the variance. Collectively, the three significant predictors explained 48% of the variance in males' psychological adjustment. For females, on the other hand, perceived paternal acceptance made the single greatest contribution to psychological adjustment, followed by perceived sibling acceptance and perceived teacher acceptance—in that order. Neither perceived maternal acceptance nor best friend acceptance explained unique portions of the variance for females. Collectively, the three significant predictors explained 50% of the variance in females' psychological adjustment.

Parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory) postulates that the perception of acceptance-rejection by attachment figures throughout the lifespan—but especially in childhood and adolescence—is associated with a specific form of psychological adjustment everywhere, regardless of differences in language, culture, ethnicity, race, gender, or other such defining conditions (Rohner, 1986, 2004). More specifically, PARTheory's personality subtheory argues that perceived parental rejection is universally associated with the development of ten personality dispositions that collectively form an index of psychological maladjustment. These dispositions include: hostility, aggression, passive aggression, and problems with management of hostility and aggression; dependence or defensive independence, depending on the form, frequency, severity, and duration of perceived rejection; negative self-esteem; negative self-adequacy; emotional unresponsiveness; emotional instability; and, negative worldview. These seven dispositions constitute core features in this index. They are the ones assessed most often in research derived from PARTheory's personality subtheory. The subtheory also contends, however, that persons who feel rejected by their attachment figures are likely to feel anxious and insecure, and to develop distorted mental representations of themselves, of significant others, and of the world around them. Empirical confirmation about the *pancultural* association between perceived rejection and anxiety, insecurity, and distorted mental representations awaits future research. Several large-scale meta-analyses of the personality dispositions included in the major index of psychological adjustment, however, confirm PARTheory's postulates regarding worldwide correlations between perceived parental (maternal and paternal) rejection and psychological maladjustment of children and adults (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002a, 2002b, in press; Rohner & Khaleque, 2010).

Over 3,000 studies are known to have been completed on issues of interpersonal acceptance-rejection (Rohner, 2011). About 500 of these have been influenced by PARTheory and its associated

measures. Many of these deal with the relation between psychological adjustment and children's or adults' perceptions of such attachment relationships as: parental (maternal and/or paternal) acceptance-rejection (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002b, 2010; Rohner 1975, 1986; Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner & Khaleque, 2010; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001); sibling acceptance-rejection (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2011; Hakvoort, Bos, van Balen, & Hermanns, 2010; Ripoll, Carrillo, & Castro, 2009; Rohner, Varan, Koberstein, & Ozyavru, 2011); best friend acceptance-rejection (Kemp, Scholte, Overbeek, & Engels, 2006; King & Terrance, 2008; Meeus, Branje, & Overbeek, 2004; Scholte, van Lieshout, & van Aken, 2001; Wilkinson, 2010); teacher acceptance-rejection (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Rohner, 2010; Walsh, Harel-Fisch, & Fogel-Grinvald, 2010) intimate partner acceptance-rejection in adulthood (Rohner 2008; Rohner & Khaleque, 2008; Rohner & Melendez, 2008); and other relationships. The bulk of the evidence from these studies confirms PARTheory's expectation that all these important interpersonal relationships are significantly correlated with children's and/or adults' psychological adjustment.

Some of these studies examine perceived acceptance-rejection in two classes of attachment relationships simultaneously. For example, some studies examine the unique or independent contribution of sibling acceptance versus parental (mothers' and fathers') acceptance to youths' psychological adjustment (e.g., Rohner, Varan, Koberstein, & Özyavru, 2011). Studies such as these also generally explore the total contribution of both sibling and parental acceptance to youths' adjustment. So far as we know, however, no study has yet simultaneously examined the extent to which *multiple* classes of attachment relationships each make unique contributions to respondents' (males' versus females') psychological adjustment, after controlling for the influence of all the other classes of relationship. That is what this study does, as well as examine the total contribution of all classes of interpersonal relationship to males' and females' adjustment.

More specifically, in this stepwise regression study we ask whether the perception of maternal, paternal, sibling, best friend, and teacher acceptance each make a significant but independent contribution to the psychological adjustment of Kuwaiti adolescents after controlling for the contribution of all other attachment relationships. We also ask what the relative contribution is of each class of relationship in relation to the other significant attachment relationships, and we ask about the magnitude of the total contribution of all significant classes of attachment relationships.

## Method

### Sample

Two hundred forty-nine adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 ( $M = 16$  years,  $SD = 1.68$ ) participated in this research. The sample included 96 males (38.6%) and 153 females (61.4%). All were Arabic-speaking Kuwaiti Muslims. All also lived in nuclear or extended families consisting of their mothers, fathers, siblings, and usually other kinsmen. The vast majority of the families (92%) had from four through 15 resident family members ( $M = 11.63$ ,  $SD = 12.06$ ). Additionally, the youths had from one through 40 siblings ( $M = 6.62$ ,  $SD = 7.72$ ), commonly by different mothers but the same father, but occasionally by a single mother but different fathers. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents lived in an urban area within Kuwait; 63% lived in Bedouin areas.

### Measures

The adolescents responded to Arabic-language versions of six self-report questionnaires. These included the child version of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire for mothers and for fathers (Child PARQ: Mother and Father; Rohner, 2005a); Teacher's Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire: Child version (Child TARQ/Control; Rohner, 2005b); and the child version of the Personality Assessment Questionnaire (Child PAQ; Rohner & Khaleque, 2005). Additionally, the first

author adapted the TARQ/Control to be used by the adolescents for assessing their perceptions of the level of sibling acceptance (Sibling Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire, SARQ), and best friend acceptance (Best Friend Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire, BFARQ). Each of these measures is described next.

*Child PARQ: Mother and Father.* The Child PARQ is a 60-item self-report questionnaire assessing youths' perceptions of their mothers' and their fathers' love-related (accepting) behaviors toward them. The measure is composed of four subscales, including warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, and undifferentiated rejection. Undifferentiated rejection refers to individuals' beliefs that their parents do not really love, want, appreciate, or care about them without necessarily experiencing clear behavioral indicators that the parents are unaffectionate, neglecting, or aggressive toward them. Sample items on the mother version of the child PARQ include "My mother makes me feel wanted and needed" (perceived warmth/affection), "My mother goes out of her way to hurt my feelings" (perceived hostility/aggression), "My mother pays no attention to me as long as I do nothing to bother her" (perceived indifference/neglect), and "My mother does not really love me" (perceived undifferentiated rejection). The father version of the Child PARQ is virtually identical to the mother version except, of course, that it refers to fathers' behavior.

Adolescents respond to items such as these on a 4-point Likert scale from 4 (*almost always true*) through 1 (*almost never true*). Scores for the four subscales are summed after reverse scoring the warmth/affection subscale to create a measure of perceived coldness and lack of affection, which is transculturally known to be one of the four major expressions of perceived rejection. The total score on the Child PARQ spreads from a low of 60 (*maximum perceived acceptance*) through a possible high of 240 (*maximum perceived rejection*). Scores at or above 150 on the standard 60-item version of the PARQ reveal the presence of qualitatively more perceived parental rejection than acceptance. Scores between 60 and approximately 120 reveal the presence of substantial perceived parental acceptance.

Extensive evidence reported in Ahmed, Rohner, Khaleque, and Gielen (2011) shows the measure to be reliable and valid for use throughout the Arab world. For example, alpha coefficient in the 21 Arab studies known to have provided such information ranged from .76 through .95. Test-retest reliability ranged from .94 through .98. Finally all five studies known to have provided information about the factorial validity of the Arabic versions of the PARQ found a clearly identifiable Acceptance factor and a Rejection factor. Additionally, evidence provided by Khaleque and Rohner (2002b) shows the measure to be reliable and valid for international use more widely. In this study, alpha coefficients for males were .96 on the PARQ: Mother, and .95 on the PARQ: Father. For females, alpha coefficients were .96 on both the PARQ: Mother and the PARQ: Father.

*TARQ/Control.* The TARQ/Control is a 29-item adaptation of the 73-item Child PARQ/Control (Rohner, 2005a), which in turn is nothing more than the 60-item Child PARQ just described, with a 13-item behavioral control subscale built into it. The behavioral control subscale was not used in this research, however, because it was not included in the Child PARQ for assessing adolescents' perceptions of maternal and paternal behavioral control. Accordingly, the subscale is not discussed further here.

The TARQ/Control without the behavioral control scale contains 24 items with the same four subscales found on the Child PARQ. This measure is designed to assess students' perceptions of their primary teachers' accepting-rejecting behaviors. Low scores on the acceptance-rejection portion of the TARQ/Control reveal that youths perceive their teachers to be accepting (i.e., warm and affectionate, low in hostility/aggression, low in indifference/neglect, and non-rejecting in the undifferentiated form). Sample items on the acceptance-rejection portion of the TARRQ/Control include "My teacher says nice things about me" (perceived warmth/affection); "My teacher goes out of her/his way to hurt my feel-

ings (perceived hostility/aggression); “My teacher pays no attention when I ask for help” (perceived indifference/neglect); “My teacher seems to dislike me” (perceived undifferentiated rejection). Adolescents respond to items such as these in the same way they do on the Child PARQ. The total score on the acceptance-rejection portion of the TARQ/Control spread from a low of 24 (*maximum perceived acceptance*) to a high of 96 (*maximum perceived rejection*). Scores at or above the test’s midpoint of 60 reveal that students perceive their teachers to be qualitatively more rejecting than accepting.

Evidence provided in Rohner (2010) shows the TARQ/Control to be a reliable and valid measure for use in international research. Coefficient alpha for males in this study was .86; for females it was .90.

*SARQ*. As noted earlier, the SARQ is an adaptation of the acceptance-rejection portion of the TARQ/Control. Here, however, adolescents reflect on the accepting-rejecting behaviors of their sibling of choice. Other than that, the items, scoring procedures, and other characteristics of the SARQ are identical with the acceptance-rejection portion of the TARQ/Control. Because this is the first time the SARQ has been used, we have no prior evidence about its reliability or validity. However, coefficient alpha in this study for males was .88; for females it was .91.

*BFARQ*. As was true of the SARQ, the BFARQ is an adaptation of the acceptance-rejection portion of the TARQ/Control. In this instance, however, adolescents reflect on the accepting-rejecting behaviors of their best friend. In all other respects the BFARQ is identical to the acceptance-rejection portion of the TARQ/Control. Again, because this is the first time the BFARQ has been used we have no information about its reliability and validity for general use in international research. However, coefficient alpha for males in this study was .92; for females it was .91.

*Child PAQ*. The Child PAQ is a 42-item self-report questionnaire asking youths to reflect on the seven personality dispositions most central to PARTheory’s personality subtheory. As already noted, these include hostility/aggression (e.g., “I think about fighting or being mean”), dependence (e.g., “I like my parents to give me a lot of attention”), negative self-esteem (e.g., “When I meet someone I do not know, I think (s)he is better than I am”), negative self-adequacy (e.g., “I think I am a failure”), emotional unresponsiveness (e.g., “It is hard for me to show the way I feel to someone I like”), emotional instability (e.g., “I am cheerful and happy one minute, and gloomy and unhappy the next”), and negative worldview (e.g., “I see the world as a dangerous place”). Each subscale consists of 6 items scored on 4-point Likert scale from 4 (*almost always true*) through 1 (*almost never true*). The sum of the seven subscales composes the total PAQ score, which is the index of psychological adjustment described earlier. The total score on the Child PAQ spreads from 42 (excellent psychological adjustment) through 168 (serious psychological maladjustment). Scores at or above the test midpoint of 105 suggest increasingly serious psychological maladjustment. Hence, the higher the score is the higher the level of psychological maladjustment.

The Child PAQ has been found to be reliable and valid for use in international research, with an overall mean weighted alpha coefficient across 1,115 respondents in six international studies of .83 (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002b). Additional evidence is provided in Rohner and Khaleque (2005), and in Ahmed, Rohner, Khaleque, and Gielen (2011) as used in the Arab world. Coefficient alpha for males in this study was .79; for females it was .87.

## Procedures

After reviewing the proposed research, and receiving assurances about the protection of human subjects, the Ministry of Education in Kuwait authorized the research to be conducted in intermediate and secondary schools. The Ministry also instructed school principals and teachers to cooperate fully.



Subsequently, informed consent was sought from parents and students to participate in the research. The great majority assented to this request after the nature of the research was fully explained.

### Results

As shown in Table 1, both males and females tended to perceive themselves to be accepted by their mothers, fathers, siblings, best friends, and teachers—though males reported significantly less teacher acceptance (Cohen's  $d = .45$ ) than did females. Moreover, males tended to report significantly less paternal acceptance (Cohen's  $d = .38$ )—but not less maternal acceptance—than did females, and males reported significantly less best friend acceptance (Cohen's  $d = .58$ ) than did females. Nonetheless, both males and females tended to self-report similar levels of positive psychological adjustment.

**Table 1.** *Gender Differences in Measures*

Measures	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>t</i>
Perceived maternal acceptance				
Males	104.73	28.52	96	-.21
Females	105.63	34.36	153	
Perceived paternal acceptance				
Males	116.20	35.08	95	2.87**
Females	102.96	34.37	153	
Perceived sibling acceptance				
Males	47.15	12.36	95	.89
Females	45.50	14.84	153	
Perceived best friend acceptance				
Males	45.29	14.66	95	4.51**
Females	37.19	12.83	153	
Perceived teacher acceptance				
Males	53.20	12.76	95	3.29**
Females	47.04	14.55	153	
Children's psychological adjustment				
Males	95.10	14.07	95	-1.70
Females	98.91	18.08	153	

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

Bivariate correlations shown in Table 2 reveal—as predicted in PARTheory—significant correlations for both males and females among all major variables in the study. That is, perceived maternal, paternal, sibling, best friend, and teacher acceptance were all significantly correlated with the psychological adjustment of both males and females. Moreover, all interpersonal relationship variables were significantly intercorrelated. These results suggest the possibility that some of these relationships may not make independent contributions to the psychological adjustment of the adolescents.

To test this possibility we performed two identical stepwise multiple regression analyses, one for males (Table 3) and one for females (Table 4). Three significant predictors emerged in the regression model for males. Specifically, perceived sibling acceptance, best friend acceptance, and paternal acceptance accounted for independent portions of the variance in males' psychological adjustment. Neither perceived maternal acceptance nor teacher acceptance, however, explained unique portions of the variance. Collectively, sibling, best friend, and paternal acceptance explained 48% of the variance in males' psychological adjustment.

**Table 2.** *Intercorrelations Among Measures, by Sex*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Maternal acceptance	--	.64**	.69**	.53**	.44**	.53**
2. Paternal acceptance	.51**	--	.59**	.42**	.32**	.51**
3. Sibling acceptance	.49**	.52**	--	.74**	.52**	.62**
4. Best friend acceptance	.25**	.43**	.42**	--	.45**	.60**
5. Teacher acceptance	.40**	.43**	.58**	.43**	--	.35**
6. Psychological adjustment	.48**	.62**	.53**	.41**	.51**	--

Note. Intercorrelations above the diagonal are for males, below diagonal are for females.

\*\* $p < .01$

**Table 3.** *Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Males' Psychological Adjustment*

Model	B	SE	$\beta$	$t$	$\Delta R^2$
Constant	58.26	4.43		13.12**	
Sibling acceptance	.31	.14	.28	2.21*	.40**
Best friend acceptance	.28	.10	.30	2.64*	.04*
Paternal acceptance	.09	.03	.23	2.45*	.03*

Note.  $R^2 = .48$ . Regression coefficients were taken from the last step.  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficients.

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

**Table 4.** *Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Females' Psychological Adjustment*

Model	B	SE	$\beta$	$t$	$\Delta R^2$
Constant	52.49	4.29		12.23**	
Paternal acceptance	.21	.03	.42	5.72**	.40**
Sibling acceptance	.29	.10	.23	2.73**	.07**
Teacher acceptance	.22	.09	.18	2.27**	.02*

Note.  $R^2 = .50$ . Regression coefficients were taken from the last step.  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficients.

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

A somewhat different picture emerged in the stepwise multiple regression analysis for females, shown in Table 4. There one can see that perceived paternal acceptance made the greatest single independent contribution to the psychological adjustment of females, followed by perceived sibling acceptance and perceived teacher acceptance to a much lesser degree. Neither perceived maternal acceptance nor best friend acceptance explained unique portions of the variance for females. Collectively, perceived paternal acceptance, sibling acceptance, and teacher acceptance accounted for 50% of the variance in females' psychological adjustment.

## Discussion

The principal objective of this research was to ascertain whether the perception of maternal, paternal, sibling, best friend, and teacher acceptance each make a significant but independent contribution to the psychological adjustment of Kuwaiti adolescents, after controlling for the contributions of all the other attachment relationships. We also asked what the relative contribution of each class of attachment relationship is in relation to the other significant attachment relationships. Finally, we asked about the magnitude of the total contribution to youth's psychological adjustment of all significant classes of attachment relationships.

Results of correlational analyses reveal—as predicted in PARTheory—that all major attachment relationships studied are significantly associated with the psychological adjustment of both male and female Kuwaiti adolescents. That is, according to the theory, the psychological, behavioral, and cognitive adjustment of youths everywhere throughout the world is expected to be affected in the same way when they perceive themselves to be accepted or rejected by their parents and other people important to them. This aspect of the theory has been confirmed in several hundred prior studies (Rohner, 2011), as well as in this one.

Results of stepwise regression analyses in this study, however, show that not all attachment relationships necessarily make *independent* contributions to variations in youths' psychological adjustment when the influence of the other attachment relationships is controlled. In this study, for example, sibling acceptance made overwhelmingly the greatest single contribution to the psychological adjustment of adolescent males. Perceived best friend acceptance and paternal acceptance also made independent but decidedly smaller contributions. Unexpectedly, however, neither perceived maternal acceptance nor perceived teacher acceptance made significant independent contributions to males' adjustment. Collectively, perceived sibling, best friend, and paternal acceptance accounted for 48% of the variance in males' psychological adjustment.

For adolescent Kuwaiti females, on the other hand, perceived paternal acceptance made overwhelmingly the greatest single contribution to psychological adjustment. Perceived sibling acceptance and teacher acceptance also made independent but decidedly smaller contributions. Again unexpectedly, neither perceived maternal acceptance nor best friend acceptance made independent contributions to the adjustment of adolescent females. Collectively, perceived paternal, sibling, and teacher acceptance accounted for 50% of the variance in females' psychological adjustment.

The fact that fathers' love-related behaviors made independent contributions to the psychological adjustment of both males and females is not surprising given emerging evidence about the pancultural salience of perceived paternal acceptance (Khaleque & Rohner, in press; Rohner & Britner, 2001; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). What may be somewhat surprising is the fact that perceived maternal acceptance failed to make an *independent* contribution to the adjustment of either males or females. This conclusion is not without precedent, however. For example, Rohner and Veneziano (2001) reported a number of studies where the influence of father love on offspring's development was as great and sometimes greater than the influence of mother love. In fact, some of these studies concluded that father love was the sole significant predictor of specific outcomes after controlling for the influence of mother love.

Cultural factors may contribute to the fact that perceived paternal acceptance has a greater impact on Kuwaiti daughters' psychological adjustment than it does on sons' adjustment. The role of fathers in the Kuwaiti patriarchal family system may be particularly implicated here. That is, even though mothers usually have high status in Kuwaiti families—and even though they are intensely involved in children's care—Muslim families in Kuwait often tend to be characterized by a hierarchy of genders wherein females tend to be subordinated to males (Al-Mateen & Afzal, 2004). As a result, daughters may be more keenly aware of and attentive to the behavior of their fathers than are sons. In this way they may also be more likely to be influenced by variations in perceived paternal acceptance than are sons. Empirical support of this speculation awaits future research.

Other gender differences are also notable in Kuwaiti families. Males, for example, tend to perceive significantly less paternal, teacher, and best friend acceptance than do females. Rohner, Parmar, and Ibrahim (2010) reached a similar conclusion in an earlier study of the influence of perceived teacher acceptance and parental acceptance on the psychological adjustment of 205 Kuwaiti children. Moreover, different predictors contribute to the psychological adjustment of males versus females in this study. Specifically, as already noted, perceived sibling acceptance has the greatest single impact on the psychological adjustment of males even though sibling acceptance also contributes to the adjust-

ment of females—but to a lesser extent. Rohner, Varan, Koberstein, and Özyavru (2011) reached a similar conclusion when they found in a sample of 180 Turkish adolescents that younger siblings' perceptions of their older siblings' acceptance made a significantly stronger contribution to the younger siblings' psychological adjustment than did either perceived maternal or paternal acceptance. The importance of sibling acceptance for adolescents' psychological adjustment is understandable in light of a common tendency for adolescents to reduce the intensity of their relationships with parents—in comparison to what it had been in earlier childhood—and in view of the tendency for adolescents to invest more time in less hierarchical relationships such as sibling relationships and friendships outside the family (Spera, 2005; Steinberg, 2001; Steinberg & Silk, 2002).

It is unclear at this time why Kuwaiti females' perceptions of their best friends' acceptance failed to make an independent contribution to their psychological adjustment, but best friends' acceptance did contribute independently to the adjustment of adolescent males. It is also unclear at this time why Kuwaiti males' perceptions of teachers' acceptance failed to make an independent contribution to their psychological adjustment, but teacher acceptance did contribute independently to the adjustment of adolescent females. These results are especially puzzling in light of the fact that a prior study of 205 Kuwaiti middle school children (Rohner, Parmar, & Ibrahim, 2010) found that perceived teacher acceptance did not make an independent contribution to the adjustment of either boys or girls—though both perceived maternal and paternal acceptance did. Our inability to explain these anomalous results constitutes a limitation of this study.

This research has at least two other limitations as well. First, its cross-sectional design gives no information about the effects of perceived acceptance over time, or about possible causal effects. Second, all data were collected by self-reports. Consequently we cannot rule out the possibility that shared method variance might have influenced the results. This problem should not be too serious, however, in view of the fact that data from a variety of sources other than self-reports suggest that positive correlations between the PARQ, PAQ, and some of the other measures used in this study are not the result of response bias (see, for example, Khaleque & Rohner, 2011).

Finally, this chapter raises important questions to be addressed in future PARTheory research. More specifically, even though this research shows that youths' psychological adjustment is significantly correlated with their perceptions of the level of perceived acceptance by five classes of attachment figures—as predicted by PARTheory—PARTheorists are not yet able to explain major conditions under which the effects of perceived acceptance in some of these attachment relationships become almost entirely mediated by the effects of perceived acceptance in other attachment relationships.

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# Parental Acceptance and Early Adolescents' Adjustment: Mediation via Emotional Security

Alberto Alegre

## Abstract

This study examines the relationship between parental acceptance and early adolescents' internalizing and externalizing problems. Guided by Cummings and Davies' (1995) theoretical advances and empirical work, it proposes and tests a model of relations in which emotional security plays a mediating role. A total of 120 adolescents (between 10 and 13 years of age) and their mothers participated. Adolescents answered the warmth/affection subscale of the Parental Acceptance/Rejection Questionnaire (Rohner, 1990), the Security in the Parent-Child Subsystem (Alegre & Benson, 2010), and the anxious/depressed, withdrawn, aggressive and delinquent behavior subscales from the Youth Self-Report (Achenbach, 1991). Mothers answered parallel measures of parental acceptance and adolescents' adjustment. Mothers' and adolescents' responses were combined to obtain standardized unified measures of parental acceptance and of adolescents' internalizing and externalizing problems. To test the mediational hypotheses we followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) methodology. Predictive analyses involved two-step hierarchical regressions. The results partially supported the hypotheses. Emotional security mediated the relationship between parental acceptance and adolescents' externalizing problems. However, it did not mediate the relationship between parental acceptance and adolescents' internalizing problems.

Adolescence is a time of new challenges and new opportunities. Some adolescents develop quite serious adjustment problems. Among the problems that adolescents face are depression (Kessler & Walters, 1998), suicide attempts (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003), aggressiveness and antisocial behavior (Millstein & Litt, 1993; McCord, 1993; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), and drug use (Newcomb & Bentler, 1988).

Researchers have been able to clearly establish a relationship between adolescents' adjustment problems and their parents' parental acceptance (Parmar & Rohner, 2005). However, the theory explaining the mechanisms of this relationship is still not complete. Parental acceptance can be defined as the group of behaviors that parents develop to communicate to their adolescent children, for example, their "warmth, affection, care, comfort, concern, nurturance, support, or simply love" (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2005, p.5). The opposite of parental acceptance is parental rejection and hostility (Rohner et al., 2005), which have been linked to adolescents' internalizing problems such as depression, loneliness, distress, and somatic complaints, and to externalizing problems such as substance abuse, aggressiveness, and delinquent behavior (Campo & Rohner, 1992; Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994; Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2003).

Based on Cummings and Davies' (1995) Emotional Security Theory, we propose that when parents do not show acceptance towards their children, the children feel emotionally insecure. Children then mobilize their resources to regain a sense of security, reducing their available resources to deal with other difficulties, therefore resulting in internalizing and externalizing problems (Cummings & Davies, 1995).

## Emotional Security

Prior research has identified *emotional insecurity* in the context of marital conflict as one important dimension for explaining adolescent internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Cummings & Davies,

1995; Davies & Cummings, 1994, 1998; Davies & Forman, 2002). Such research uses a functionalist conceptualization of emotional insecurity in which this construct has two specific important functions: regulating adolescents' emotions and behaviors in response to the interparental marital conflict, and developing and using internal mental representations of the interparental marital relationship and the consequences of the threatening situation for their own security (Cummings & Davies, 1995).

When adolescents are faced with interparental marital conflict, they feel in danger and react with feelings of anger, distress, and emotional concern, and immediately develop behaviors to recover a sense of security. They do not habituate to conflict, but, on the contrary, they become sensitized, and so their emotional and behavioral reactions are stronger the more exposed they have been to marital conflict. At the same time, adolescents appraise the situation in terms of the causes and potential consequences for their own security and in terms of their own coping skills. Again, the more interparental marital conflict the adolescents have experienced in their lives, the more negative their appraisals are, and, in turn, the more prone adolescents are to use similar appraisals and reactions when facing other situations and relationships (Davies & Cummings, 1994). While those mental representations may be accurate in the case of the marital conflict, and the consequent emotional and behavioral reactions may help to recover a sense of security, they are often inadequate when facing other human relations and situations. In this way, adolescents' appraisals and reactions to interparental marital conflict lead to the development of adjustment problems. Evidence that child emotional insecurity plays a mediating role between marital conflict and youth adjustment problems is accumulating (Davies & Cummings, 1998; Davies, Cummings, & Winter, 2004; Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2002; Forman & Davies, 2003).

The emotional security model developed by Davies and Cummings (1994) provides a valuable basis for its extension into the parent acceptance context. Applied to this context, the model suggests that the perceived lack of support from parents when an adolescent is in distress generates strong emotions such as fear, sadness, or anger, and behavioral reactions such as vigilance, over-demandingness of attention, or avoidance with parents. Insecure reactions to parental lack of acceptance, therefore, render adolescents less able to regulate emotional or behavioral responses and increase vulnerability to internalizing or externalizing problems (Alegre & Benson, 2010).

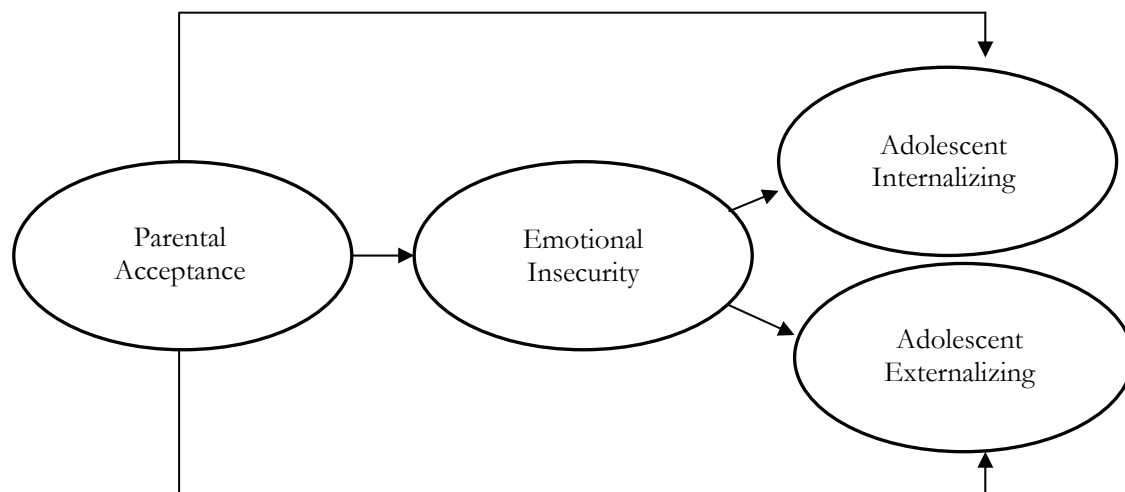
Insecure representations in the context of parental rejection or lack of acceptance correspond to the mapping of the internal appraisals of parental support and care. The patterns that exist in these insecure representations influence subsequent perceptions of danger or concern about parental lack of acceptance. When such insecure mental representations transfer to other relationships, they also influence adolescents' ability to adapt to developmental challenges (Alegre & Benson, 2010).

In support of this extension of Cummings and Davies' Emotional Security Theory to the context of parental acceptance, a series of studies show that parental warmth and availability predict children and adolescents' emotional security and this, in turn, predicts children and adolescents' internalizing and externalizing problems (Schacht, Cummings, & Davies, 2009; Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006; Sturge-Apple, Davies, Winter, Cummings, & Schermerhorn, 2008). However, those studies do not show that the emotional insecurity derived from the lack of parental acceptance plays a mediating role in this relationship. Alegre and Benson (2010) have shown this evidence in a study of 329 college students between the ages of 18 and 22, but for adolescents there is not yet evidence of such a mediating role. Therefore, the current study investigates a potential pathway that tries to explain the relationship between parental acceptance and adolescents' internalizing and externalizing problems. This pathway proposes that emotional security mediates this relationship.

## Hypotheses

In this study two hypotheses are proposed: 1) parental acceptance predicts adolescents' internalizing problems, and emotional security mediates this relationship, 2) parental acceptance predicts adolescents' externalizing problems, and emotional security also mediates this relationship (see Figure 1).





**Figure 1.** *Hypothesized Mediation Model*

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were from four different schools in a city in Spain. A total of 120 early adolescents and 112 mothers participated. The adolescents ranged from 10 to 13 years of age, with a mean of 11.3 years of age. Participants were 49.2% male and 50.8% female. They were primarily of Spanish nationality (84.9%), with the rest being of South and Central American (10.9%), European (0.8%), or African origin (3.4%). Participants were of the following socioeconomic statuses: 10.2% high, 81.4% medium, and 8.5% low. Socioeconomic status was self-reported based on the three groups mentioned above. Approximately 68.4% of the adolescents lived with their two biological or adoptive parents, 11.1% lived with one divorced biological parent and the new spouse or partner, 19.7% lived with only one biological or adoptive parent, and 0.9% lived with some other family member. Mothers responded to the questionnaires at home, while students answered their questionnaires at school in group sessions. At all time research procedures conformed to APA ethical standards.

### Measures

*Parental acceptance.* Parental acceptance was measured with the warmth/affection subscale of the Parental Acceptance/Rejection Questionnaire (Rohner, 1990). This subscale assesses parent-child relationships where parents are perceived to give love or affection. It includes 20 items with response choices of *almost always true* (4), *sometimes true* (3), *rarely true* (2), or *almost never true* (1). The reliability reported in the manual is  $\alpha = .95$  (Rohner, 1990). The subscale correlates positively with the Child's Report of Parent Behavior Inventory (CRPBI; Schaefer, 1965) acceptance scale ( $r = .90, p < .001$ ), showing support for external validity.

In this study, the factor analysis showed a one-factor solution for both adolescents' and mothers' responses confirming the scale proposed by its author. Reliability measured with Cronbach's alpha was .82 for adolescents' responses, and .80 for mothers' responses.

*Emotional security.* Participants answered the Security in the Parent-Child Subsystem (SPCS; Alegre & Benson, 2010). This questionnaire is an adaptation of the Security in the Interparental Subsystem