

PERCEIVED PATERNAL AND MATERNAL ACCEPTANCE AND CHILDREN'S OUTCOMES IN COLOMBIA

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The relationship between perceived paternal and maternal acceptance and children's adjustment was analyzed. The sample consisted of 234 children and 234 parental figures (mother or primary female caregiver, and father or primary male caregiver) living in two-parent nuclear families in Colombia. The children's age range was 7 to 13 ($M = 9.7$). Children completed the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Child PARQ mother and father versions; Rohner, 1990), and the Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ; Rohner, 1990). Parents completed the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). The analyses revealed that perceived paternal and maternal acceptance were both related to self-reported children's psychological adjustment. Perceived acceptance from mothers, but not from fathers, was directly related to children's behavioral problems as reported by parents. Results suggested that the effect of perceived paternal acceptance on children's behavioral problems is indirect, and that maternal acceptance mediates the effects of paternal acceptance.

Keywords: acceptance, father, mother, psychological adjustment, behavior problems.

According to Rohner (1975, 2004) parental acceptance and rejection form the warmth dimension of parenting. This dimension can be defined as a continuum where, at one end of the continuum are those parents who express their love and warmth to their children verbally or physically, and, at the other extreme, are those parents who feel aversion and disapproval for their children and may use severe or abusive discipline strategies. The author has developed the

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Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory; Rohner, 1986; Rohner & Rohner, 1980), a socialization theory that attempts to predict and explain major antecedents, consequences, and other correlates of parental warmth (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002).

One postulate of PARTheory is that the psychological adjustment of children everywhere – regardless of differences in culture, ethnicity, race, gender, socioeconomic status, or other such defining conditions – varies as a direct result of their experiences of parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). A meta-analysis of 43 studies drawn from 7,563 respondents in 15 countries (Khaleque & Rohner) confirmed the expectation that perceived parental acceptance is universally associated with psychological adjustment. Thus, strong evidence supports PARTheory's expectations that children everywhere who come from loving (accepting) families are more likely than children who come from unloving (rejecting) families to feel good about themselves, feel competent, have less problems with the management of hostility and aggression, have adequate emotional responsiveness and emotional stability, have less dependence and have a positive worldview (Kim & Rohner, 2002, 2003; Rohner, 2004). According to this meta-analysis, about 26% of the variability in children's psychological adjustment is accounted for by parental acceptance (Rohner, 2004).

The question that now is becoming widely acknowledged in parental warmth research is the importance of paternal acceptance on children's psychological and social development. The vast majority of studies analyze the relationships between parents and children without differentiating the father from the mother, the primary focus being the mother's behavior. However, recent research suggests that father's and mother's behavior can have differential effects on the psychological adjustment of their children (Veneziano, 2000). Some research has suggested that paternal acceptance is at least as important as maternal acceptance (Rohner, 1998; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Studies comparing paternal and maternal influence find that paternal acceptance is related to children's social and academic competence (Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Musitu & García, 2004), children's mental health (Amato, 1994), children's substance abuse (Campo & Rohner, 1992), and children's personality disorders (Rohner & Brothers, 1999). Notwithstanding these studies, the possible influence of fathers' behavior has been largely ignored.

Another limitation in parental-child relationship research is that the data usually come from the observation or the perception of a single source, either parents or children (Gracia, 2002; Mash, 1991; Peterson & Hann, 1999). Parents and children do not necessarily perceive parental acceptance manifestations in the same way. It is important to analyze parental behavior from both parent's and children's point of view (Gracia, Lila, & Musitu, 2005). Some researchers have suggested that using two independent measures of children's psychological

adjustment could avoid possible shared variance in the assessment of relationships among psychological adjustment, paternal acceptance, and maternal acceptance (Veneziano, 2000; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001).

Drawing from these ideas, the aims in this study were: (1) to analyze, in a Colombian sample, the relationship between perceived parental acceptance and children's psychological and social adjustment – with this aim we tested the PARTheory postulate of a universal relationship between parental acceptance and children's psychological and social adjustment (Rohner, 2004; Rohner & Britner, 2002); (2) to evaluate independently the relationship between perceived maternal and paternal acceptance and children's psychological and social adjustment – with this aim we tested the possible differences in this relationship between father and mother acceptance (Veneziano, 2000; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001); and (3) to use two independent measures of children's outcomes (reported by children and parents) in order to avoid possible shared variance (Rohner; Veneziano).

Finally, we have also included three sociodemographic variables identified by researchers as potential sources of variation in the relationship between parental behavior and children's outcomes. These variables are children's age (Biller & Kimpton, 1997), gender (Updegraff, McHale, & Crouter, 1996), and social class (Veneziano, 2000).

Some characteristics of the Colombian society, such as more collectivistic than individualistic values (Gracia & Musitu, 2003; Triandis, 1990), a high degree of violence in society (Lila, Musitu, & Buelga, 2000; Ortiz, 1985), and low economic development made it salient to do this research in this cultural context.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The sample consisted of 234 children and 234 parental figures (mother or primary female caregiver, and father or primary male caregiver) living in two-parent nuclear families in Colombia, South America. Questionnaires were completed by children and parents or primary caregivers. Children ranged in age from 7 to 13 years ($M = 9.7$, $SD = 1.31$). Of the children 51.7% ($n = 121$) were male and 48.3% ($n = 113$) female. All the children were attending school at the time of the research. Of the parents' questionnaires, 86.3% ($n = 202$) were completed by mothers and 13.7% ($n = 32$) by fathers.

MEASURES

Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire Child Version (Child PARQ)

This self-report questionnaire measures perceptions of parental treatment of the child in terms of four dimensions, a) parental warmth and affection, b) parental hostility and aggression, c) parental indifference and neglect, and c) parental

undifferentiated rejection. The four PARQ scales constitute the warmth (acceptance-rejection) dimension of parenting. Taken together, these four scales compose the total PARQ score used in this study. Children responded to two versions of the PARQ (Rohner, 1990), one assessing children's perceptions of their father's (or primary male caregiver's) acceptance-rejection (Child PARQ, father version) and one assessing mother's (or primary female caregiver's) acceptance-rejection (Child PARQ, mother version). Cronbach alpha for the total Child PARQ father version was .96, and .95 for the mother version. The questionnaire is keyed in the direction of perceived rejection. The higher the score, the more rejection children tend to experience. The lower the score, the more acceptance children tend to experience. Scores range from 60 to 240; scores equal to or above 150 reveal the perception of more rejection than acceptance.

Outcome variables

Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) This self-report questionnaire (Rohner, 1990) assesses the way in which children perceive their own personality and behavioral dispositions. The following scales constitute the child PAQ: a) hostility/aggression, b) dependence, c) negative self-esteem, d) negative self-adequacy, e) emotional unresponsiveness, f) emotional instability, and g) negative world views. Cronbach alpha for the PAQ as an overall measure of psychological adjustment was .79. The PAQ is keyed so that the higher the score, the higher the level of self-reported psychological maladjustment.

Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) This checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983) evaluates the behavior problems and social competencies of children as reported by their parents. The behavior problems measure used in this study is composed of two broad dimensions: internalizing and externalizing. Internalizing includes anxious, obsessive, somatic complaints, schizoid behavior, depressed withdrawal, being immature, and being uncommunicative (Cronbach alpha = .88). Externalizing includes being delinquent, aggressive, cruel, or hyperactive (Cronbach alpha = .91). The CBCL is keyed so that the higher the score, the higher the number of children behavior problems reported by parents.

Sociodemographic controls were children's age, children's gender, and social class. Social class scores were obtained from occupation and level of education measures (see Gracia, García, & Musitu, 1995).

RESULTS

Children's mean score for perceived maternal acceptance ($M = 112.5$, $SD = 30.9$, $n = 234$) indicates that children in this sample experienced, on the average, more maternal acceptance than rejection. Twenty-five (10.7 %) of the children had PARQ scores (mother version) at or above 150, indicating that they experienced significantly more maternal rejection than acceptance. Children's mean score for

perceived paternal acceptance ($M = 112.1$, $SD = 32.8$, $n = 233$) indicates that children in this sample experienced on the average more paternal acceptance than rejection. Twenty-nine (12.4%) of the children had PARQ scores (father version) at or above 150, indicating that they experienced significantly more paternal rejection than acceptance. Means and standard deviations for perceived maternal and paternal acceptance, and outcome variables are described in Table 1.

TABLE 1
MEANS AND (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) FOR BOYS AND GIRLS IN PERCEIVED ACCEPTANCE AND OUTCOME VARIABLES

Variables	Boys	Girls
Perceived Maternal Acceptance	113.4 (31.7)	111.6 (30.3)
Perceived Paternal Acceptance	114.3 (33.1)	109.8 (32.6)
Children's Psychological Adjustment	96.8 (15.4)	97.4 (13.1)
Internalizing (behavior problems)	19.3 (11.1)	21.5 (11.9)
Externalizing (behavior problems)	21.0 (13.1)	18.2 (9.7)

Note: No significant differences between boys and girls were found

To analyze the relative contribution of perceived maternal versus paternal acceptance to children's psychological adjustment and behavioral problems, we conducted three separate regression analyses, one for children's self-reported psychological adjustment, and two for parents' reported internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems (see Table 2). Two models were examined in each analysis. The first model estimated the influence of sociodemographic controls on outcome variables. In the second model we included perceived maternal and paternal acceptance as predictors. The first model in the three regression analyses showed a significant effect of social class on outcome variables. This suggested that lower class children experience significantly more psychological maladjustment and behavioral problems. However, when perceived maternal and paternal acceptance were entered into the equation (model 2), social class did not maintain its significant relationship with outcome variables.

Perceived maternal and paternal acceptance were entered in the second model for each outcome variable. The first regression analysis showed a R^2 of .46, $F(5, 227) = 65.48$, $p < .001$ (.36 change in R^2), which indicates that the variability in Colombian children's psychological adjustment can be accounted for jointly by maternal ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$) and paternal ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$) acceptance. This finding suggests that both perceived maternal and paternal acceptance explain a unique portion of the variance in Colombian children's self-reported psychological adjustment. For behavioral problems, results showed a R^2 of .17, $F(5, 225) = 14.19$, $p < .001$ (.09 change in R^2), for internalizing problems, and a R^2 of .22, $F(5, 225) = 20.08$, $p < .001$ (.17 change in R^2), for externalizing problems.

These findings indicate that the variability in children's behavioral problems can also be accounted for by paternal and maternal acceptance. However, the standardized regression coefficients reflecting the unique contribution of perceived maternal and paternal acceptance revealed that only perceived maternal acceptance (internalizing: $\beta = .28, p < .01$; externalizing: $\beta = .39, p < .001$) was significantly related to behavioral problems. Perceived paternal acceptance did not have a significant direct effect on children's behavioral problems.

TABLE 2
CHILDREN'S OUTCOMES (PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT, INTERNALIZING AND EXTERNALIZING BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS) REGRESSED ON SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CONTROLS, AND MATERNAL AND PATERNAL ACCEPTANCE

	Model 1		Model 2	
Psychological Adjustment (PAQ)	B	Beta	B	Beta
Gender ^a	1.658	.058	1.987	.070
Age	-.090	-.008	.356	.033
Social class	-2.891	-.318***	-.690	-.076
Maternal Acceptance			.181	.393***
Paternal Acceptance			.137	.317***
Constant		105.465		57.523
R^2		.102		.468
Change in R^2		.102***		.366***
Internalizing (CBCL)	B	Beta	B	Beta
Gender ^a	2.785	.121	2.800	.122
Age	-.167	-.031	-.029	-.003
Social class	-1.890	-.257***	-.938	-.127
Maternal Acceptance			.103	.273 **
Paternal Acceptance			.029	.084
Constant		24.288		4.844
R^2		.076		.172
Change in R^2		.076***		.096***
Externalizing (CBCL)	B	Beta	B	Beta
Gender ^a	-2.357	-.102	-2.368	-.102
Age	-.631	-.071	-.455	-.051
Social class	-1.259	-.170**	.028	.004
Maternal Acceptance			.150	.395***
Paternal Acceptance			.027	.076
Constant		33.508		7.580
R^2		.051		.223
Change in R^2		.051**		.173***

^a 1 = male; 2 = female

** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Finally, following the approach suggested by Veneziano (2000), we assessed the possibility that paternal acceptance had an indirect effect on children's behavioral problems. To assess this possibility, the two path coefficients in the indirect path were multiplied according to the tracing rule (Kenny, 1979). Results of this operation showed that the indirect effect of paternal acceptance (internalizing, .19; externalizing, .27), calculated as the product of the paths from paternal to maternal acceptance (.70), and from maternal acceptance to behavioral problems (internalizing, .28; externalizing, .39), was larger than the direct effect (internalizing, .07; externalizing, .09) of paternal acceptance on children's behavioral problems. These results suggest that the effect of perceived paternal acceptance on children's behavioral problems is indirect, and that maternal acceptance mediates the effects of paternal acceptance.

DISCUSSION

This study showed that perceived parental acceptance is related to children's psychological and social adjustment in a Colombian sample. This relationship held after controlling for sociodemographic variables. These results are similar to those reported in previous research, supporting PARTheory findings about the universal relationship between parental acceptance and children's outcomes (Rohner, 2004; Rohner & Britner, 2002). Thus, similar to many other samples from different cultural settings, Colombian children's psychological and social adjustment varies with their experiences of maternal and paternal acceptance.

Our results showed that children's self-reported psychological adjustment was related to perceived paternal and maternal acceptance. This finding is in accordance with previous studies in other cultural settings showing that fathers are often equal to mothers in their influence on different aspects of children's development (Rohner & Khaleque, 2005; Veneziano, 2000). However, in relation to behavioral problems, as reported by parents, only perceived maternal acceptance had a direct relationship to children's behavioral problems, both internalized and externalized. Our data suggest that perceived paternal acceptance had an indirect effect mediated by perceived maternal acceptance. It is not clear why paternal acceptance is indirectly related to children's behavioral problems. This result could be explained by the cultural construction of fatherhood and motherhood in Colombian culture (for analyses of North American social construction of motherhood and fatherhood, see Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). In this regard, Veneziano suggests that the relative influence of paternal and maternal behavior varies across cultural groups as a function of cultural groups' adaptations to unique historical, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions. Our results support the importance of considering separately the influence of fathers as well as mothers whenever possible. Moreover, our results

support the preference of using two independent sources of information (parents and children perspectives). Usually, but not always, the two perspectives lead to similar conclusions (Rohner et al., 2005). More research is needed to better understand the different implications that maternal and paternal acceptance has for children's outcomes.

Finally, the cross-sectional nature of our data does not allow us to establish a causal link between paternal and maternal acceptance and children's outcomes. Some studies have shown that children with behavioral problems elicit coercive parental discipline (Anderson, Lytton, & Romney, 1986; Bell & Chapman, 1986; Day, Peterson, & McCracken, 1998; Gracia, 1995; Lila & Gracia, 2005), although it is not clear if children's behavior affects paternal and maternal behavior in the same manner. With our data set we could not ascertain if the children are rejected because their behavior is problematic, or their behavior problems are a consequence of parental rejection. In a study of the worldwide mental health correlates of parental acceptance-rejection, Rohner and Britner (2002) reported longitudinal evidence confirming that parental rejection tends everywhere to precede the development of a variety of mental health problems, such as depression and depressed affect, conduct problems and behavior disorders, and substance abuse. The results from other longitudinal studies indicate the existence of a reciprocal and bidirectional association between children's behavioral problems and parental rejection (Cohen & Brook, 1995; Gershoff, 2002). More longitudinal research is needed to clarify these questions.

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