Introduction to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory) and Evidence

Ronald P. Rohner
University of Connecticut, r.rohner@uconn.edu

Recommended Citation
Introduction to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory) and Evidence

Abstract

Interpersonal acceptance–rejection theory (IPARTheory) is an evidence–based theory of socialization and lifespan development. It is composed of three subtheories, each of which deals with a separate but interrelated set of issues. IPARTheory’s personality subtheory – which is the most highly developed component of the theory – deals primarily with the pancultural nature and effects of interpersonal acceptance and rejection. Coping subtheory explores the fact that some individuals are better able to cope with experiences of perceived rejection than are other individuals. Finally, IPARTheory’s sociocultural systems subtheory attempts to predict and explain major causes and sociocultural correlates of interpersonal acceptance–rejection worldwide. Empirical evidence overwhelmingly supports the theory’s major postulates and predictions, especially postulates and predictions in personality subtheory. Emerging evidence about the neurobiological and biochemical risks posed for the development, structure, and function of the human brain are beginning to help explain why these postulates and predictions are so consistently confirmed panculturally.

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.

This article is available in Online Readings in Psychology and Culture: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/orpc/vol6/iss1/4
Overview of Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory)

Interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory (IPARTheory) is an evidence-based theory of socialization and lifespan development that aims to predict and explain major consequences and other correlates of interpersonal acceptance and rejection worldwide (Rohner, 1986, 2004; Rohner & Rohner, 1980). Historically (beginning about 1960), the theory focused mostly on the effects of perceived parental acceptance-rejection in childhood and extending into adulthood. At that time, the theory was called “parental acceptance-rejection theory” (PARTheory). But by 2000, the theory had broadened to include intimate adult relationships and other significant interpersonal relationships throughout the lifespan. This shift in emphasis in 2014 led to the transition of the theory and its name from PARTheory to its current designation: Interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory (IPARTheory). Despite this change in name and emphasis, significant portions of the theory continue to feature the effects, causes, and other correlates of children’s perceptions of parental acceptance-rejection and of adults’ remembrances of parental acceptance-rejection in childhood. This fact is amplified in this paper. IPARTheory attempts to answer five classes of questions divided into three subtheories. These are personality subtheory, coping subtheory, and sociocultural systems model and subtheory.

**Personality subtheory** asks two general questions: First, is it true, as the subtheory postulates, that children pan-culturally – in all sociocultural systems, racial or ethnic groups, genders, and the like – tend to respond in the same way when they perceive themselves to be accepted or rejected by their parents and other attachment figures? Second, to what degree do the effects of childhood acceptance and rejection extend into adulthood and old age?

**Coping subtheory** asks one basic question. That is, what gives some children and adults the resilience to emotionally cope more effectively than most people with the experience of childhood rejection?

**Sociocultural systems model and subtheory** asks two very different classes of questions. First, why are some parents warm and loving and others cold, aggressive, neglecting/rejecting? Is it true, for example – as IPARTheory predicts – that specific psychological, familial, community, and societal factors tend to be reliably associated everywhere in the world with specific variations in parental acceptance-rejection? Second, in what way is the total fabric of a nation as well as the behavior and beliefs of individuals within society affected by the fact that most parents in that country tend to either accept or reject their children? For example, is it true, as IPARTheory predicts, that a people's religious beliefs, artistic preferences, and other expressive beliefs and behaviors tend to be universally associated with their childhood experiences of parental love and love withdrawal?

Several distinctive features guide IPARTheory’s attempts to answer questions such as these. First, by employing a multi-method research strategy, the theory draws extensively from worldwide, cross-cultural evidence as well as from every major ethnic group in the
United States. Additionally, it draws from literary and historical insights as far back as two thousand years. And more importantly, it draws from and helps provide a conceptual framework for integrating empirical studies on issues of interpersonal acceptance-rejection that have been published since the end of the nineteenth century, mostly within the United States. From these sources the theory attempts to formulate a lifespan developmental perspective on issues surrounding interpersonal acceptance and rejection. Much of this lifespan perspective is incorporated into IPARTheory's personality subtheory, described later. First however, we discuss the concepts of interpersonal acceptance and rejection, or the warmth dimension of interpersonal relationships. At this point, we should remind readers that in IPARTheory the term parent refers to whoever the major caregiver(s) is/are of a child – not necessarily to biological or adoptive parents.

**The Warmth Dimension of Interpersonal Relationships**

Together, interpersonal acceptance and rejection form the warmth dimension of interpersonal relationships. This is a dimension or continuum on which all humans can be placed because everyone experiences more or less love at the hands of the people most important to them. Thus, the warmth dimension has to do with the quality of the affectional bond between individuals (e.g., between children and their parents, and between intimate adults, among others). In particular, the warmth dimension focuses on the physical, verbal, and symbolic behaviors that individuals use to express their caring or lack of caring about the other person, as described below. One end of the continuum is marked by interpersonal acceptance, which refers to the warmth, affection, care, comfort, concern, nurturance, support, or simply love that one person can express to or experience from another person. The other end of the continuum is marked by interpersonal rejection, which refers to the absence or significant withdrawal of these positive feelings and behaviors and by the presence of a variety of physically and psychologically hurtful behaviors and affects. It is important to note that individuals are neither accepted nor rejected in any categorical sense. Rather, everyone falls somewhere along the warmth dimension, experiencing varying degrees of interpersonal acceptance and rejection in their relationships with significant others.

Extensive cross-cultural research over the course of six decades in IPARTheory reveals that interpersonal rejection can be experienced by any combination of four principal expressions: (1) cold versus warm, and unaffectionate versus affectionate, (2) hostile and aggressive, (3) indifferent and neglecting, and (4) undifferentiated rejecting (Rohner, 1986, 2004).

Undifferentiated rejection refers to individuals' beliefs that the other person (e.g., attachment figure) does not really care about them or love them, even though there might not be clear behavioral indicators that the other person is neglecting, unaffectionate, or aggressive toward them. Warmth/coldness, hostility, and indifference refer to internal, psychological states of individuals. People may perceive significant others to be warm (or cold and unloving) or to be hostile, angry, bitter, resentful, irritable, impatient, or antagonistic...
toward them. Alternatively, individuals may perceive significant others to be unconcerned and uncaring about them, or to have a restricted interest in their overall well-being. Affection, aggression, and neglect, on the other hand, refer to observable behaviors that result when significant others are perceived to act on these emotions. Interpersonal affection can be shown physically (e.g. hugging, kissing, caressing, and comforting), verbally (e.g. praising, complimenting, and saying nice things to or about the other), or symbolically in some other way, as with the use of culturally specific gestures. These and many other caring, nurturing, supportive, and loving behaviors help define the behavioral expressions of interpersonal acceptance. When people act on feelings of hostility, anger, resentment, or enmity, the resulting behavior is generally called aggression. As construed in IPARTTheory, aggression is any behavior where there is the intention of hurting someone, something, or oneself (physically or emotionally). As shown in Figure 1, people may be physically aggressive (e.g., hit, push, throw things, and pinch) and verbally aggressive (e.g. sarcasm, curse, mock, shout, say thoughtless, humiliating, or disparaging things to or about the other). Additionally, individuals may use hurtful, nonverbal symbolic gestures toward others.

**Figure 1.** The warmth dimension of interpersonal relationships. Elements to the left of the slash marks (i.e., warmth or coldness, hostility, and indifference) refer to internal, psychological states of individuals. Elements to the right of the slash marks (affection, aggression, and neglect) refer to observable behaviors that result when significant others are perceived to act on these emotions.
The connection between indifference as an internal motivator and neglect as a behavioral response is not as direct as the connection between hostility and aggression. This is true because people may neglect or perceive to be neglected by significant others for many reasons that have nothing to do with indifference. For example, individuals may neglect significant others as a way of trying to cope with their anger toward them. Neglect is not simply a matter of failing to provide for the material and physical needs of significant others, however. It also pertains to individuals’ failure to attend appropriately to the social and emotional needs of others. Often, for example, neglecting persons pay little attention to significant others’ needs for comfort, solace, help, or attention; they may also remain physically as well as psychologically unresponsive or even unavailable or inaccessible. All these behaviors, real or perceived—individually and collectively—are likely to induce individuals to feel unloved or rejected by their significant others. Even in warm and loving relationships, however, individuals are likely to experience—at least occasionally—a few of these hurtful emotions and behaviors.

Thus, it is important to be aware that interpersonal acceptance-rejection can be viewed and studied from either of two perspectives. That is, acceptance-rejection can be studied as perceived or subjectively experienced by the individual (the phenomenological perspective), or it can be studied as reported by an outside observer (the behavioral perspective). Usually, but not always, the two perspectives lead to similar conclusions. IPART theory research suggests, however, that if the conclusions are very discrepant, one should generally trust the information derived from the phenomenological perspective. This is true because an individual may feel unloved (as in undifferentiated rejection), but outside observers may fail to detect any explicit indicators of interpersonal rejection. Alternatively, observers may report a significant amount of interpersonal aggression or neglect, but the target person may not feel rejected. This occurs with some regularity in reports of child abuse and neglect. Thus, there is only a problematic relation between so-called “objective” reports of abuse, rejection, and neglect on the one hand and children’s perceptions of parental acceptance-rejection on the other. As Kagan (1978) put it—in the context of parent-child relations—“parental rejection is not a specific set of actions by parents but a belief held by the child” (p. 61).

In effect, much of interpersonal acceptance-rejection is symbolic (Kagan, 1974, 1978). Therefore, to understand why rejection has consistent effects on children and adults, one must understand its symbolic nature. Certainly in the context of ethnic and cross-cultural studies investigators must strive to understand people’s symbolic, culturally-based interpretations of love-related behaviors if they wish to fully comprehend the acceptance-rejection process in those settings. That is, even though individuals everywhere may express, to some degree, acceptance (warmth, affection, care, concern) and rejection (coldness, lack of affection, hostility, aggression, indifference, neglect), the way they do it is highly variable and saturated with cultural or sometimes idiosyncratic meaning. Parents anywhere, for example, might praise or compliment their children, but the way they do it in one sociocultural setting might have no meaning (or might have a totally different meaning) in a second setting. This is illustrated in the following incident:
A few years ago I [Rohner] interviewed a high caste Hindu woman about family matters in India. Another woman seated nearby distracted my attention. The second woman quietly and carefully peeled an orange and then removed the seeds from each segment. Her 9-year-old daughter became increasingly animated as her mother progressed. Later, my Bengali interpreter asked me if I had noticed what the woman was doing. I answered that I had, but that I had not paid much attention to it. "Should I have?" "Well," she answered, "you want to know about parental love and affection in West Bengal, so you should know...." She went on to explain that when a Bengali mother wants to praise her child – to show approval and affection for her child – she might give the child a peeled and seeded orange. Bengali children understand completely that their mothers have done something special for them, even though mothers may not use words of praise for to do so would be unseemly, much like praising themselves. (Rohner, 1994, p. 113; see also Rohner & Chaki-Sircar, 1988).

At this point, we should caution that in everyday American English, the word “rejection” implies bad parenting and sometimes even bad people. In cross-cultural and multiethnic research, however, one must attempt to view the word as being descriptive of parents’ and others’ behavior, not judgmental or evaluative. This is true because parents in about 25 percent of the world’s societies behave normatively in ways that are consistent with IPARTheory’s definition of rejection (Rohner, 1975; Rohner & Rohner, 1980). But in the great majority of cases – including historically in the United States – these parents behave toward their children in the way that they believe good, responsible parents should behave, as defined by cultural norms. Therefore, in the context of cross-cultural research on parental acceptance-rejection, a major goal is to determine whether children and adults everywhere respond the same way when they experience themselves to be accepted or rejected as children – regardless of differences in culture, language, race, ethnicity, gender, social class, or other such defining conditions.

**IPARTheory's Personality Subtheory**

IPARTheory's personality subtheory attempts to predict and explain major personality or psychological – especially mental health-related – consequences of perceived interpersonal acceptance and rejection. The subtheory begins with the probably untestable assumption that over the course of biocultural evolution, humans have developed the enduring, biologically-based emotional need for positive response from the people most important to them (Rohner, 1975; see also Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002; Leary, 1999). The need for positive response includes an emotional wish, desire, or yearning (whether consciously recognized or not) for comfort, support, care, concern, nurturance, and the like. In adulthood, the need becomes more complex and differentiated to include the wish (consciously recognized or unrecognized) for positive regard from people with whom one has an affectional bond of attachment. People who can best satisfy this need are
typically parents for infants and children, but include significant others and non-parental attachment figures for adolescents and adults.

As construed in IPARTheory, a **significant other** is any person who is uniquely important to the individual, and who is interchangeable with no one else (Rohner, 2005a). In this sense, parents and intimate partners, for example, are generally significant others. But these people also tend to have one additional quality not shared by most significant others. That is, individuals' sense of emotional security and comfort tends to be dependent on the quality of their relationship with their significant others. Because of that fact, these people are usually the kind of significant others called *attachment figures* in both IPARTheory (Rohner, 2005a) and attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982; Colin, 1996). The essence of the concept *attachment* as construed in IPARTheory is captured by a short poem written by Rohner (2009):

**Attachment: The Emotional Moon Phenomenon**

Sometimes I’m happy
Sometimes I’m blue.
My mood all depends
On my relationship with you.

Parents are thus uniquely important to children because the security and other emotional and psychological states of offspring are dependent on the quality of relationship with their parent(s). It is for this reason that parental acceptance and rejection is postulated in IPARTheory to have unparalleled influence in shaping children's personality development over time. Moreover, according to IPARTheory's personality subtheory, adults' sense of emotional security and well-being tends to be dependent on the perceived quality of relationship with adult attachment figures. Thus, acceptance or rejection by an intimate partner is also postulated to have a major influence on adults' personality and psychological adjustment.

The concept *personality* is defined in personality subtheory (Rohner, 2005a) as an individual’s more or less stable set of predispositions to respond (i.e., affective, cognitive, perceptual, and motivational dispositions) and actual modes of responding (i.e., observable behaviors) in various life situations or contexts. This definition recognizes that behavior is motivated, influenced by external (i.e., environmental) as well as internal (e.g., emotional, biological, and learning) factors, and usually has regularity or orderliness across time and space. IPARTheory’s personality subtheory postulates that the emotional need for positive response from significant others and attachment figures is a powerful and culturally invariant motivator. When children do not get this need satisfied adequately by their major caregivers – or adults do not get this need met by their attachment figures – they are predisposed to respond both emotionally and behaviorally in specific ways. In particular – according to the subtheory – individuals who feel rejected by significant others are likely to be anxious and insecure. In an attempt to allay these feelings and to satisfy their needs, persons who feel rejected often increase their bids for positive responses, but only up to a point. That is, they tend to become more dependent (see Figure 2). The term *dependence* in the theory refers
to the internal, psychologically felt wish or yearning for emotional (as opposed to instrumental or task-oriented) support, care, comfort, attention, nurturance, and similar behaviors from significant others. The term, as used in IPARTheory, also refers to the actual behavioral bids individuals make for such responsiveness. For young children, these bids may include clinging to parents, whining, or crying when parents unexpectedly depart, and seeking physical proximity with them when they return.

In IPARTheory, dependence is construed as a continuum, with independence defining one end of the continuum and dependence the other. Independent people are those who have their need for positive response met sufficiently so that they are free from frequent or intense yearning or behavioral bids for succor from significant others. Very dependent people, on the other hand, are those who have a frequent and intense desire for positive response, and are likely to make many bids for responses. As with all the personality dispositions studied in IPARTheory, humans everywhere can be placed somewhere along the continuum of being more or less dependent or independent. According to the theory, much of the variation in dependence among children and adults is contingent on the extent to which they perceive themselves to be accepted or rejected by significant others. Many rejected children and adults feel the need for constant reassurance and emotional support.

Figure 2. Dependence/independence in relation to interpersonal acceptance-rejection.
According to personality subtheory, parental rejection as well as rejection by other attachment figures also leads to other personality outcomes, in addition to dependence. These include hostility, aggression, passive aggression, or psychological problems with the management of hostility and aggression; emotional unresponsiveness; immature dependence or defensive independence depending on the form, frequency, duration, and intensity of perceived rejection and parental control; impaired self-esteem; impaired self-adequacy; emotional instability; and negative worldview. Theoretically, these dispositions are expected to emerge because of the intense psychological pain produced by perceived rejection. More specifically, beyond a certain point—a point that varies from individual to individual—children and adults who experience significant rejection are likely to feel ever-increasing anger, resentment, and other destructive emotions that may become intensely painful. As a result, many rejected persons close off emotionally in an effort to protect themselves from the hurt of further rejection. That is, they become less emotionally responsive. In doing so they often have problems being able or willing to express love and knowing how to or even be capable of accepting it from others.

Because of all this psychological hurt, some rejected individuals become defensively independent. *Defensive independence* is like healthy independence in that individuals make relatively few behavioral bids for positive responses. It is unlike healthy independence, however, in that defensively independent people continue to crave warmth and support—positive responses—though they sometimes do not recognize it. Indeed, because of the overlay of anger, distrust, and other negative emotions generated by chronic rejection, they often positively deny this need, saying in effect, "To hell with you! I don't need you. I don't need anybody!" This attitude is epitomized in the words to Simon and Garfunkel’s classic folk song, “I Am a Rock.” Defensive independence with its associated emotions and behaviors sometimes leads to a process of counter rejection, where individuals who feel rejected reject the person(s) who reject them. Not surprisingly, this process sometimes escalates into a cycle of violence and other serious relationship problems.

In addition to dependence or defensive independence, individuals who feel rejected are predicted in IPARThory’s personality subtheory to develop feelings of impaired self-esteem and impaired self-adequacy. This comes about because—as noted in symbolic interaction theory (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934)—individuals tend to view themselves as they think significant others view them. Thus, insofar as children and adults feel their attachment figures do not love them, they are likely to feel they are unlovable, perhaps even unworthy of being loved. Whereas self-esteem pertains to individuals' feelings of self-worth or value, self-adequacy pertains to their feelings of competence or mastery to perform daily tasks adequately and to satisfy their own instrumental (task oriented) needs. To the extent that individuals feel they are not very good people, they are also apt to feel they are not very good at satisfying their needs. Or alternatively, insofar as people feel they are not good at satisfying their personal needs, they often come to think less well of themselves more globally. Anger, negative self-feelings, and the other consequences of perceived rejection tend to diminish rejected children's and adults' capacity to deal effectively with stress. Because of this, people who feel rejected often have problems with emotion regulation. That is, they tend to be less emotionally stable than people who feel accepted. They often become
emotionally upset – perhaps tearful or angry – when confronted with stressful situations that accepted (loved) people are able to handle with greater emotional equanimity. All these acutely painful feelings associated with perceived rejection tend to induce children and adults to develop a negative worldview. That is, according to IPARTheory, rejected persons are likely to develop a view of the world – of life, interpersonal relationships, and the very nature of human existence – as being untrustworthy, hostile, unfriendly, emotionally unsafe, threatening, or dangerous in other ways. These thoughts and feelings often extend to people's beliefs about the nature of the supernatural world (i.e., God, the gods, and other religious beliefs) (Batool & Najam, 2009; Rohner, 1975, 1986) (see IPARTheory's sociocultural systems subtheory, below).

Negative worldview, negative self-esteem, negative self-adequacy, and some of the other personality dispositions described above are important elements in the social-cognition or mental representations of rejected persons. In IPARTheory, the concept of mental representation (Rohner, 2005a) refers to an individual's more-or-less organized but usually implicit conception of existence, including conception of things that individuals take for granted about themselves, others, and the experiential world constructed from emotionally significant past and current experiences. Along with one's emotional state – which both influences and is influenced by one's conception of reality – mental representations tend to shape the way individuals perceive, construe, and react to new experiences, including interpersonal relationships. Mental representations also influence what and how individuals store and remember experiences (see also Baldwin, 1992; Clausen, 1972; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Epstein, 1994).

Once created, individuals’ mental representations of self, significant others, and the world around them tend to induce them to seek or to avoid certain situations and kinds of people. In effect, the way individuals think about themselves and their world shapes the way they live their lives. This is notably true of rejected children and adults. For example, many rejected persons have a tendency to perceive hostility where none is intended, to see deliberate rejection in unintended acts of significant others, or to devalue their sense of personal worth in the face of strong counter-information. Moreover, rejected persons are likely to seek, create, interpret, or perceive experiences, situations, and relationships in ways that are consistent with their distorted mental representations. And they often tend to avoid or mentally reinterpret situations that are inconsistent with these representations. Additionally, rejected children and adults often construct mental images of personal relationships as being unpredictable, untrustworthy, and perhaps hurtful. These negative mental representations are often carried forward into new relationships where rejected individuals develop a fear of intimacy – finding it difficult to trust others emotionally (Phillips et al., 2013). They are also likely to become hypervigilant and hypersensitive – and to overreact – to any slights or signs of emotional undependability. This process is often referred to as rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Ibrahim, Rohner, Smith, & Flannery, 2015). Because of all this selective attention, selective perception, faulty styles of causal attribution, and distorted cognitive information processing, rejected individuals – especially children – are generally expected in IPARTheory to self-propel along qualitatively different developmental pathways from accepted or loved people.
Many of these effects of perceived rejection are also found in developmental trauma disorder (DTD; van der Kolk, 2010) and in complex posttraumatic stress disorder (Complex PTSD or simply CPTSD; Courtois, 2004). These are conditions where youths experience repeated trauma — especially interpersonal trauma — over an extended period of time and developmental periods. Included among the shared effects of perceived rejection, DTD and CPTSD are issues of hypervigilance, anxiety, often self-hatred, problems with interpersonal relationships, and suicidality, among several others. Additionally, issues of depression and substance abuse, discussed later, are also implicated in perceived rejection, DTD, and CPTSD.

The pain of perceived rejection is very real (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). In fact, brain imaging (fMRI) studies reveal that specific parts of the brain (i.e., the anterior cingulate cortex, and the right ventral prefrontal cortex) are activated when people feel rejected, just as they are when people experience physical pain (Eisenberger, 2012a, 2012b, 2015; Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004; Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; see also Squire & Stein, 2003). Moreover, Fisher, Aron, and Brown (2005) found that different regions of the brain are activated among adults who are happily in love versus those who had been recently rejected by their partners.

In addition to research using fMRIs, results of both animal and human studies suggest that emotional trauma in childhood may affect brain structure and function in other ways. For example, evidence shows that emotional neglect in childhood may be a significant risk factor for cerebral infarction in old age (Wilson et al., 2012). Moreover, perceived rejection and other forms of long-term emotional trauma are often implicated in the alteration of brain chemistry (Ford & Russo, 2006). The effect of these and other neurobiological and neuropsychological changes may ultimately compromise children's central nervous system and psychosocial development (Ford, 2005). On the positive side, however, Luby et al. (2012) found that the early experience of maternal nurturance among preschoolers is strongly predictive of larger hippocampal volume among the same children at school age. These results are important because the hippocampus is a region of the brain that is central to memory, emotion regulation, stress modulation, and other functions — all of which are essential for healthy social and emotional adjustment.

It is perhaps for reasons such as these that over 550 studies involving tens of thousands of participants cross-culturally and major American ethnic groups consistently show that about 60 to 80 percent of the children and adults measured so far respond as personality subtheory predicts (Ki, 2015; Rohner, 2016c). In fact, no adequate study anywhere in the world — across cultures, genders, ages, geographic boundaries, ethnicities, and other defining conditions — has failed to show the same basic trend that children’s and adults’ mental health status tends to be impaired in direct proportion to the form, frequency, severity, and duration of rejection experienced (see Figure 3). Some adults who came from loving families, however, also display the constellation of psychological problems typically shown by rejected children. These people are called “troubled” in IPARTTheory; many are individuals who are in rejecting relationships with attachment figures other than parents. This fact helps confirm IPARTTheory’s expectation that, for most people, perceived rejection by any attachment figure at any point throughout the lifespan effectively compromises the
likelihood of healthy social-emotional functioning. However, it is also expected in IPARTTheory that a minority of individuals will be able to thrive emotionally despite having experienced significant rejection by an attachment figure. These people are called affective copers. They are the focus of IPARTTheory’s coping subtheory discussed next.

![Figure 3. Personality subtheory in relation to troubled individuals and affective copers.](image)

**IPARTTheory’s Coping Subtheory**

IPARTTheory’s coping subtheory deals with the question of how some rejected individuals are able to withstand the corrosive drizzle of day-to-day rejection without suffering the negative mental health consequences that most rejected individuals do. Theoretically and empirically, the coping process is the least well-developed portion of IPARTTheory. As is true for most other bodies of research on the coping process (Ki, 2015; Somerfield & McCrae, 2000; Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002), little is yet known with confidence about the mechanisms and processes that help answer coping subtheory’s basic question. Nonetheless, it seems clear that in order to understand the coping process – indeed the entire acceptance-rejection process – one must adopt a multivariate, person-in-context perspective. This perspective has three elements: self, other, and context. Specifically, the multivariate model of behavior employed in IPARTTheory states that the behavior of the individual (e.g., coping with perceived rejection) is a function of the interaction between self,
other, and context. "Self" characteristics include the individual's mental representations along with the other internal (biological) and external (personality) characteristics discussed earlier. "Other" characteristics include the personal and interpersonal characteristics of the rejecting other, along with the form, frequency, duration, and severity of rejection. "Context" characteristics include other significant people in the individual's life, along with social-situational characteristics of the person's environment. A specific, but so far not well tested, hypothesis coming from this perspective states that, all other things being equal, the likelihood of individuals being able to cope with perceived interpersonal rejection is enhanced by the presence of at least one warm, supportive attachment figure in their life.

IPARTheory's emphasis on mental activity – including mental representations – leads us to expect that specific social cognitive capabilities allow some children and adults to cope with perceived rejection more effectively than others. These capabilities include a clearly differentiated sense of self, a sense of self-determination, and the capacity to depersonalize (Rohner, 1986, 2005a). More specifically, coping subtheory expects that the capacity of individuals to cope with rejection is enhanced to the degree that they have a clearly differentiated sense of self, one aspect of which is a sense of self-determination or self-efficacy. Self-determined individuals believe they can exert at least a modicum of control over what happens to them through their own effort or personal attributes. Other individuals may feel like pawns: they feel as though things happen to them because of fate, chance, luck, or powerful others. Individuals with a sense of self-determination are believed in IPARTheory to have an internal psychological resource for minimizing some of the most damaging consequences of perceived rejection.

Similarly, individuals who have the capacity to depersonalize are believed in the theory to be provided with another social-cognitive resource for dealing with perceived rejection. Personalizing refers to the act of "taking it personally," that is, to reflexively or automatically relate life events and interpersonal encounters to oneself – interpreting events egocentrically in terms of oneself, usually in a negative sense. Thus, personalizers are apt to interpret inadvertent slights and minor acts of insensitivity as being deliberate acts of rejection or other hurtful intentions. This, too, is related to rejection sensitivity discussed earlier. Individuals who are able to depersonalize, however, have a psychological resource for dealing in a more positive way with ambiguities in interpersonal relationships. All three of these social cognitive capabilities are thought in IPARTheory to provide psychological shields against the more damaging effects of perceived rejection. However, these attributes themselves tend to be affected by rejection, especially rejection occurring during the formative years of childhood. This complicates the task of assessing the independent contribution that each attribute might make in helping children and adults cope with perceived interpersonal rejection.

It is important to note here that the concept copers in IPARTheory's coping subtheory refers to affective copers versus instrumental copers. Affective copers are those persons whose emotional and overall mental health is reasonably good despite having been raised in seriously rejecting families or despite being seriously rejected by other attachment figures throughout the life span. Instrumental copers, on the other hand, are rejected persons who do well school, in their professions, occupations, and other task-oriented activities, but
whose emotional and mental health is impaired. Instrumental copers maintain a high level of task competence and occupational performance despite experiencing serious rejection in childhood. Many prominent personalities in history have been instrumental copers. Included among them are such personages as Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong, John Stuart Mill, Richard Nixon, Edgar Allen Poe, Eleanor Roosevelt, Babe Ruth, and Mark Twain, among many, many others (Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962; Howe, 1982). Biographies and autobiographies of these individuals reveal that even though they were successful instrumental copers, they were not affective copers. All appear to have been psychologically distressed in ways described in IPARTheory's personality subtheory.

Even though the mental health status of affective copers is reasonably good, it is generally not as good as that of individuals coming from loving (accepting) families or in other emotionally satisfying relationships – but it does tend to be significantly better than that of most individuals coming from rejecting families or seriously rejecting adult relationships (Ki, 2015). Over time, from childhood into adulthood, however, all but the most severely rejected and psychologically injured individuals are likely to have enough positive experiences outside their families of origin to help ameliorate the most damaging emotional, cognitive, and behavioral effects of parental rejection. Thus, given the ordinary resilience characteristic of most people most of the time (Masten, 2001, 2014) – in combination with successful psychotherapy, positive work experiences, satisfying intimate relationships, and other emotionally gratifying experiences – adults who were rejected in childhood are often better adjusted emotionally and psychologically than they were as children under the direct influence of rejecting parents – though they tend not to have as positive sense of well-being as adults who felt loved all along. That is, important sequelae of rejection are apt to linger into adulthood, placing even affective copers at somewhat greater risk for social, physical, and emotional problems throughout life than persons who were loved continuously. This is especially true if the rejection process in childhood seriously compromised the individual’s ability to form secure, trusting relationships with an intimate partner or other adult attachment figure.

The first empirical study to assess key features of the affective coping process was conducted by Ki (2015). That study was based on 11,946 adults from 10 nations. Almost 17% of the respondents in the study reported having been seriously rejected in childhood by one or both parents. Nonetheless, 40% of the respondents fit the conceptual and operational definition of affective copers. According to Ki, significantly more women than men tend to be affective copers. At this point, it is unclear why this gender difference exists, except that women everywhere appear to seek emotional support from others more often than do men (Tamres et al., 2002). Beyond this, it is worth noting that both male and female copers tend internationally to report significantly more maternal acceptance than paternal acceptance (Ki, 2015). However, male copers report experiencing significantly more maternal acceptance in childhood than do women, and female copers report experiencing more paternal acceptance in childhood than do men. Nonetheless, remembrances of both maternal and paternal acceptance in childhood tend to be significant and independent predictors of male copers' psychological adjustment in adulthood. For women, on the other hand, an interaction between remembered maternal and paternal acceptance in childhood
are significant predictors of adjustment. That is, female copers’ remembrances of paternal acceptance in childhood moderate the relation between remembered maternal rejection and women’s psychological adjustment. Similarly, female copers’ remembrances of maternal acceptance in childhood moderate the relationship between remembered paternal rejection and women’s adjustment. Alternatively stated, the psychological adjustment of female copers who experienced serious maternal rejection in childhood improves to the extent that they remember their fathers as having been a loving (accepting) parent. But under the condition of high paternal rejection in childhood, the intensity of the relation between remembered maternal rejection in childhood and female copers’ psychological maladjustment intensifies. The same pattern appears when the moderator is maternal acceptance.

**IPARTheory's Sociocultural Systems Model and Subtheory**

Interpersonal acceptance-rejection occurs in a complex ecological (familial, community, and sociocultural) context. IPARTheory's sociocultural systems model provides a way of thinking about the antecedents, consequence, and other correlates of interpersonal acceptance-rejection within individuals and total societies (see Figure 4). This model has its historical roots in the early work of Kardiner (1939, 1945a, 1945b), and later in the work of Whiting and Child (1953). It also shares notable similarities with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model, and with Berry and Poortinga’s (2006) eco-cultural model. It shows, for example, that the likelihood of parents displaying any given form of behavior (e.g., acceptance or rejection) toward their children is shaped in important ways by the maintenance systems of that society – including such social institutions as family structure, household organization, economic organization, political organization, system of defense, and other institutions that bear directly on the survival of a culturally organized population within its natural environment. The model also shows that parents' accepting-rejecting and other behaviors directly impact children's personality development and behavior (as postulated in personality subtheory).

The double-headed arrow in the model shows a bidirectional flow between elements. This suggests that personal characteristics of children such as their temperament and behavioral dispositions shape to a significant extent the form and quality of parents' behavior toward them. Arrows in the model also reveal that – in addition to family experiences – youths have a wide variety of influential experiences in the context of the natural environment in which they live, the maintenance systems of their society, peers and adults in the nation, and the institutionalized expressive systems of their country.

*Institutionalized expressive systems and behaviors* refer to the religious traditions and behaviors of a people, to their artistic traditions and preferences, to their musical and folkloric traditions and preferences, and to other such symbolic, mostly non-utilitarian, and non-survival related beliefs and behaviors. They are called "expressive" in IPARTheory because they are believed to express or reflect people's internal, psychological states, at least initially when the expressive systems were first created. Thus, expressive systems are believed in
IPARTheory to be symbolic creations, formed over time by multiple individuals within a society. As the people change, the expressive systems and behaviors also tend to change, though sometimes slowly and grudgingly – especially if the systems have been codified in writing. It is important to note here – according to sociocultural systems subtheory – that even though expressive systems are ultimately human creations, once created and incorporated into the sociocultural system, they tend to act back on individuals, shaping their future beliefs and behaviors.

Guided by the sociocultural systems model, IPARTheory's sociocultural systems subtheory attempts to predict and explain worldwide causes of parental acceptance and rejection. The subtheory also attempts to predict and explain expressive correlates of parental acceptance and rejection. For example, the subtheory predicts – and substantial cross-cultural evidence confirms – that in societies where children tend to be rejected, cultural beliefs about the supernatural world (i.e., about God, gods, and the spirit world) usually portray supernaturals as being malevolent, that is hostile, treacherous, unpredictable, capricious, destructive, or negative in other ways (Batool & Najam, 2009; Bierman, 2005; Dickie et al., 1997; Rohner, 1975, 1986; Thiele, 2007). However, the supernatural world is usually thought to be benevolent – warm, supportive, generous, protective, or kindly in other ways – in societies where most children are raised with loving acceptance. No doubt these cultural differences are the result of aggregated individual differences in the mental representations of accepted versus rejected persons within these two kinds of societies. Parental acceptance and rejection are also known to be associated worldwide with many other expressive sociocultural correlates such as the artistic traditions...
characteristic of individual societies, as well as the artistic preferences of individuals within these societies (Brown, Homa, Cook, Nadimi, & Cummings, 2016; Rohner & Frampton, 1982). Additionally, evidence suggests that the recreational and occupational choices adults make may be associated with childhood experiences of acceptance and rejection (Aronoff, 1967; Mantell, 1974; Rohner, 1986). Hoarding, too, tends to be associated with adults’ remembrances of the experience of childhood rejection (Brown, 2015). All these and other expressive behaviors and beliefs appear to be byproducts of the social, emotional, and social-cognitive effects of parental acceptance-rejection discussed earlier.

Why are parents in most societies warm and loving, but parents in about 25 percent of the world’s societies mildly to severely rejecting (Rohner, 1975, 1986; Rohner & Rohner, 1981)? What factors account for these societal differences and for individual variations in parenting within societies? Questions such as these guide the second portion of IPARTheory’s sociocultural systems subtheory. No single or simple response answers these questions, but specific factors noted below do appear to be reliably associated with societal and intrasocietal variations in parental rejection. Principal among these are conditions that promote the breakdown of primary emotional relationships and social supports. Thus, single parents (most often mothers) in social isolation without social and emotional supports – especially if the parents are young and economically deprived – appear universally to be at greatest risk for withdrawing love and affection from their children (Rohner, 1986). It is useful to note, however, that from a global perspective, poverty by itself is not necessarily associated with increased rejection. Rather, it is poverty in association with these other social and emotional conditions that place children at greatest risk. Indeed, much of humanity is now and always has been in a state of relative poverty. But despite this, most parents around the world raise their children with loving care (Rohner, 1975).

Paradigm Shift from Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory) to Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection Theory (IPARTheory)

IPARTheory initially focused on parental acceptance and rejection. But in 1999, it went through a paradigm shift from parental to interpersonal acceptance and rejection. More specifically, the central postulate of what was then called PARTheory stated that perceived parental rejection is associated with the specific cluster of personality dispositions noted in personality subtheory. The reformulated postulate now states that perceived rejection by an attachment figure at any point in life tends to be associated with the same cluster of personality dispositions found among children and adults rejected by parents in childhood. Now the theory and associated research is focused on all aspects of interpersonal acceptance-rejection, including but not limited to parental acceptance-rejection, peer and sibling acceptance-rejection, teacher acceptance-rejection, grandparent acceptance-rejection, acceptance-rejection in intimate adult relationships, parent-in-law acceptance-rejection, and acceptance-rejection in other attachment relationships throughout the
lifespan. Despite this paradigm shift in theory and research-focus, the theory continued to be known as PARTheory until 2014 because that label had become so widely recognized internationally.

However, by 2014, overwhelming empirical evidence supported the theory’s basic postulate that children and adults in many classes of relationships other than parent-child relationships understand themselves to be cared about (i.e., accepted or rejected) in the same four ways that children do in parent-child relationships. Additionally, evidence supported the postulate that individuals in these non-parental relationships tend to respond to perceptions of acceptance-rejection in the same way that children do when they perceive themselves to be accepted or rejected by their parents. In view of these facts, the name of the theory was officially changed to IPARTheory on June 25, 2014 (Rohner, 2014) at the 5th International Congress on Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection.

The first empirical study to test IPARTheory’s reformulated postulate was conducted in 2001 (Khaleque, 2001; Rohner & Khaleque, 2008). That study examined the impact of perceived acceptance-rejection by intimate male partners on the psychological adjustment of 88 heterosexual adult females in the United States. This path-breaking study sparked great international interest, so much so that the study was conducted in more than 15 countries worldwide. One of the earliest of these studies (Parmar & Rohner, 2005) dealt with 79 young adults in India. There, the authors found that the less accepting both men and women perceived their intimate partners to be, the worse was their psychological adjustment. Simple correlations also showed the expected positive correlation between adults’ psychological adjustment and remembered maternal and paternal acceptance in the childhood of the adults. However, results of multiple regression analysis showed that partner acceptance was the strongest single predictor of men’s psychological adjustment, though this relation was partially mediated by remembered paternal (but not maternal) acceptance in childhood. For women, on the other hand, both partner acceptance and paternal (but not maternal) acceptance were approximately coequal as predictors of psychological adjustment.

More recently, similar findings were reported in eight other international studies including in: Colombia and Puerto Rico (Ripoll-Núñez & Alvarez, 2008); Finland (Khaleque, Rohner & Laukala, 2008); India (Parmar & Rohner, 2008); Japan (Rohner, Uddin, Shamsunaher, & Khaleque, 2008); Korea (Chyung & Lee, 2008); Kuwait (Parmar, Ibrahim, & Rohner, 2008); Turkey (Varan, Rohner, & Eryuksel, 2008), and the United States (Rohner, Melendez, & Kaimier-Rickaby, 2008). Finally, a 2010 meta-analysis of 17 studies (discussed later) showed that adults’ perceptions of their intimate partners’ acceptance tended in all studies to correlate strongly with the psychological adjustment of both men and women (Rohner & Khaleque, 2010). Collectively, these studies suggest the possibility of a universal relationship between adults’ mental health status and their perceptions of acceptance-rejection by adult intimate partners as well as by parents in childhood.

The second major issue to be studied following the reformulation of IPARTheory in 1999 dealt with the relative contribution of perceived teacher versus parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance and behavioral control to the psychological adjustment, school conduct, and academic achievement of school-going youths (boys and girls) within six
nations cross-culturally (Rohner, 2010). These nations included Bangladesh, Estonia, India, Kuwait, the Mississippi Delta region of the United States, and Turkey. Results of analyses exposed enormous gender and sociocultural variability in patterns of predictors assessed with each of the three outcome variables studied. As expected from IPARTheory, however, predictors of variations in youth’s psychological adjustment were much more stable. More specifically, both perceived teacher acceptance and parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance were significantly correlated with the adjustment of both boys and girls in all nations where this relationship was studied. Results of multiple regression analyses, however, showed that perceived teacher acceptance mediated to a large degree the relationship between perceived parental acceptance and youth’s psychological adjustment in Bangladesh and India. On the other hand, these analyses showed that only perceived parental acceptance made independent or unique contributions to student’s psychological adjustment in Kuwait and Estonia.

Methods in IPARTheory Research

IPARTheory’s six-decade program of research is guided methodologically by conceptual models called *anthroponomy* and the *universalist approach*, respectively (Rohner, 1986, 2005a; Rohner & Rohner, 1980). Anthroponomy is an approach to the human sciences characterized by a search for *universals*, that is, for worldwide principles of behavior that can be shown empirically to generalize across our species (Homo sapiens) under specified conditions whenever they occur. Although many propositions advanced by Western social scientists are assumed to apply to all humans, verification of such claims is complex and involves attention to the role of culture, language, migration, history, and other such factors. It also requires attention to the strengths and weaknesses of individual measurement procedures (e.g., self-report questionnaires) and general paradigms of research (e.g., the holocultural method) (Cournoyer, 2000; Cournoyer & Malcolm, 2004; Rohner, 1986).

In IPARTheory, these issues are addressed in the universalist approach, a multi-methodology and multi-procedure research strategy that searches for the convergence of results across an array of discrete measurement modalities and paradigms of research in a broad range of sociocultural and ethnic settings worldwide. More specifically, five discrete methods or types of studies have been used to test core aspects of the theory. These methods can be discussed in two clusters, as follows.

Quantitative Psychological Studies

The first cluster consists of two types of studies. The first involves *quantitative psychological studies* using techniques such as interviews, behavior observations, and self-report questionnaires, most often the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) (Rohner, 2005b), the Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire (PARQ/Control) (Rohner, 2005c), and the Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) (Rohner & Khaleque, 2005b). Along with many other self-report questionnaires (see Box 1),
these measures were developed to help researchers and practitioners study issues of interpersonal acceptance-rejection. Extensive information about the reliability and validity of many of these measures and others for international use and among American ethnic groups is already available in the Handbook for the Study of Parental Acceptance and Rejection (Rohner & Khaleque, 2005a) and elsewhere (e.g., Gomez & Rohner, 2011, Martorell & Carrasco, 2014; Senese, Bacchini, Miranda, Aurino, & Rohner, in press). References to over 4,400 quantitative psychological studies using these and related measures may be found in Rohner (2016c). There, interested students and researchers may do keyword searches to locate articles and books dealing with specific topics of special interest to them.

Among these many articles are more than 120 studies throughout the Arab world alone (Ahmed, Rohner, Khaleque, & Gielen, 2016). These and other studies support IPARTheory’s expectation that perceived parental rejection in childhood and rejection by attachment figures in adulthood tend to be associated with a host of psychological, behavioral, physical-health, and other problems, including externalizing and internalizing behaviors, loneliness, various forms of psychopathology including personality disorders, risky sexual and other behaviors, suicide and suicidal ideation, among many others.

Perceived parental acceptance in childhood and acceptance by attachment figures in adulthood, on the other hand, has been found in these studies to be associated with many psychological, behavioral, emotional, and other benefits, including altruism, positive life satisfaction, psychological hardiness, positive scholastic achievement, feelings of emotional security, and social responsibility. Additionally, remembrances of parental acceptance in childhood have been shown to be an overall buffer in adulthood against the development of biomarkers indicating a proneness for many negative physical-health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease (Carroll et al., 2013).

Meta-analyses, the second type of study in the quantitative psychological-studies category, summarize and synthesize results of a collection of these discrete psychological studies. In all, 11 such meta-analyses testing central aspects of IPARTheory have been completed. They are based on 551 quantitative reports representing an aggregated sample of 125,437 respondents in 31 countries on every continent except the Antarctic.

Collectively, these meta-analyses confirm IPARTheory’s central postulate that both maternal and paternal acceptance pan-culturally predict the psychological adjustment of both boys and girls. Additionally, the meta-analyses show that all seven of the personality dispositions featured prominently in IPARTheory’s personality subtheory are pan-culturally associated with children’s perceptions of parental acceptance. It is worth noting, too, that children’s perception of parental warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, and indifference/neglect – along with overall perceived acceptance – each pan-culturally predicts significant variations in children’s overall psychological adjustment as well as the seven personality dispositions measured on the PAQ.

It is not only variations in parents’ love that pan-culturally predict children’s adjustment and behavior, but so too do other significant people in children’s lives. For example, as noted in the 10th meta-analysis (Ali, Khaleque, & Rohner, 2015) children’s perceptions of their teachers’ acceptance tend to predict pan-culturally children’s overall psychological
adjustment as well as children’s – especially boys’ – conduct in school.

Regarding adults, the meta-analyses show that both men’s and women’s psychological adjustment are panculturally associated with their remembrances of both maternal and paternal acceptance in childhood. Additionally, adults’ remembrances of maternal acceptance in childhood predict all seven of the personality dispositions among

---

**Box 1**

**Measures Used in IPART Theory Research**

1. Best Friend Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (BFARQ)
2. Early Childhood Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (ECARQ)
3. Early Childhood Best Friend Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Early Childhood BFARQ)
4. Gender Inequality Scale (GIS)
5. Grandparent Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (GARQ)
6. In-Law Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (ILARQ)
7. In-Law Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire (ILAR/CQ)
8. Intimate Adult Relationship Questionnaire (IARQ)
9. Intimate Partner Attachment Questionnaire (IPAQ)
10. Intimate Partner Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire (IPAR/CQ)
11. Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Loneliness Scale (IPARLS)
12. Interpersonal Relationship Anxiety Questionnaire (IRAQ)
13. Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ)
14. Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire (PARQ/Control)
15. Parental Control Scale (PCS)
16. Parental Power-Prestige Questionnaire (3PQ)
17. Parent’s Evaluation of Child’s Conduct (PECC)
18. Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ)
19. Physical Punishment Questionnaire (PPQ)
20. Teacher Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (TARQ)
21. Teacher’s Evaluation of Student’s Conduct (TESC)

**Note:**
All self-report questionnaires are available from [www.rohnerresearchpublications.com](http://www.rohnerresearchpublications.com). Others are currently under development, and will become available online after their reliability and validity have been assessed.
both men and women. Adults’ remembrances of *paternal* acceptance, however, do not appear to correlate as expected with dependence. Beyond this, it is important to note that both men’s and women’s psychological adjustment tends to be panceulturally associated with their perceptions of their intimate partners’ acceptance in the same way that adults’ adjustment is associated with remembrances of parental acceptance-rejection in childhood.

Finally, we should observe that men’s remembrances of their *mothers*’ acceptance in childhood tend to be associated to a significantly greater extent with the adult *sons*’ psychological adjustment than do adult daughters’ remembrances of maternal acceptance in childhood. Adult daughters’ adjustment, however, tends to be influenced by remembrances of *paternal* acceptance in childhood to a greater degree than do adult sons’ remembrances of paternal acceptance. Almost all of these conclusions are based on data using the PARQ and the PAQ. One of the meta-analyses (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002b) shows that these measures are reliable assessment devices to use in international and cross-cultural comparative research.

**Ethnographic Research**

The second cluster of distinctive methods used in IPARTheory consists of three types of studies based on *ethnographic research*. The first of these is the *ethnographic case study* such as the one done by Rohner and Chaki-Sircar (1988) among women and children in a Bengali village. Ethnographic case studies employ long-term (e.g., six months to several years) participant observation procedures within a specific culturally organized community, along with structured and unstructured observations, interviews, and other such procedures. Such ethnographic studies produce a context-rich account of the way of life of a people. A second method within this cluster is the *controlled comparison or concomitant variation study* (Naroll, 1968; Pelto & Pelto, 1978; Rohner, 1977). In these studies, investigators usually locate two or more culture-bearing populations in which one of two conditions is true: (1) Relevant variables in the sampled populations vary, but other sociocultural factors remain constant, or (2) relevant variables in the sample population remain constant while other sociocultural factors are free to vary. Rohner’s (1960) comparative study of parental rejection in three Pacific societies (i.e., a Maori community of New Zealand, a traditional highland community of Bali, and the Alorese of Indonesia) illustrates the second type of study in this cluster.

Finally, the *holocultural method* (traditionally called the cross-cultural survey method) is the third approach within this cluster (Naroll, Michik, & Naroll, 1976, 1980; Whiting & Child, 1953). This method is a research design for statistically measuring the relation between two or more theoretically defined and operationalized variables in a random, stratified sample of the world’s adequately described sociocultural systems. The sources of data are ethnographic reports rather than direct observations, self-report questionnaires, interviews, or other such procedures (Rohner et al., 1978). Rohner’s (1975) study of parental acceptance-rejection in 101 well-described non-industrial societies distributed widely throughout the major geographic regions and culture areas of the world illustrates this type of study.
Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Research Modality

Each of these five types of studies contains unique strengths and weaknesses. There are several strengths of the psychological-study cluster, for example – including valid, reliable, and precise descriptions of phenomena. Estimates of both central tendency and variability in data generated in this cluster of methods allow sensitive and powerful statistical procedures to be employed to tease out subtle effects. A typical weakness of these studies, however, is the fact that rich contextual data is usually missing. Special strengths of the methods in the ethnographic research cluster are validity and groundedness. That is, ethnographic studies produce accounts that are rich in cultural detail and context. Derived as they are from ethnography, holocultural studies are also grounded, but they have an important additional strength in that they allow for truly pancultural sampling that takes into account the full range of known sociocultural variation throughout the world, especially of non-industrial societies. A weakness of these methods, however, is the fact that measures coded from ethnography are sometimes imprecise, and therefore may be low in reliability.

Further Evidence Supporting the Main Features of IPARTheory

Overwhelmingly, the most highly developed portion of IPARTheory is its personality subtheory. Evidence bearing on that subtheory comes from all five types of studies described above. Because of their robustness and simplicity, however, hundreds of researchers internationally have chosen to use the PARQ, PARQ/Control, and the PAQ – and associated IPARTheory measures – with hundreds of thousands of children and adults in many ethnic groups and societies on every continent of the world except for Antarctica. More evidence has been compiled from these studies than from studies using any other set of measures. Accordingly, results of these studies are given greatest attention here.

Virtually every competent study that has used these measures – regardless of racial, cultural, linguistic, geographic, economic, and other such variations – has reached the same conclusion. Specifically, the experience of interpersonal (especially parental) acceptance or rejection tends to be associated transculturally with the form of psychological adjustment (or maladjustment) postulated in personality subtheory. The first meta-analysis described earlier, for example, showed that 3,433 additional studies – all with nonsignificant results – would be required to disconfirm the conclusion that perceived acceptance-rejection is panculturally associated with children’s psychological adjustment; Nine hundred forty-one such studies would be required to disconfirm this conclusion among adults (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002a). All effect sizes reported in the meta-analysis were statistically significant. Additionally, results showed no significant heterogeneity in effect sizes in different samples cross-culturally or within American ethnic groups.

That meta-analysis also showed that regardless of culture, ethnicity, or geographic location, approximately 26% of the variability in children’s psychological adjustment and 21% of the variability in adults’ adjustment is accounted for by perceived parental (paternal as well as maternal) acceptance-rejection. These results support IPARTheory’s expectation that
the magnitude of the relation between perceived acceptance-rejection and psychological adjustment is likely to be stronger in childhood – while children are still under the direct influences of parents – than in adulthood (Rohner, 1986, 1999). Obviously, a substantial amount of variance in children's and adults' adjustment remains to be accounted for by other factors. No doubt a variety of cultural, behavioral, genetic, neurobiological, and other such factors are implicated in this variance (Reiss, 1997; Saudino, 1997; South & Jarnecke, 2015).

As I said above, three other classes of data also support the major postulates of IPARTheory's personality subtheory. These are cross-cultural survey (holocultural) studies, ethnographic case studies, and controlled comparison (concomitant variation) studies. Regarding the first, results of the major holocultural study (Rohner, 1975) of 101 well-described non-industrial societies mentioned earlier confirmed the conclusion that parental acceptance-rejection is associated panculturally with the psychological (mal)adjustment of children and adults. Additionally, the controlled comparison of three sociocultural groups in the Pacific mentioned earlier (Rohner, 1960) also supports this conclusion, as did an 18-month ethnographic and quantitative psychological community study in West Bengal, India (Rohner & Chaki-Sircar, 1988). Moreover, a six-month ethnographic and quantitative psychological case study of 349 nine- through 16-year-old youths in St. Kitts, West Indies (Rohner, 1987) along with a six-month ethnographic and quantitative psychological case study of 281 nine- through 18-year-old youths and their parents in a poor, biracial (African American and European American) community in southeast Georgia, USA (Rohner, Bourque, & Elordi, 1996; Veneziano & Rohner, 1998) also confirm the conclusion that perceived parental acceptance-rejection is associated with youth's psychological adjustment.

All this evidence about the universal expressions of acceptance-rejection along with evidence about the worldwide psychological effects of perceived acceptance-rejection led Rohner (2004) to formulate the concept of a relational diagnosis called the acceptance-rejection syndrome. The acceptance-rejection syndrome consists of two complementary sets of factors. First, nearly 500 studies in 2004 showed that children and adults everywhere tend to organize their perceptions of interpersonal acceptance-rejection around the same four classes of behavior, including warmth/affection – or its opposite, coldness/lack of affection – hostility/aggression, indifference/ neglect, and undifferentiated rejection. Second, as noted earlier, cross-cultural and meta-analytic evidence supports the conclusion that children and adults who experience their relationship with parents and other attachment figures as being rejecting tend universally to self-report the specific form of psychological maladjustment specified in personality subtheory. Together these two classes of behavior comprise a syndrome, that is, a pattern or constellation of co-occurring behaviors, traits, and dispositions. Any single psychological disposition (e.g., anger, hostility, or aggression) may be found in other conditions; it is the full configuration of dispositions that compose the syndrome. Collectively, all this evidence has led IPARTheory to postulate a deep structure of the human affectional system – i.e., a biocultural coevolutionary foundation of the human affectional system.
In addition to issues of overall psychological adjustment described in personality subtheory and in the acceptance-rejection syndrome, evidence also strongly implicates at many other mental health-related issues as likely universal correlates of perceived parental rejection. These include (1) depression and depressed affect, (2) behavior problems, including conduct disorders, externalizing behaviors, and delinquency, (3) substance (drug and alcohol) abuse (Rohner & Britner, 2002), (4) rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Ibrahim et al., 2015), (5) fear of intimacy (Rohner, 2016a), and loneliness (Rohner, 2016b), among many others. Some of these issues appear to be direct effects of perceived interpersonal acceptance-rejection, and some appear to be more indirect effects mediated by preexisting problems with psychological maladjustment of the type described in personality subtheory.

The Importance of Father Love

Substantial evidence in many of the foregoing classes of study suggests that father love (acceptance-rejection) is often as strongly implicated as mother love in the development of behavioral and psychological problems as well as in the development of offspring’s sense of health and well-being (Rohner, 1998; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Veneziano, 2000, 2003). Studies supporting this conclusion tend to deal with the following issues among children, adolescents, and adults: (1) personality and psychological adjustment problems (Ahmed, Rohner, & Carrasco, 2012; Amato, 1994; Dominy, Johnson, & Koch, 2000; Khaleque & Rohner, 2011; Komarovsky, 1976; Stagner, 1938); (2) mental illness (Akun, 2016; Barrera Jr. & Garrison-Jones, 1992; Lefkowitz & Tesiny, 1984); (3) psychological health and well-being (Amato, 1994); (4) conduct disorder (Eron, Banta, Walder, & Laulicht, 1961; Putnick et al., 2014); (5) substance abuse (Brook & Brook, 1988; Emmelkamp & Heeres, 1988); (6) delinquency (Andry, 1962); (7) prosocial behavior (Putnick et al., 2014); (8) children’s social competence (Putnick et al., 2014); and (9) school performance (Putnick et al., 2014).

Some of these studies, especially those carried out in the 1990s and later, use multiple regression, structural equation modeling, and other powerful statistical procedures that allow investigators to estimate the relative contribution of each parent’s behavior to youth outcomes. Many of these studies conclude that father/paternal love explains a unique and independent portion of the variance in specific child outcomes over and above the portion explained by maternal love (Ahmed et al., 2012; Carrasco & Rohner, 2013; Rohner & Carrasco, 2014; Veneziano, 2003). Other studies conclude that paternal love is sometimes the sole significant predictor of specific child outcomes (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Studies in this latter category tend to address one or more of the following issues: (1) personality and psychological adjustment problems (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992; Bartle, Anderson, & Sabatelli, 1989; Dickie et al., 1997); (2) conduct and delinquency problems (Kroupa, 1988); and (3) substance abuse (Brook, Whiteman, & Gordon, 1981; Eldred, Brown, & Mahabir, 1974).
Many newer studies have begun to report differential effects of perceived paternal versus maternal acceptance on the psychological adjustment of daughters versus sons. For example, Sultana and Khaleque (2016) found that whereas both maternal and paternal acceptance made significant and independent contributions to the adjustment of adult sons, only remembrances of paternal acceptance in childhood made a significant and independent contribution to adult daughters' adjustment.

Substantial evidence is also beginning to show that genetic influences on mental health differ as a function of environmental risk factors such as rejecting parent-child relationships. For example, South and Jarnecke (2015) reported from a nationwide study of twins that adults' remembrances of their fathers' discipline (punishment and behavioral control) and affection moderated genetic and environmental influences on internalizing symptoms of the adults. More specifically, heritability was greatest at the highest levels of paternal affection and discipline. Adults' remembrances of their fathers' affection in childhood also moderated etiological influences on adults' alcohol-use problems. In this context, heritability was greatest at the lowest levels of paternal affection. No moderating effects were found for mothers.

From all this evidence, it is now clear that paternal acceptance is sometimes a better predictor of offspring's psychological and behavioral adjustment than is maternal acceptance. But until recently, it was not clear why this is true. Conclusions reached in a recent study of offspring's (children’s and young adults') perceptions of each parent's (mothers’ versus fathers’) prestige and interpersonal power within the family (Rohner & Carrasco, 2014) helps to explain why the love-related behavior of one parent (e.g., fathers) sometimes has a significantly greater impact on offspring’s psychological adjustment than does the love-related behavior of the other parent (e.g., mothers). Results of research within the 11 nations in that study revealed that the love-related behaviors of both parents tended in most countries to make unique (i.e., independent) contributions to the psychological adjustment of both sons and daughters. This fact notwithstanding, results of analyses also showed that in many instances, offspring's perceptions of one parent’s (e.g., fathers’) interpersonal power and/or prestige within the family tended to moderate the relation between perceived parental (maternal and/or paternal) acceptance and offspring’s psychological adjustment. The study of 785 college students in Portugal illustrates this phenomenon (Machado, Machado, Neves, & Fávero, 2014). There, the authors found that both men’s and women’s remembrances of maternal and paternal acceptance in childhood made independent contributions to the psychological adjustment of the young adults. But the magnitude of the relation between perceived paternal acceptance and daughters’ adjustment intensified significantly the more interpersonal power fathers were perceived to have relative to mothers. The magnitude of the relation between perceived paternal acceptance and sons’ adjustment, however, intensified the more prestige fathers were perceived to have relative to mothers.
Implications of IPARTheory Evidence

The search in IPARTheory for panculturally valid principles of behavior is based on the assumption that with a scientific understanding of the worldwide consequences, antecedents, and other correlates of interpersonal acceptance-rejection comes the possibility of formulating culture-fair and practicable programs, policies, and interventions affecting families and children everywhere. This research contributes to the goal of culture-fair programs and policies in that it asks researchers and practitioners to look beyond differences in cultural beliefs, language, and custom when making assessments about the adequacy of parenting, and to focus instead on whether individuals’ fundamental needs (e.g., the need for emotional support, nurturance, affection, and the like from significant others, especially attachment figures) are being met. Social policies and programs of prevention, intervention, and treatment based on idiosyncratic beliefs at a particular point in history are likely to prove unworkable for some, and probably even prejudicial for many minority populations. Policies and programs based on demonstrable principles of human behavior, however, stand a good chance of working as nations and people change. The values and customs of a particular sociocultural group, therefore, are not — according to IPARTheory — the most important criteria to be used to evaluate the adequacy of parenting and other interpersonal relationships in that group. Rather, the most important question becomes how accepted and cared-about do children and others perceive themselves to be. Insofar as children and adults perceive their parents and other attachment figures to be accepting, then — according to both theory and evidence presented here — it probably makes little difference for children's developmental outcome how external reporters view parents' behavior.

It is thoughts such as these that have motivated a great part of IPARTheory research. Now, after almost six decades of research with tens of thousands of children, adolescents, and adults in over 60 nations worldwide, and with members of every major American ethnic group, at least two conclusions seem warranted. First, the same classes of behaviors appear panculturally to convey the symbolic message that "my parent..." (or other attachment figure) "loves me" (or does not love me, care about me, want me — i.e., rejects me). These classes of behavior include the perception of warmth/affection (or its opposite, coldness and lack of affection), hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, and undifferentiated rejection, as defined at the beginning of this chapter. Additional support for this conclusion is found in the work of McNeely and Barber (2010) who asked 4,300 adolescents in 12 nations (from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America) to respond to the following question: “Please list the specific things that your parents/caregivers do that make you feel like they love you?” Responses to this query confirmed that adolescents themselves in all cultures studied perceived aspects of emotional support (e.g., expressing affection and encouragement, and the absence of parental hostility or parental aggression) as being expressions of parental love or acceptance.

The second major conclusion is that differences in culture, ethnicity, social class, race, gender, and other such factors do not exert enough influence to override the apparently
universal, biologically-based tendency for children and adults everywhere to respond in essentially the same way when they perceive themselves to be accepted or rejected by people most important to them, especially attachment figures. Having said this, however, we must also stress that the association between perceived acceptance-rejection and psychological and behavioral outcomes for youths and adults is far from perfect. Indeed, approximately 74% or more of the variance in youths’ and adults’ psychological and behavioral adjustment is yet to be accounted for, probably by behavior genetic, neurobiological, sociocultural, and other such factors. Nonetheless, results of research completed so far are so robust and consistent everywhere in the world that IR believe professionals should feel confident developing policies and practice-applications based on the central tenets of IPARTheory – especially IPARTheory’s personality subtheory – despite the fact that much is yet to be learned about the effects, causes, and other correlates of perceived interpersonal acceptance and rejection.

References


Manuscript submitted for publication.


Eisenberger, N. I. (2012b). The pain of social disconnection: Examining the shared neural
underpinnings of physical and social pain. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 13*(6), 421-434. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/nrn3231](http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/nrn3231)


contemporaneous analyses. *Developmental Psychology, 20*(5), 776-785. [Link](http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.20.5.776)


https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/orpc/vol6/iss1/4
parental acceptance in childhood, and psychological adjustment among married adults in India. *Cross Cultural Research, 42*(1), 57-66. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1069397107309763](http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1069397107309763)


Sultana, S., & Khaleque, A. (2016). Differential effects of perceived maternal and paternal acceptance on male and female adult offspring’s psychological adjustment. *Gender Issues, 33*(1), 42-54. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12147-015-9147-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12147-015-9147-0)


van der Kolk, B. A. (2010). *Developmental trauma disorder: Towards a relational diagnosis for children with complex trauma histories*. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Psychiatry, Boston University, Boston, MA.


https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/orpc/vol6/iss1/4
http://dx.doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0b013e31826e25bd

### Audio/Visual Resources for IPARTheory


### Discussion Questions

1. How do expressions of interpersonal acceptance and rejection (including parental acceptance-rejection) differ cross-culturally and in different ethnic groups? For example, think about different ways that people express warmth and affection cross-culturally.

2. With reference to this chapter, explain how parents give children a sense of who they are, and why that is important.

3. How would you summarize information about the importance of interpersonal acceptance-rejection in an accessible way to an audience of non-psychologists?

4. What kind of relationship (in terms of acceptance-rejection) did you have with your own parents or primary caregivers when you were young? What bearing do you think that had on who you are today?

5. What practical (e.g., prevention, intervention, or treatment) implications do you see in the fact that perceived interpersonal acceptance-rejection has consistent effects on humans in all societies and ethnic groups of the world?

6. Why is anthroponomy and the universalist approach—or something like it—needed to confirm the existence of universals in human behavior?

7. Why does perceived rejection by one’s intimate adult partner (or by other attachment figures) generally have the same psychological effects as perceived parental rejection in childhood? In other words, what psychological, neurobiological, biochemical, or other processes seem to be at work here?
8. Select any widely known theory of personality (e.g., psychodynamic, social learning, humanistic, existential), and explain how it would deal with the phenomenon of parental rejection. How is that like and different from the way in which IPARTheory deals with it?

About the Author

Ronald P. Rohner is Professor Emeritus of Human Development and Family Studies and Anthropology at the University of Connecticut Storrs, USA. He is also the founding President and Executive Director of the International Society for Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection. Moreover, he is author of interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory, along with most of the measures used to empirically test the theory. As a result of his lifetime commitment to cross-cultural research, he received the American Psychological Association Award for Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Psychology. He also received the Outstanding International Psychologist Award from the USA for 2008.