



## THE EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED PARENTAL ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION ON INFIDELITY TENDENCY

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### Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effects of parental acceptance-rejection on infidelity and the role of different types of perceived parental rejection and gender on these variables. The sample group comprised of men and women between the ages of 18 and 37, who had been in a romantic relationship for at least one year at the time of the study. The group consisted of 163 participants from Near East University. The Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire and Infidelity Tendency Questionnaire were administered to the sample group. The collected data was then entered into the SPSS and was analysed using t-test, one-way ANOVA and regression analysis. The mean infidelity score for men was significantly higher than that for women. As the length of relationship increased, the infidelity tendency scores decreased. The results showed that perceived aggression from the mother/father and control from the mother were predictors of infidelity tendency.

**Keywords:** parental acceptance, rejection, aggression, infidelity tendency

### INTRODUCTION

Parents play a significant role in the lives of their offspring. Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory) to explain and interpret the reasons behind parental acceptance and rejection, the impact on interpersonal relationships as they are perceived in childhood, the possible effects of this perception on children's and adults' behavioural, cognitive and emotional development, as well as on the lifespan of their remaining relationships and socialisation (Rohner, Khaleque & Cournoyer (2007). In this theory, by adopting a universal perspective, Rohner, Khaleque & Cournoyer (2011) aimed to identify the inter-culturally generalizable principles of human behaviour. PARTheory also aims to explain the warmth dimension of parenting (Rohner, 2005), where it defines warmth as the quality of the loving relationship between child and parent (Khaleque, 2013). This dimension is universally valid because every person experiences some form of love with his or her caregivers (Rohner, 2005). The most important hypothesis of this theory is that accepting or rejecting parental behaviour may inter-culturally be different. In addition, perceived rejection from parents may cause similar results in the personality development of children (Rohner, Khaleque & Cournoyer, 2007).

As a result of the studies that compared different cultures, it was found that parents express their rejection in four different ways:

- a. Cold and unaffectionate: lack of love and affection, acting cold
- b. Hostile and aggressive: feeling hostile and acting aggressive
- c. Indifferent and neglecting: acting indifferent and neglecting
- d. Undifferentiated rejection: belief of the child that his/her parents do not love him/her despite the parents not being cold, neglecting or aggressive (Rohner, 2005).

Acceptance-rejection syndrome is characterised by social, emotional and cognitive tendencies (Rohner, 2004). In various studies, it was shown that perceived parental acceptance-rejection has a critical role in personality development (Hussain & Munaf, 2012). According to the theory, children and adults who experienced rejection feel anxious and insecure. Furthermore, rejected individuals tend



to be less dependent on other people (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). This perceived rejection results in certain personality traits such as low self-respect, negative self-efficacy, a negative worldview, and a perception of the world as a dangerous or untrustworthy place (Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner & Khaleque, 2010)

Both PARTheory and attachment theory claim that parenting styles, which depend on parental love, affect relevant cognitive representations and also explain how expectations of parental sensitivity and trust meet emotional needs (Bowlby, 1969; Rohner, Khalaque & Cornoyer, 2010). Both theories suggest that these representations are life long and that they are generalised to other relationships and behaviour associated with intimate relationships (Rohner, 2008). The mother is the first object of love for a baby. The quality of attachment towards this object of love is very important in terms of identifying the emotions and attitudes towards other significant people in later life. Eryavuz (2006) found that there is a positive correlation between perceived parental rejection and perceived rejection by the partner.

Perris and Anderson (2000) argue that there is a significantly positive correlation between the experience of emotional warmth and indicators of secure attachment while there is a significantly negative correlation between experiences of dysfunctional parenting and the same indicators.

People who feel rejected by significant others often construct mental images of personal relationships as being unpredictable, untrustworthy and hurtful (Ahmed, Rohner, Khaleque & Gielen, 2010). Individuals with avoidant attachment tend to be interested in short-term relationships, casual sexual experiences and permissive sexual beliefs. In addition, compared to individuals with other attachment styles, these types of individuals are reported to have early sexual experiences as well as open or play-like love affairs (Gentzler & Kerns, 2004). Amidon's (2007) study showed that there is a significantly positive relationship between anxious attachment style and infidelity. Here, infidelity is defined as a breach of emotional or physical boundaries with another individual outside the existing relationship (Drigotas & arta, 2001; Hall & Fincham, 2006). Another study also reports that compared to individuals with other attachment styles, individuals with anxious attachment have higher scores for infidelity (Bogart & Sadava, 2002). It is argued that maternal rejection is an indicator for both avoidance and anxious attachment styles (Salahur, 2010). Boğda and Şendil's (2012) study showed that compared to individuals with secure attachment, individuals with insecure attachment received higher scores in tendency for infidelity and that males appear to have higher tendency for infidelity scores.

Quality of marriage is very important in studies of infidelity and/or tendency for infidelity. This quality is found to affect both the level of parents' emotional and physical wellbeing and their stagnation (Weil, 1975; Polat, 2006). It is known that 60-65% of couples who choose to attend marriage counselling do so due to infidelity (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001). Low levels of satisfaction with the marriage, low quality of marriage and conflicts between partners are some factors that were identified to be related to infidelity (Polat, 2006). In a meta-analysis, it was found that 34% of men and 24% of women have sexual activities outside their marriages (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007). However, the rate of infidelity in close relationships is higher (Hall & Fincham, 2009). Treas and Giesen (2000), argue that it would be conservative assumptions to say that 15-45% of Americans have relationships outside their marriages (Amato & Previti, 2003).

In the literature, it is argued that men and women are socialised differently in relation to sexuality. While men are encouraged to have more casual sexual relationships, women are guided towards love-focused, monogamous relationships (Oliver & Hyde, 2003). Studies show that men value the sexual component of a relationship more, whereas the emotional component is valued more by women (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2002).



Although there are many studies focusing on non-marital romantic and sexual relationships, there seems to be a lack of studies focusing on polygamous relationships of unmarried couples or couples that do not live together (Agostinelli, Seal, & Hannett, 1994; Treas & Giesen, 2000).

In Schmitt's (2004) study, where the relationship between personality traits and tendency for infidelity was investigated, infidelity was found to be related to both low levels of reconciliatory traits and low levels of conscience. Sexual restriction may increase risk of feelings of rejection and anger in the wake of jealousy (Peters, Eisenlohr-Moul, Pond & DeWall, 2014).

Although infidelity is related to self-perception and perception of others, there is a need to investigate its relationship with rejection. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship of perceived parental rejection and its types with the tendency for infidelity. In this respect, answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. Is there any difference between the participants' tendency for infidelity scores based on gender?
2. Is there any difference between the participants' tendency for infidelity scores based on the duration of their relationship?
3. Is perceived parental rejection and its types an indicator of tendency for infidelity scores?

## METHODS

### Participants:

The sample comprised men and women between the ages of 18 and 37 years, who had been in a romantic relationship for at least one year at the time of the study. The group consisted of 163 participants who were in a romantic relationship. Taking into consideration the ages of the students, they were split into two age groups of 18-24 and 25-37 respectively, with an average of 21,31 (S=3,6). Table 1 shows summary statistics of the socio-demographical characteristics of the participants. The consisted of 82 women (%50,3) and 81 men (%49,7). The results of the analysis show that %11 of students (n=18) had a low socio-economic status, %27,3 of students (n=45) had a middle socio-economic status and % 61,3 of students (n=100) had a high socio-economic status. Participants chosen by using random sampling method were recruited from Near East University.

### Measurements

#### General Information Form:

The general information form was created with the aim of collecting demographic questions pertaining to age, sex, economic statue and length of the relationship.

#### Infidelity Tendency Questionnaire (ITQ):

This inventory was designed by Polat (2006) with the aim of measuring married individuals' infidelity tendencies. In total, it constitutes 30 items, 18 of which measure positive infidelity tendencies and 12 of which relate to negative infidelity tendency behaviour. The negative items were scored reversely and a high score from the inventory indicated a high infidelity tendency. To ensure reliability, Cronbach alpha and split half reliability scores were evaluated and .95 was calculated for Cronbach alpha and .95 was found for two half reliability. This result displays the high internal consistency of the measure. For the present study, the Cronbach alpha reliability was found to be .92.



### **Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire Adult Form (Adult PARQ/Control):**

The scale was originally developed as PARQ by Rohner, Saavedra and Granum (1978) and later took on its final form of the 73 item PARQ/Control when the control scale was added. Parental Rejection; 1. Cold and emotionless, 2. Aggression, 3. Neglect, 4. Undifferentiated rejection is evaluated by PARQ and Control is evaluated by the 13-item Control Scale. The scale is evaluated as “Almost Never True”, “Rarely True”, “Sometimes True” and “Almost Always True”. High scores show a low level of perceived warmth and maximum rejection. PARQ was applied by Varan (2003). Cronbach Alpha internal consistency was changed to between .86 and .96 for the adult version by the both of mother and father form. Cronbach Alpha scores were found to be .80 for the mother form and .81 for the father form in the present study.

### **Statistical Analyses**

SPSS software version 17 was used to evaluate the data collected in this study by computer. T-test, one way ANOVA and multiple regressions was used to explore the relationship between rejection and rejection types for predicting infidelity tendencies.

### **RESULTS**

The mean infidelity scores (Table 2) of men ( $M=92,03$ ,  $SD=10,08$ ) is significantly higher,  $t(163) = -5,733$ , two-tailed  $p=.000$ ,  $p<.01$ , than that of women ( $M=82,64$ ,  $SD=10,80$ ).

The results of the analysis variance (Table 3) showed a significant difference between infidelity tendency scores and length of relationship,  $F(2,157) = 14,945$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $p<.01$ . Tukey's test results showed that the participants, whose length of relationship was less than one year ( $M=93,85$ ), had the highest scores for infidelity tendency. As the length of relationship increased, the scores for infidelity tendency decreased. The infidelity scores for participants whose length of relationship was between one and five years ( $M=87,56$ ), were higher than the scores for the participants whose length of relationship was between five and ten years ( $M=80,87$ ).

There were no significant differences found between age and family economic level in terms of infidelity tendency.

Perceived parental aggression (Table 4) from the mother and the father indicates a high and significant relationship with negligence, undifferentiated rejection, coldness and control scores,  $R=0.502$ ,  $R^2=0.25$ ,  $p<.01$ . These variables explain 25% of the total variance in tendency for infidelity.

According to the standardised regression coefficient, the relative order of importance for the indicating variables is: perceived maternal aggressiveness, perceived paternal aggressiveness and maternal control. When the t-test results for the significance of the correlation coefficient were examined, only maternal aggressiveness was found to be a significant and meaningful indicator of tendency for infidelity. Perceived parental neglect, rejection, undifferentiated rejection and perceived paternal control were not found to be significant in this respect.

### **DISCUSSION**

In this study, the impact of perceived parental rejection in childhood on individuals' tendency for infidelity in early adulthood was investigated. From the point of view of gender, men were found to have higher tendency for infidelity scores. Similarly, Oliver & Hyde (2003) studies show that men are encouraged to have casual sexual relationships while women are encouraged to have love-based sexual experiences.

A significant difference was found between tendency for infidelity scores and the duration of the participants' existing relationships. It was observed that the longer the relationship duration, the lower the tendency for infidelity scores. Studies carried out with unmarried couples are very limited in this



respect. In the current study, there was no significant difference between married and unmarried couples in their tendency for infidelity scores. There seems to be a consensus among researchers that low levels of satisfaction in marriage and conflict between partners are closely related (Polat, 2006). Studies focusing on the relationship between tendency for infidelity and parental experiences in childhood were reviewed. This review showed that some of these studies focused on infidelity and different styles of attachment. In the current study, the aim was to investigate the possible relationship between perceived parental acceptance and rejection and tendency for infidelity.

Both PARTheory and attachment theory indicate that cognitive representations develop based on whether the individual's need for sensitivity and security, which are expected to come from the parents, are met through the relationship established between the child and the parents (Bowlby, 1969). According to the PARTheory, rejected children and adults are generally anxious and insecure (Rohner, Khaleque & Cornoyer, 2010). Moreover, rejected individuals tend to be less dependent on others (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). Parental rejection plays an important role on personality development (Hussain & Munaf, 2012). It is argued in previous studies that there is a relationship between perceived rejection and certain personality traits, such as low self-perception, feelings of incompetence and a negative worldview (Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner & Khaleque, 2010).

When subcategories are examined individually, it can be observed that perceived maternal and paternal aggressions as well as perceived maternal control are indicators of tendency for infidelity in young adults. It is argued that rejected children who do not have a loving parental model, and who therefore do not feel loved, are unable to learn to love others. In his study, Schmitt (2004) found that aggressive personality traits are negatively correlated with tendency for infidelity. In the current study, it was also found that perceived maternal aggression is negatively correlated with tendency for infidelity. It has been argued in many previous studies that aggression is correlated with perceived aggressive attitudes of parents. It is also indicated that the failure to receive the expected love and support from the parents is related to both insecure attachment and projection of perceived rejection on others. In Salahur's (2010) study of the relationship between attachment styles and parental acceptance-rejection, it was claimed that perceived maternal rejection and perceived paternal neglect were indicators of both withdrawn and anxious attachment styles. Furthermore, in another study, participants who were insecurely attached scored higher in tendency for infidelity compared to those who were securely attached (Boğda & Şendil, 2012).

It was found that perceived maternal aggression is an indicator of the tendency for infidelity and that these variables are negatively correlated. Perceived maternal aggression is believed to be a cause of obsession with the mother in childhood. Moreover, this obsession may be projected on to the partner in adulthood. Therefore, our study demonstrates the importance of the relationship that children have with their mothers.

As with any research study, the current study has some limitations. This was a correlational study. It has been observed that the relationship quality and conflicts within the relationship are correlated with infidelity. However, these variables were not taken into account in the current study. Since these variables may affect the tendency for infidelity, it is recommended for further research to focus on these variables and investigate their relationship to the tendency for infidelity.

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**Table 1. The Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Students**

Variables	N	Percent	
Gender	Women	82	%50.3
	Men	81	%49.7
Socio-economic status	Low socioeconomic status	18	%11.0
	Middle socio-economic status	45	%27.3
	High socio-economic status	100	%61.3

**Table 2. The difference between women and men according to infidelity tendency scores**

Sex	N	M	SD	df	T	P
Women	82	82,64	10,80	161	-5,733	.000**
Men	81	92,03	10,08			

\*\*p<.01

**Table 3. The difference between length of relationship according to infidelity tendency scores**

Infidelity	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	3326,541	2	1663,271	14,945	.000**
Within Groups	17473,459	157	111,296		
Total	20800,000	159			

\*\*p<.01

**Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis for Indicators of Tendency for Infidelity**

Variable	B	Standard Error	B	t	p	Paired R	Partial r
(Constant)	88.793	7.515		11.816	.000		
Maternal Aggression	-0.774	0.236	-0.524	-3.284	.001**	-0.257	-0.230
Paternal Aggression	-0.310	0.139	-0.300	-2.229	.027*	-0.178	-0.156
Maternal Neglect	-0.278	0.250	-0.175	-1.113	.267	-0.090	-0.078
Paternal Neglect	0.230	0.202	0.189	1.135	.258	0.092	0.080
Undifferentiated Rejection (Mother)	0.198	0.363	0.073	0.545	.586	0.044	0.038
Undifferentiated Rejection (Father)	0.332	0.299	0.157	1.112	.268	0.090	0.078
Maternal Control	0.338	0.160	0.192	2.110	.036*	0.169	0.148
Paternal Control	0.174	0.153	0.102	1.136	.258	0.092	0.080
Coldness (Mother)	0.209	0.143	0.171	1.465	.145	0.118	0.103
Coldness (Father)	0.161	0.120	0.172	1.333	.184	0.108	0.094

R= 0.502

R<sup>2</sup>= 0.252

F(10,152)= 5.116

p= .000

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