

PARENTAL ACCEPTANCE-REJECTION IN THE CYPRIOT FAMILY. A SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON THE PART / PARQ

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Abstract. Cross-cultural evidence shows that all children experience more or less acceptance and rejection at the hands of the people most important to them, usually their parents. Research reported here is based on Rohner's Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PART) [6] of Socialization and conducted using the child version of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) in a sample of 220 Greek speaking Cypriot boys and girls ranging in age from 9-12 years. Our research aimed at (a) developing a profile of the dimension "parental warmth" (acceptance-rejection) as experienced by Greek Cypriot children, and (b) drawing cross-cultural comparisons between the Greek Cypriot children's assessment of parental attitudes and those of their peers in the USA. A two-sample t-test was used to compare the responses of our subjects on the four scales of the instrument regarding gender and nationality.

Keywords: Parental Acceptance-Rejection, Models of Parenting, Socialization.

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationships of children to parents and other family members can be thought of as a system or network of interacting parts. The family system exists in a set of larger systems - the neighborhood, the community, and the broader society [2]. All those systems have effects on children directly and indirectly, through parents' attitudes and child-rearing practices. A parent-child relationship develops over time as two individuals interact with each other. Children's behavior contributes to this interaction just as parents' attitudes and behavior do. The reciprocal influence of parental behavior and child temperament forms the basis for the very important principle of bidirectionality in development. This principle states that the parent-child relationship goes both ways: Parents influence children, and children influence parental behaviors. Another way to state this is to say that children's development is a product of the interaction between their own characteristics and those of the people who participate in their socialization process [4]. Just as the child's temperament affects the parent, the parent's individual personality characteristics affect responses to the child.

At this moment and time there are frequent debates on the consequences parental attitudes and behaviors have for the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional development of children. Research results worldwide point consistently to the existence of two-dimensional models describing important qualities of parenting:

E.g. Acceptance-rejection and restrictiveness-permissiveness.

Our research is based on the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PART). This is a theory of Socialization, developed by Ronald Rohner, which attempts to explain and predict major consequences of parental acceptance and rejection for behavioral, cognitive, and emotional development of children and for the personality

functioning of adults everywhere, regardless of differences in culture, language, physical type, or other possibly limiting conditions [6]. PART also attempts to predict major psychological, environmental and maintenance systems antecedents to parental acceptance-rejection. Parental acceptance-rejection theory and research are representative of an emerging field within the human sciences, a field called Anthroponomy, i.e. a science with the goal to search, discover and verify world-wide principles of human behavior.

Parental Acceptance-Rejection: Definition

An early model of the two dimensions of parental attitudes is that of Schaeffer [12].

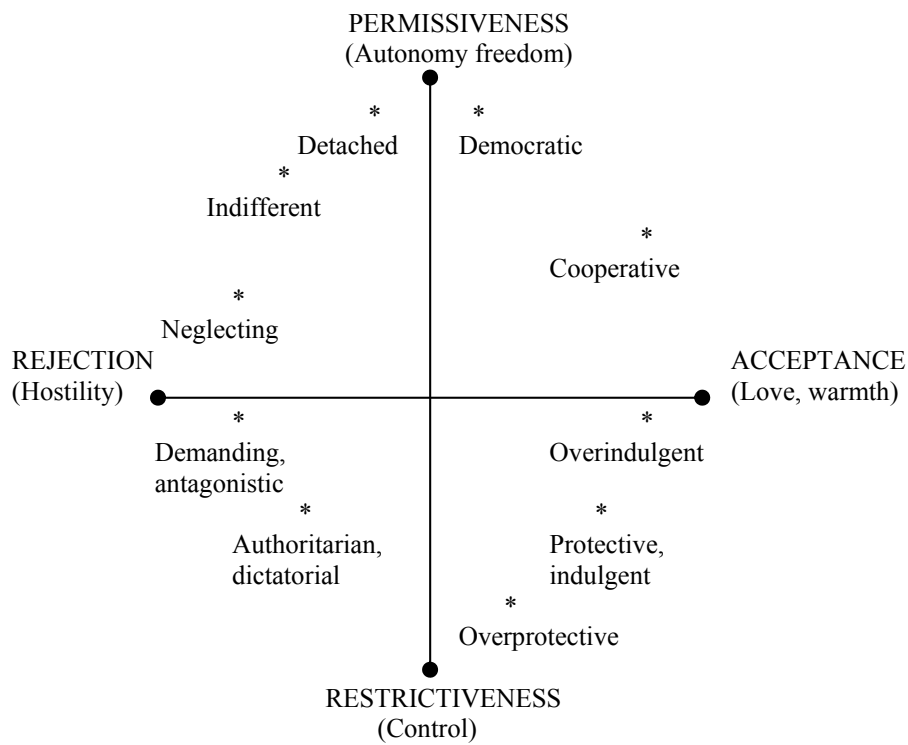


Fig. 1: Two-dimensional model: Schaeffer/Baumrind.

Figure 1 illustrates the type of child rearing that can be described by classifying parents' behavior on acceptance-rejection (the horizontal axis) and restrictiveness-permissiveness (the vertical axis). The labeled points in each quadrant of Fig.1 show how a parent might behave when showing different combinations of acceptance and restrictiveness. For example a parent who is rejecting and restrictive might be labeled as demanding and as antagonistic. A permissive, rejecting parent could be considered indifferent while a permissive, accepting parent might be characterized as democratic. The meanings of these rather abstract terms can best be garnered from a closer examination of the types of parent behavior and attitudes involved.

As the figure shows, conceptually, parental acceptance and rejection together form the warmth dimension of parenting. Parental warmth is construed as a bipolar dimension where rejection, or the absence of parental warmth and affection, stands at one pole of the scale in opposition to acceptance at the other.

Acceptance is an attitude toward children that may be manifested in different ways depending on the personality of the parents. Accepting parents perceive their children as having many positive qualities and they enjoy being with their children. Accepting parents are defined in PART as those who show their love or affection toward children physically and/or verbally. All are forms of behavior that jointly and individually are likely to induce a child to *feel* loved or accepted.

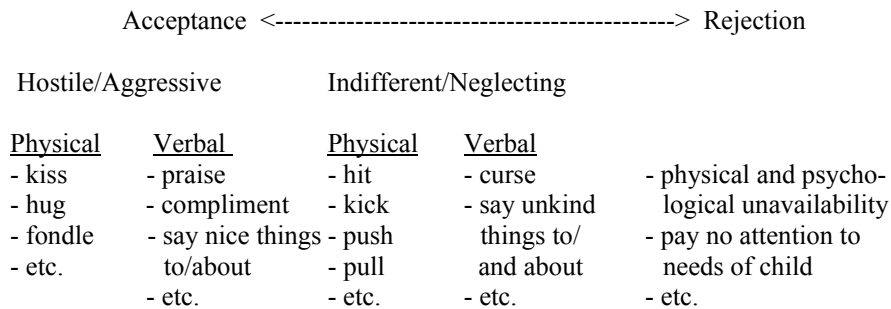


Fig. 2: Warmth dimension of parenting. Conceptual model of principal parenting concepts in Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory.

Rejecting parents are defined in PART as those who dislike, disapprove of, or resent their children. According to Rohner [7] rejection is manifested around the world in two principal ways, namely, in the form of parental hostility and aggression on the one hand, and in the form of parental indifference and neglect on the other. Hostility includes feelings of anger, resentment and enmity toward the child, whereas indifference refers to a lack of concern or interest in the child. Hostile parents are likely to be aggressive, either physically or verbally, and indifferent parents are likely to be physically or psychologically remote from their children or inaccessible to them (to ignore their children's bids for attention, help, comfort) and to be unresponsive to the children's needs. Rejection revealed as hostility/aggression and rejection revealed as indifference/neglect express a "damaged" or even an absence

of bond of parental attachment. Both of these forms of rejection, in their concrete manifestations, are likely to induce children to *feel* “unloved” or rejected.

Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory: Social-Emotional Outcomes

The first integrative summary of the worldwide antecedents and effects of acceptance-rejection drew heavily from holocultural research using a pancultural sample of 101 societies [5]. Results from this research demonstrated that rejected children throughout the world are significantly more hostile, aggressive or passive-aggressive than are accepted children. Moreover results showed that rejected children tend to evaluate themselves more negatively and to be more dependent than accepted children. Additionally the rejected child is apt to become resentful or angry with his/her parents, as well as fearful of more rejection producing emotional withdrawal from them. However behind this emotional detachment is often the wish to reestablish a warm, nurturing relationship with his/her parents.

Much of this process seems to be what Bowlby [1] called anxious attachment for younger children. Finally the rejected child - a child who is anxious, hostile, insecure, emotionally unstable and who devaluates his/her feelings of self-esteem and self-adequacy - is, according to PART, likely to generalize these feelings onto the nature of the world as being an unfriendly, hostile place in which to live (i.e. a negative world view). PART postulates that even though they may want to reach out to others, rejected children are often unable to establish fully satisfying social relations with their peers, and so they withdraw further into themselves.

Adults who were rejected as children are likely to have strong needs for affection, but they are often impaired in their ability to return it because many of them have become emotionally insulated to potentially close interpersonal relations. The rejection cycle is likely to be perpetuated as any of these rejected adults who become parents are expected by PART to reject their own children significantly more often than parents who felt accepted as children [10]. The effects of rejection are not limited simply to individual personality and behavioral disorders, but they reach into such abstract domains as the religious beliefs of a people, their art, music and other expressive behaviors [9].

In the present study our research goals are summarized as follows:

- (a) To develop a Greek version of the PARQ-Child (Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire) and to standardize it for Greek speaking populations. We will henceforth refer to it as Gr-PARQ-Child.
- (b) To use the above-named questionnaire in order to develop a profile of the dimension “parental warmth” (acceptance-rejection) experienced by Greek Cypriot children.
- (c) To draw some cross-cultural comparisons between the Greek Cypriot children’s assessment of parental attitudes and those of their peers in the US.

2. METHODOLOGY

Parental acceptance-rejection may be viewed from the following two perspectives:

- (I) As subjectively experienced by the child,

and
(II) as externally measured by an outside observer.

The Parental Acceptance-Rejection-Questionnaire (PARQ) is a self-report questionnaire designed to assess individuals' - both children's and adults' - perceptions of parental acceptance and rejection. The PARQ is characterized by its phenomenological orientation - that is, it asks children to interpret caregiver behavior through their own personal and cultural lenses.

The Child version of the instrument was validated in 1975 for use in the USA [11] but not yet for use in other sociocultural systems. Since that time, it has been used with thousands of children in hundreds of studies nationally and internationally. Indeed, it is now available in at least 22 languages worldwide.

As already mentioned, our initial research interest focused on providing a Greek version of the PARQ that did not exist up to now. We therefore set out to translate and validate the PARQ for Greek speaking populations, so that in the future this instrument could be used for further research on issues of Socialization. The Greek version of the PARQ used in this study was directly translated from its English version. The resulting initial questionnaire was piloted (February 2001) on small samples of Greek-speaking children to detect any problems with the instrument. Troublesome questions were altered.

The PARQ-Child is a 60-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure children's perceptions of parental acceptance and rejection. It consists of four scales: perceived warmth/affection (20 items), perceived hostility/aggression (15 items), perceived indifference/neglect (15 items), and perceived undifferentiated rejection (10 items). These are actually the four principal forms that the warmth dimension seems to take everywhere. Children are asked to reflect on the way their primary caregiver (usually the mother) now treats them.

Individuals respond to statements on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *almost always true* to *almost never true*. A total (composite) score for the PARQ, providing an overall acceptance-rejection profile, is obtained by summing the four scales after reverse scoring the warmth/affection scale score to produce a measure of parental coldness and low affection.

Empirical evidence has shown that children and adults everywhere in the world appear to respond easily to native-language versions of the PARQ. Both direct observation and empirical evidence support the conclusion that individual items on the PARQ measure something emically meaningful in all sociocultural contexts in which it has been used so far.

Table 1: Possible extremes and midpoints of Scale and Total-Test Scores of the PARQ [8].

Scales/Total test	Lowest possible	Highest possible	Midpoint
Warmth/Affection (WA)	20	80	50
Aggression/Hostility (AH)	15	60	37.5
Neglect/Indifference (NI)	15	60	37.5
Rejection(Undifferentiated) (RU)	10	40	25
Total (Composite) Test (TC) (a)	60	240 (b)	150

(a) Includes Warmth/Affection scale reverse scored.

(b) 240 means maximum rejection (not maximum acceptance).

As we can see from Table 1 the PARQ Total Composite Test Score (TC) may range from 60 to 240, with a midpoint of 150. Any scores greater than or equal to 150 reveal that children experience more rejection than acceptance at home.

The sample used for the standardization of the Gr-PARQ-Child consists of (N =) 220 Greek Cypriot boys and girls ranging in age from 9 through 12 years and living in the town of Limassol/Cyprus. All children attended school at the time the research was conducted in March 2001. The subjects were evenly divided by gender. Note that a similar sample was used in the USA, namely a sample of 220 boys and girls (aged 9-12) living in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. The USA-sample was evenly distributed by ethnic group (Black and White). Rohner, Saavedra & Cranium [11] used this sample to assess the validity and reliability of the PARQ-Child.

The questionnaires were group-administered during class time. Children completed the questionnaire by themselves. The test administrators as well as the teachers were available to the children to respond to questions on an individual basis.

3. RELIABILITY

Cronbach's coefficient alpha [3] was used as the principal measure of reliability. Coefficient alpha is a measure of internal consistency of items within a scale. Thus a high alpha indicates that all items in a scale are sampling the same content area. The Gr-PARQ-Child reliability coefficients (alpha) are shown in Table 2. With the exception of the R(U) scale (which is still of an acceptable magnitude of 0.63) they are all quite high (very near or a lot greater than 0.80) and are comparable to their counterparts of the US-PARQ.

Table 2: Internal Consistency Reliability Coefficients for PARQ-Child Scales.

Scale	Coefficient Alpha Gr-PARQ-Child	Coefficient Alpha US-PARQ-Child
WA	0.89	0.90
AH	0.86	0.87
NI	0.79	0.77
R(U)	0.63	0.72

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1. Total Composite Test (TC) Score

Our first data analysis regards the Total Composite Test Score as this provides an overall acceptance-rejection profile of the individual or population tested. Here one can clearly see how our (Cyprus) sample lies on the whole bipolar dimension of parental behavior since acceptance (i.e. warmth) defines one end of the continuum and parental rejection the other.

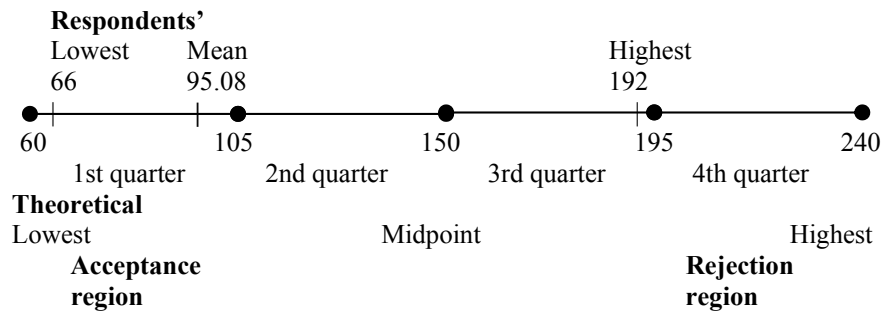


Fig. 3: Scores on the Total Composite Test Score.

As it has already been mentioned (see Table 1) the theoretical midpoint is 150. In the analysis of the Cypriot children's responses TC ranges from a minimum of 66 to a maximum of 192 (see Table 3). The mean score is 95.08 and lies in the 1st quarter of the region, well below the theoretical midpoint, i.e. in a region we could name "Acceptance region." A percentage of 96.8 of the respondents have totals below, and only 2.2% (just 5 children) above the theoretical midpoint (with 0.9% on the midpoint) (see Table 4).

Now, as table 5 shows the TC-mean for boys is 94.06 as opposed to 96.09 for girls. Applying a (two-tailed) two-sample t-test one obtains $p = 0.48 \gg 0.10$, showing no (statistical) difference at all in the behavior of the two genders.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for the Cyprus Gr-PARQ Sample (N = 220).

Scales/ Total test	Mean	St/d dev/n	Median	Mode	Min.	Max.
WA	28.09	8.14	26	23	20	73
AH	23.81	6.91	22	17	15	52
NI	23.99	6.61	23	21	15	49
R(U)	19.15	4.33	19	17	12	35
TC	95.08	21.12	90	87	66	192

Table 4: Scores above/below the theoretical midpoint (Cyprus Gr-PARQ Sample).

Scales/ Total test	Below		Theoretical midpoint	Above	
	N	%		N	%
WA	215	97.7	1	4	1.8
AH	207	94.1	-	13	5.9
NI	208	94.6	-	12	5.4
R(U)	196	89.1	5	19	8.6
TC	213	96.8	2	5	2.3

Table 5: Comparisons between mean scores regarding 'Gender' (Cyprus sample).

Scales/ Total Test	Girls Mean	St/d dev/n	Boys Mean	St/d dev/n
AW	28.15	9.50	28.03	6.56
AH	23.03	6.92	24.59	6.84
NI	24.25	6.82	23.73	6.42
R(U)	18.56	4.16	19.74	4.44
TC	94.06	22.11	96.09	20.13

4.2. Interpretation of scales

All scales of the PARQ are designed so that a high score reveals a maximum perceived warmth/affection, maximum perceived aggression/hostility, and so forth. Three of the four scales (Aggression/Hostility, Neglect/Indifference, Rejection-Undifferentiated) are measures of perceived rejection.

I. Warmth / Affection (WA) scale

The Warmth/Affection scale refers to parent-child relationships where parents are perceived to give love or affection without qualification, however not necessarily with great demonstration. A high score on the Warmth/Affection scale reveals minimum perceived warmth, i.e. maximum rejection. The reverse-scored warmth

scale refers to a parent that is viewed as being unaffectionate, unloving, uninvolved or uncaring, but not aggressive or positively neglecting per se.

As shown in Table 4, in the Cyprus Gr-PARQ sample 215 respondents (97.7%) are below the theoretical midpoint of 50 and only 4 are above. With a mean score of 28.09 (see Table 3) one can identify that they are well in the 1st quarter, i.e. in the “Acceptance region” (see Fig. 4).

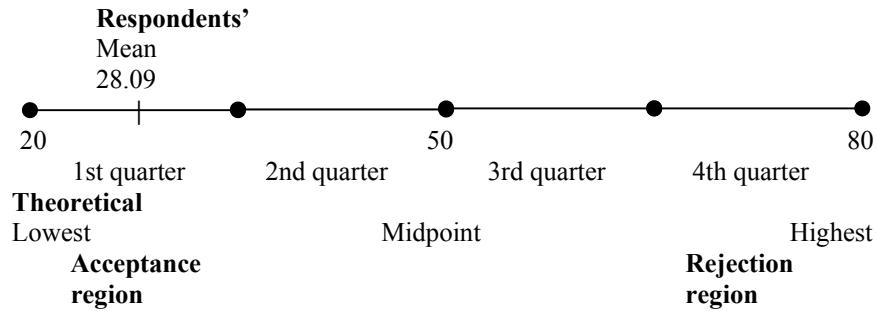


Fig. 4: Scores on the Warmth / Affection Scale.

Now, in order to compare the responses of Cypriot boys (mean = 28.03 – see Table 5) and girls (mean = 28.15) regarding Warmth/Affection we carried out a two-sample t-test. A p-value of 0.91 ($\gg 0.10$) was obtained, indicating that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the two genders on this scale.

As already mentioned above the three scales that follow, namely Aggression-Hostility (AH), Neglect-Indifference (NI), and Rejection/Undifferentiated (RU) are all forms of behavior falling at the “negative” (i.e. rejecting) end of the warmth dimension.

II. Aggression / Hostility (AH) scale

This scale refers (a) to the conditions where the child believes his/her parents are angry or resentful of him/her (hostility), or (b) to conditions where the child believes his/her parents intend to hurt him/her (physical or verbal abuse). A high score on the AH scale reveals maximum perceived aggression/hostility.

In the Cyprus Gr-PARQ sample 207 respondents (94.1%) were below and 13 (5.9%) above the theoretical midpoint (see Table 4). With a mean score of 23.81 (see Table 3), which lies well below the theoretical midpoint of 37.5, and in the 1st quarter (see Fig. 5) one can establish that the level of aggression/hostility perceived by our respondents was very low.

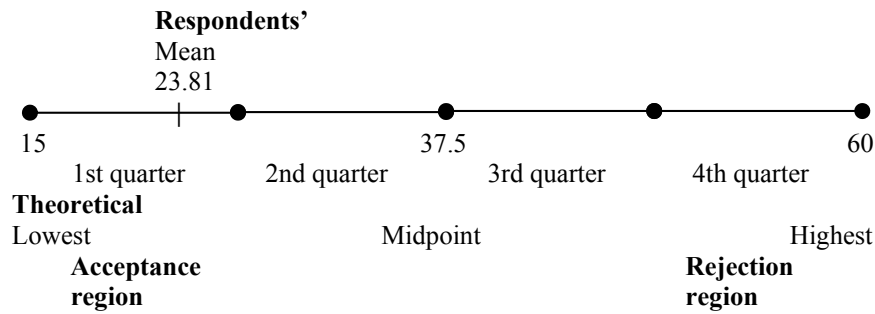


Fig. 5: Scores on the Aggression / Hostility Scale.

As for the comparison between boys (mean = 24.59 – see Table 5) and girls (mean = 23.03), a two-sample t-test resulted in a p-value of 0.09 (< 0.10) indicating that this time there is a statistically quite significant difference between the two genders regarding perceived aggression/hostility. There seems to exist a tendency of Cypriot boys to perceive more aggression/hostility from their caregivers than girls do. Apparently with boys typically engaging in more ‘high-power’ activities, it does not come as a surprise that they should perceive their major caregivers (most likely their mother) as more impatient, scolding them more often and expressing frustration and irritation over their behavior in other ways - more so than in the case of girls of the same age.

III. Neglect / Indifference (NI) scale

This scale refers to conditions where the child sees his/her parents as unconcerned/uninterested in him/her. Such parents are likely to be viewed as spending a minimum amount of time with the child. Neglecting or indifferent parents are not necessarily perceived by the child as hostile. They are just viewed as distant and unconcerned about the child. As in all the other scales, a high score on the NI scale reveals maximum perceived neglect/indifference on behalf of the child regarding the behavior of his/her major caregiver.

As shown in Table 4, in the Cyprus Gr-PARQ sample 94.6% of the children’s responses were below and 5.4% above the theoretical midpoint of the PARQ, which is 37.5. With a mean score of 23.99 (see Table 3) being well below the theoretical midpoint one can say that the Cypriot children have a very low perception of Neglect/Indifference regarding the behavior of their major caregiver toward them. A comparison between the responses of boys (mean = 23.73 – see Table 5) and girls (mean = 24.25) regarding perceived Neglect/Indifference revealed no differences at all. The two-sample t-test resulted in a p-value of 0.56 ($>> 0.10$).

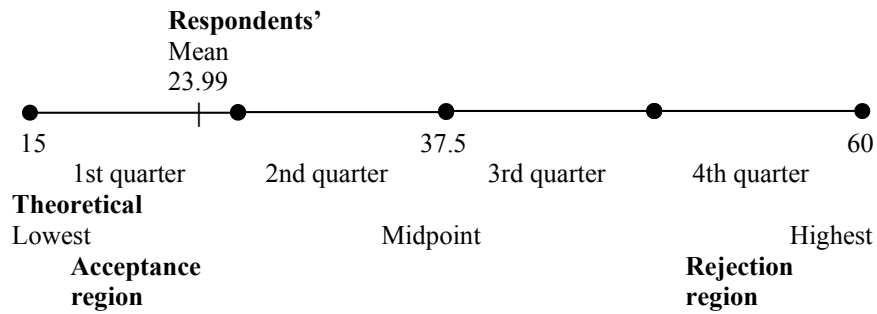


Fig. 6: Scores on the Neglect / Indifference Scale.

IV. Rejection - Undifferentiated (RU) scale

This scale refers to the perceived absence or significant withdrawal of love and affection. Undifferentiated rejection does not clearly reflect either perceived aggression/hostility or perceived neglect/indifference, per se. A high score on this scale indicates maximum perceived undifferentiated rejection. In this scale the theoretical midpoint is 25 with the mean score of the Cyprus Gr-PARQ sample at 19.15 (see Table 3) being well below it. There is a slight difference between the results in this scale as compared to the other three, as it is the only scale where the percentage of children below the theoretical midpoint lies below 90% i.e. at 89.1% and there is, as opposed to the other scales, a relatively higher percentage of responses (8.6%) above the theoretical midpoint (see Table 3).

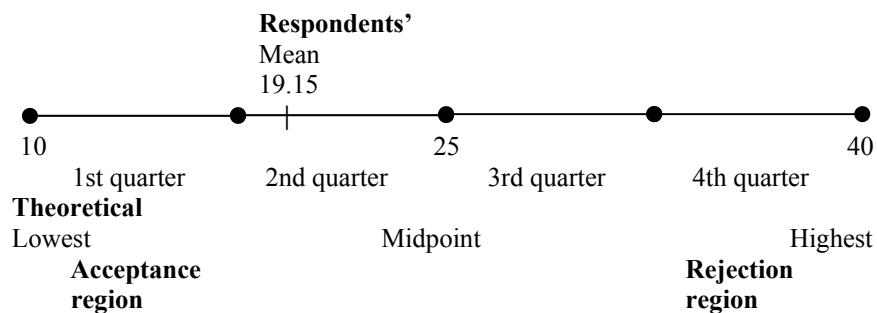


Fig. 7: Scores on the Rejection - undifferentiated Scale.

As we can see from Fig.7, the mean score of the responses of the Cypriot children lies in the 2nd quarter of the Rejection/indifference scale and is thus higher than in all three other scales.

The two-sample t-test for gender comparison resulted in a p-value of 0.04 (< 0.05) and there seems to exist a strong tendency of the boys (mean = 19.74 – see Table 5) of our sample to perceive more rejection from their major caregiver than girls (mean = 18.56) do.

5. COMPARISON BETWEEN THE CYPRUS AND THE USA SAMPLE

In comparing the extremes of scale scores that arise from the formal validation procedures applied to the US-PARQ-Child (given in [8]) with the results of our Cyprus (Gr-PARQ-Child) sample one may note (see Table 6) that the results for minimum scores are actually identical for three scales and very similar for the R(U) scale (10 for USA-sample and 12 for Cyprus-sample) and very close to each other as far as maximum scores are concerned for all scales. Recall that the sample sizes are identical (N = 220).

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics comparison between the Cyprus Gr-PARQ and the USA PARQ samples.

Scales/ Total test	Mean Cyprus	Mean USA	Min. Cyprus	Min. USA	Max. Cyprus	Max. USA
WA	28.09	31.26	20	20	73	76
AH	23.81	29.00	15	15	52	50
NI	23.99	27.04	15	15	49	45
R(U)	19.15	19.11	12	10	35	36
TC	95.08	106.41*	66	*	192	*

* Not listed

I. Total-Composite Test (TC) score

Although the total composite mean score of the USA- sample is not available in the descriptive statistics for PARQ scales [8] and we could therefore not proceed to a comparison between the two samples regarding this score one may approximate the total by adding the mean scores of the four scales (106.41). A two-sample t-test would then clearly indicate a significant difference between the Cypriot (mean = 95.08) and the American samples' responses, a result expected by having a simple look at the individual results of the four scales.

II. Warmth / Affection (WA) scale

The two-sample t-test revealed a significant difference between the responses of the American (mean = 31.26 – see Table 6) and the Cypriot children (mean = 28.09) regarding perceived warmth/affection, as the p-value was < 0.001. It seems that the Cypriot children perceive warmth and affection from their major caregiver(s) at a significantly higher level than their American peers.

III. Aggression / Hostility (AH) scale

As indicated from the mean scores of the two samples the American children (mean = 29.00 – Table 6) seem to perceive aggression/hostility from their major caregiver at a higher level than their Cypriot peers (mean = 23.81). This difference in the

mean scores of the two populations is statistically significant as the p-value obtained for a two-sample t-test is < 0.001 .

IV. Neglect / Indifference (NI) scale

Similar results as with the two scales described above were obtained for the NI scale. The mean scores for American children is 27.04 as opposed to a mean of 23.99 for Cypriot children. There is a statistically significant difference between them with a p-value of < 0.001 . This means that the American children perceive neglect/indifference in the behavior of their major caregiver toward them at a significantly higher level than their Cypriot peers.

V. Rejection – Undifferentiated (RU) scale

Interestingly enough there is a qualitative difference in the behavior of the R(U) scale as opposed to the behavior all other scales described above. It turns out that no significant differences exist between the mean scores of the responses of the two samples (American-sample mean = 19.11; Cyprus-sample mean = 19.15 – Table 6). A two-sample t-test yields a p value of $0.93 \gg 0.10$.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

In summarizing the results of this study we may establish the following conclusions:

(a) The overall acceptance-rejection profile of the Cypriot children of our sample shows that they perceive their parents as being basically quite warm and affectionate. Their total scores lie closely to that end of the continuum defined as the “acceptance region” thus indicating that they feel “loved” or accepted by their parents.

(b) The children’s scores on Warmth/Acceptance scale confirm the above-mentioned conclusion as they lie toward the lowest possible score, i.e. clearly pointing toward the fact that they perceive their parents as giving them unconditional love and acceptance. No significant differences between boys and girls were obtained.

(c) On the three scales that fall at the negative end of the warmth dimension Cypriot children had scores that indicated the following:

(i) With very low mean scores on Aggression/Hostility scale respondents demonstrated a very low belief that their parents have an angry or resentful disposition toward them. Furthermore they showed that they do not feel in any way threatened by their parents’ behavior either physically or verbally. Boys seem to show a slight tendency to perceive more Aggression/Hostility from their caregivers than girls. This could result from the fact that at this age (9-12) they typically engage in more “high-power” activities than girls; it therefore should not come as a surprise that they should perceive their mothers as more impatient, scolding them more often and expressing frustration and irritation over their behavior in other ways – more so than in the case of their peer girls.

(ii) The Cypriot children's scores on the Neglect/Indifference scale were also well below the theoretical midpoint, thus indicating that they have a very low perception of their primary caregiver as being distant and unconcerned about them. This was true of both the girls and the boys of our sample.

(iii) In reference to the scale Undifferentiated Rejection our results indicate that we have a difference in comparison to the scores on the other two scales that fall at the negative end of the dimension. Here namely we encounter a relatively higher percentage of the responses above the theoretical midpoint as compared to the Aggression/Hostility and the Neglect/Indifference scale. Again boys seem to have a stronger tendency than girls to perceive more rejection from their mothers.

We cannot actually say that our results are alarming regarding the levels of acceptance-rejection perceived by the Cypriot children especially when compared to those of their US counterparts. It is quite clear that a great number of questions regarding manifestations of parental acceptance and rejection in children's behavior in both societies remain unanswered and need further investigation; e.g. the relationship between the socio-economic status and perceived acceptance-rejection or the effect of gender differences in perceived rejection on boys versus girls. Questions, such as these, point to the direction that future work might take.

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