



Parental rejection and fear of intimacy in the United States and Guatemala: Context and culture matter

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Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between perceived parental acceptance-rejection and fear of intimacy; explored psychological maladjustment and interpersonal relationship anxiety as mediators of this relationship; and examined whether the patterns of relations between perceived parental acceptance-rejection, psychological maladjustment, and fear of intimacy were similar across the cultural contexts of the U.S.A. and Guatemala. Participants ($N=196$) were college students from Guatemala ($n=96$; 77.6% female) and the U.S. ($n=100$; 70% female). Results indicate that in both cultural contexts, perceived maternal rejection was associated with interpersonal relationship anxiety, and perceived paternal acceptance-rejection was associated with psychological maladjustment. However, only in the U.S.A. were both maternal and paternal rejection associated with fear of intimacy. Further, we found that perceived rejection from mothers and fathers was indirectly associated with greater fear of intimacy via greater psychological maladjustment in the U.S.A. sample. Findings suggest the importance of parent-child interactions on later outcomes, and the need to ensure that children feel warmth and acceptance for positive interpersonal relationships and adjustment later in life.

Keywords IPARTheory · Parental acceptance-rejection · Fear of intimacy · Psychological adjustment · Relationship anxiety · Guatemala

Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory, or IPARTheory, highlights the important role of interpersonal acceptance-rejection in human socioemotional development over the lifespan (Rohner 1986; Rohner 2016). IPARTheory traditionally focused exclusively on *parental* acceptance-rejection (and was referred to as Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory, or PARTheory), but by 1999 the theory's focus shifted to *interpersonal* acceptance-rejection, which now also includes peer, sibling, and teacher acceptance-rejection, as

well as acceptance-rejection in intimate adult and other attachment relationships (Rohner 2016).

Interpersonal acceptance-rejection lies on a continuum (referred to as the Warmth Dimension), with acceptance on one end and rejection on the other. Acceptance is shown by actions including comfort, care, and affection; rejection is shown by the opposite, including expressed dislike and disapproval (Rohner and Khaleque 2005). When referring to parenting, the position where a parent's displays of acceptance (or rejection) lie on this continuum determines the quality of the emotional bond between the parent and child (Rohner 1986).

IPARTheory suggests that the perception of acceptance from parents during childhood is fundamentally important to healthy development (Rohner 1986), and that parental acceptance-rejection heavily influences personality development throughout the lifespan (Khaleque and Rohner 2002a). When an individual's need for acceptance is not met, they are likely to develop a specific collection of personality dispositions that together represent the *acceptance-rejection syndrome* (Rohner 1999, 2004). These dispositions include: (a) hostility and aggression, (b) dependence, (c) negative self-esteem, (d) negative self-adequacy, (e) emotional unresponsiveness, (f) emotional instability, (g) negative

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worldview, (h) anxiety, (i) insecurity, and (j) cognitive distortions (Rohner 2004).

Several studies have documented that children and adults who perceive or remember their relationship with their parent(s) as rejecting are more inclined to report the *acceptance-rejection syndrome* despite cultural, ethnic, language, gender, race, and other individual differences (Khaleque and Rohner 2002b; Rohner and Britner 2002; Rohner and Khaleque 2010). In other words, research has supported the claim that IPARTheory is applicable universally—meaning that while demonstrations of acceptance-rejection might be culturally specific, the effect (i.e., acceptance-rejection syndrome) is universal. For this reason, it is important to test the theory's claims in various cultural contexts. It is also important to explore how the acceptance-rejection syndrome might have specific impacts on an adult's life. For example, when an individual's need for parental acceptance in childhood is not met, perhaps they are not only likely to develop the acceptance-rejection syndrome, but also fear of intimacy. This possibility is a new area of research within IPARTheory and is the focus of the present study in two different cultural contexts: the United States of America and Guatemala.

The Universality of IPARTheory

Children around the world react in similar ways when they perceive parental acceptance or rejection (Rohner and Khaleque 2002). For example, among Croatian adolescents, perceived paternal and maternal acceptance were positively associated with Croatian youths' psychological well-being (Glavak-Tkalic and Kukulja-Cicmanovic 2014). In Colombia, greater perceived parental rejection was associated with greater psychological maladjustment (Lila et al. 2007). These studies, along with a multitude of others (e.g., Ali et al. 2015; Chyung and Lee 2008; Khaleque and Rohner 2002a; Khaleque et al. 2008; Machado et al. 2014; Ripoll-Núñez and Alvarez 2008; Rohner and Britner 2002; Rohner and Khaleque 2010; Varan 2008), suggest that IPARTheory is generalizable to a variety of populations and cultures.

In a large meta-analysis of more than 50 studies, Khaleque and Rohner (2002a) further demonstrated the generalizability of IPARTheory. The included studies had a total of 6898 respondents (about 50% children ages 6 to 19 years and 50% adults ages 23 to 54 years) from most major ethnic and cultural groups in the United States and samples from around the globe (i.e., Europe, South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa). The results indicated that IPARTheory measures are reliable across cultures, and that between 2185 and 4537 additional studies with insufficiently low Cronbach's alphas (indicating the measures' reliability) would be required to call into question the reliability of the measures. Most importantly,

this meta-analysis strongly suggests an etic tendency for people to react analogously to parental acceptance-rejection.

Perceived parental acceptance-rejection from childhood is related to various concepts later in life. As an example, those with borderline personality disorder are more likely to have perceived rejection in childhood from fathers, but not mothers (Rohner and Brothers 1999). Similarly, adulthood depression is associated with perceived parental rejection (Rohner and Britner 2002). Important for the current study, the consequences of perceived parental rejection in childhood prolong into future relationships—for instance, Turkish adults who remembered being more accepted by their parents felt greater acceptance from their current intimate partner (Varan 2008).

Previous research on IPARTheory in Guatemala has revealed that IPARTheory measures are reliable and valid, and that perceived parental acceptance-rejection correlates with expected constructs such as ethnic prejudice (Faherty et al. 2016). Because IPARTheory posits to be a universal theory, it is reasonable to expect that relationships between perceived parental acceptance-rejection and fear of intimacy in the United States would be similar to the pattern of relationships between those variables in a different cultural setting, such as Guatemala.

Intimacy and Fear of Intimacy

Intimacy Although there are numerous definitions of *intimacy*, Descutner and Thelen (1991) conceptualize it as comprising three main factors: content (e.g., conveying personal information), emotional valence (e.g., attributing personal significance to the shared information), and vulnerability (e.g., “high regard for the intimate other;” p. 219). Moreover, Hook et al. (2003) posit that love, personal validation, trust, and self-disclosure are integral to intimacy. Lack of intimacy is associated with many negative correlates such as low self-esteem (Descutner and Thelen 1991) and increased stress and illness (Hook et al. 2003). Conversely, intimacy itself is positively associated with perceived well-being (Hook et al. 2003). Despite the disclosure of personal information being necessary for intimacy, some individuals have an “inhibited capacity. . . because of anxiety, to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued” (Descutner and Thelen 1991, p. 219). This is called fear of intimacy (FOI).

Fear of Intimacy When an individual has FOI, they are afraid to form an intimate relationship with a person who is important to them, such as a significant other (Rohner et al. 2019). This fear to self-disclose one's personal thoughts and feelings is often due to the individual feeling vulnerable to being hurt emotionally and feeling rejected (Rohner 2005). In IPARTheory, remembrances of parental rejection in

childhood tend to be associated with the development of cognitive distortions that include feeling particularly sensitive to real or even imagined rejection (Ibrahim et al. 2015; Rohner 2005). Because FOI is closely tied to rejection sensitivity, it is possible that remembrances of parental rejection in childhood are associated with FOI. One recent multicultural study (Rohner et al. 2019) suggests that psychological adjustment does significantly mediate the relationship between parental rejection and fear of intimacy.

Correlates and Predictors of Fear of Intimacy FOI is positively associated with loneliness and negatively associated with self-disclosure, social intimacy, and social desirability (Descutner and Thelen 1991). This pattern tends to be higher in men than in women (Thelen et al. 2000). Moreover, the configuration of FOI appears to be similar to perceived rejection in IPARTheory. Much like IPARTheory's Personality Subtheory—and its tenant that the acceptance-rejection syndrome can result in either dependence or reactive independence (Khaleque et al. 2018)—FOI exists in a curvilinear format, with romantic anxiety being more often present in those wanting less or more closeness, rather than in individuals who feel satisfied with their relationship's closeness (Mashek and Sherman 2004).

These extremes on the intimacy continuum are correlated with various psychological and social variables. Symptoms of depression and anxiety are associated with FOI (Descutner and Thelen 1991; Ingersoll et al. 2008; Lutwak et al. 2003; Vangelisti and Beck 2007). Lutwak et al. found that FOI was positively correlated with shame and shame-proneness. Moreover, it is also associated with the fear that the relationship might end, and FOI has been associated with perceiving less intimacy in a relationship, regardless of the partner's own level of FOI (Thelen et al. 2000). Related to FOI, fearful attachment (i.e., avoiding relationships because of fearing rejection) has been positively correlated with depression (Reis and Grenyer 2004), and depression itself has been positively associated with parenting variables such as insecure attachment (Reis and Grenyer 2004) and perceived parental rejection in IPARTheory (Rohner and Britner 2002, Khaleque et al. 2018).

Parenting and Fear of Intimacy

Research by Descutner and Thelen (1991) and Sherman and Thelen (1996) further supports a possible link between IPARTheory and FOI, as their findings reveal that people who are high in FOI are more likely to show psychological maladjustment that includes anxiety, depression, and negative self-esteem. In IPARTheory, adults' psychological maladjustment is an outcome of perceived parental rejection in

childhood, so perhaps perceived parental rejection can help to explain why people develop FOI.

To date, only two studies (Phillips et al. 2013; Rohner et al. 2019) have specifically examined adults' remembrances of parental acceptance-rejection in childhood and their current FOI. Phillips et al. (2013) found that the participants' remembrances of parental acceptance in childhood were negatively correlated with their FOI. Utilizing the framework of IPARTheory, Rohner and Khaleque (2005) developed the Interpersonal Relationship Anxiety Questionnaire (IRAQ) to measure FOI within the IPARTheory model, as FOI and interpersonal relationship anxiety (IRA) should be theoretically correlated. To date, we are only aware of one significant study that utilized the IRAQ to explore specific connections between other IPARTheory measures and fear of intimacy (measured by the Fear of Intimacy Scale [FOIS], not to be confused with the construct of fear of intimacy [FOI]; Descutner and Thelen 1991). Rohner et al. (2019) found that perceived maternal and paternal rejection predicted greater fear of intimacy as measured by the FOIS and greater IRA as measured by the IRAQ, and that participants' ($N = 3483$) country of origin did not affect this significant relationship. This provides strong support for the universality of the link between parental rejection, IRA, and FOI, which suggests that there is a theoretical connection between fear of intimacy and interpersonal relationship anxiety. However, Rohner et al. (2019) did not explore the relationship among these variables within particular cultural contexts, which we aim to do here.

In addition, FOI is intricately intertwined with other parenting variables (Thorberg and Lyvers 2006; Vangelisti and Beck 2007). One long-standing association between parenting and later relationships is that addressed by attachment theory (e.g., Ainsworth et al. 1978). Attachment theory posits that we develop worldviews, or *internal working models* (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, as cited in Vangelisti and Beck 2007), based on experiences with our parents. Because this model, or prototype (Phillips et al. 2013), serves as the basis for future relationships, "difficult childhood experiences and failed adult relationships reinforce. . . fear that intimacy is illusive or that it is inevitably fraught with pain and disappointment" (Vangelisti and Beck 2007, p. 395).

Insecure Attachment, Abuse, and Parental Divorce A secure attachment to parents has been associated with intimacy-fostering behaviors like self-disclosure, willingness to be part of social support, and need for closeness (Vangelisti and Beck 2007). Moreover, securely attached individuals, as compared to insecurely attached individuals, appear to develop future romantic relationships that are longer and less obsessive (Phillips et al. 2013). Conversely, insecurely attached individuals display significantly more FOI than those who are securely attached, and this insecure attachment is also inversely related to trust in the partner's dependability and feelings of

closeness (Thorberg and Lyvers 2006). Other parenting variables, such as physical abuse by parents, can impact one's experience in future intimate relationships. Namely, Repic (2007) found that childhood physical abuse was associated with more FOI, as well as divorce. Likewise, parental hostility is inversely related to the child's mental health and positively associated with fear of intimacy (Gasper et al. 2008). Therefore, because parenting constructs such as attachment appear to be related to FOI, it seems logical that perceived parental rejection may also play a role in FOI.

Parental Warmth A central component of parental acceptance-rejection theory is one's perception of parents' behavior within the continuum from warmth (acceptance) to coldness (rejection; Rohner and Britner 2002). Parental warmth, such as that addressed in IPARTheory, appears to be related to FOI (Gasper et al. 2008; Phillips et al. 2013), as does fatherly affirmation, defined as the perception of unconditional positive regard (Scheffler and Naus 1999). Similarly, Phillips et al. (2013) found that parental caring, and the number of caring parents, was negatively related to FOI, with both maternal and paternal care being inversely related to and significantly predictive of FOI. Related to parental warmth, it appears that fatherly affirmation (i.e., unconditional positive regard, empathy, congruence) is negatively correlated with FOI, even after controlling for self-esteem (Scheffler and Naus 1999). Considering these associations among parenting variables, psychological adjustment, FOI, and previous initial research (Rohner et al. 2019), it appears that IPARTheory should be a theoretical predictor of FOI—especially when measured by the IPARTheory-specific IRAQ.

The Cultural Contexts

We chose to explore these constructs among samples of emerging adults in Guatemala and the United States for various reasons. First, because Guatemala tends to be more collectivistic than the USA (Basabe and Ros 2005; Galban and Simon 2019), and because collectivistic cultures tend to focus more on group cohesion rather than the individual, we think it is likely that the Guatemalan participants and the U.S. participants may interpret their perceptions of acceptance-rejection differently. Given that parenting practices are a form of cultural practice that elicit culturally-valued outcomes (Ashdown and Faherty 2020), we also think it is important to investigate the interpretations of perceptions of parental acceptance and rejection as cultural in nature. Further, gender identity development and romantic intimacy are more narrowly socialized in Guatemala than in the USA (Poelker and Gibbons 2016). These gender norms and cultural ideologies of romantic love may lead Guatemalan emerging adults (and especially females; Singleton et al. 2016) to engage in romantic intimacy

in different ways than U.S. emerging adults. We explore the possible differences between U.S. and Guatemalan emerging adults in the present study a first step in exploring the relationship between acceptance-rejection and fear of intimacy in different cultural contexts, with the hope that future research will explore why those difference exist (if differences are, indeed, uncovered).

Present Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the possible connection between IPARTheory, IRA, and FOI by investigating if adults' remembrances of parental acceptance-rejection in childhood are associated with their current levels of FOI. Because the IRAQ has, so far, only been used in one significant study (Rohner et al. 2019), our work is aimed toward testing three hypotheses that will help provide better clarification on how well-established measures of interpersonal acceptance-rejection and the IRAQ (as a measure of FOI) are related. Specifically, we hypothesize: (a) The level of FOI (as measured by the FOIS) and IRA (as measured by the IRAQ) among adults (for both men and women) will both be significantly correlated with their remembrances of parental (both maternal and paternal) acceptance-rejection in childhood; (b) The level of adults' interpersonal relationship anxiety (measured by the IRAQ) and overall psychological (mal)adjustment will influence (e.g., mediate, moderate, or affect in some other way) relationships between remembrances of parental acceptance-rejection in childhood and FOI (as measured by the FOIS) because IRA and FOI should be theoretically correlated constructs; (c) And, to test the claims of universal application made by IPARTheory, the pattern of relationships among IPARTheory variables (including the IRAQ), FOIS scores, and gender will be similar in the two different cultural contexts of the United States and Guatemala.

Method

Participants

The participants ($N = 196$) included 96 college students from Guatemala (77.6% female) and 100 college students from the United States (70% female). The average age for the Guatemalan participants was 21.15 years ($SD = 3.27$) and the average age for the U.S. participants was 19.00 years ($SD = 0.89$). In terms of ethnicity for the Guatemalan participants, they marked a 15-cm line (with zero denoting *completely indigenous* identification and 15 *completely Ladino* identification [i.e., a claim to mostly European heritage]) to designate their ethnicity. Participants' marks were measured from

the left to the nearest $\frac{1}{2}$ centimeter. The mean was 10.95 cm ($SD = 4.72$ cm), indicating a general claim to mostly Ladino (i.e., non-indigenous) heritage (5% of Guatemalan participants did not indicate their ethnicity). In terms of ethnicity for the U.S. participants, 78% of the sample self-identified as European American (White), 6% as African-American, 5% as “other,” 4% as Asian American, 3% as Hispanic, 2% as biracial, 1% as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1% did not indicated their ethnicity.

Eighty-eight percent of the Guatemalan sample’s primary language was Spanish, 2% was “other,” 1% was English, 1% was something else, and 8% was missing. Ninety-five percent of the U.S. sample’s primary language was English, 4% was “other,” and 1% was missing. Finally, 80% of the Guatemalan sample and 77% of the U.S. sample reported having ever been in an intimate relationship, with 40% of the Guatemalan sample and 41% of the U.S. sample reporting currently being in an intimate relationship.

Measures

Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire: Father/Mother Short Forms (PARQF/PARQM) This 24-item questionnaire measures adult participants’ reflections on their perceived acceptance-rejection from their parents during the participant’s childhood (Rohner and Khaleque 2005). Participants are asked to think back to when they were about 10 years old, and to answer the questions based on that time of their lives. The PARQF and the PARQM are identical measures except one (PARQF) asks participants to answer the questions while thinking about their father, and the other (PARQM) while thinking about their mother. The PARQ consists of four subscales: warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, and undifferentiated rejection. Example questions from these measures include: “Went out of his/her way to hurt my feelings” and “did not pay attention to me.” Participants use a 4-point Likert-like scale to indicate whether each statement is *almost always true* (4), *sometimes true* (3), *rarely true* (2), or *almost never true* (1) of their respective parent. Both the PARQF and PARQM are summed separately to find an overall measure of maternal acceptance-rejection and paternal acceptance-rejection. We computed scores for each of the four subscales in each of the PARQF and PARQM, with higher scores indicating more negative perceptions on each scale (i.e., more rejection). In the current study, items on the PARQM had a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .85$ for Guatemalan participants and $\alpha = .91$ for U.S. participants. Cronbach’s alphas for the PARQF were $\alpha = .90$ for the Guatemalan sample and $\alpha = .92$ for the U.S. sample.

Interpersonal Relationship Anxiety Questionnaire (IRAQ) This 9-item questionnaire seeks to assess the amount of anxiety participants experience in regard to their relationships with

people who are important to them (Rohner and Khaleque 2005). Participants use a 4-point Likert-like scale to indicate whether each one-word description (such as apprehensive, nervous, and scared) is *almost always true* (4), *sometimes true* (3), *rarely true* (2), or *almost never true* (1) of their feelings about important relationships. Contrary to the PARQ scales, participants complete this measure according to how they currently feel. In the current study, items had a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .72$ in the Guatemalan sample and $\alpha = .89$ in the U.S. sample.

Adult Personality Assessment Questionnaire: Short Form (PAQ) This 42-item measure assesses psychological maladjustment according to seven subscales: hostility and aggression, dependency, negative self-esteem, negative self-adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability, and negative worldview (Rohner and Khaleque 2005). Participants use a 4-point Likert-type scale to indicate how much each statement reflects themselves, ranging from *almost always true* (4), *sometimes true* (3), *rarely true* (2), or *almost never true* (1). Example statements include: “I certainly feel worthless” and “I feel resentful against people.” The PAQ is summed to find an overall measure of psychological (mal)adjustment and scores for each of the seven subscales. Higher scores indicate more psychological maladjustment, therefore greater levels of hostility/aggression, dependence, negative self-esteem, negative self-adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability, and negative worldview for each subscale, respectively (Rohner and Khaleque 2005). In the current study, items had a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .85$ for the Guatemalan sample and $\alpha = .90$ for the U.S. sample.

Fear of Intimacy Scale (FOIS) This 35-item questionnaire measures the degree to which participants are uncomfortable with or fear intimacy in their relationships (Descutner and Thelen 1991). Participants are asked to think of their current intimate relationship (or imagine they are in an intimate relationship if they are not currently), and to respond to each item. Example items include “I would feel comfortable expressing my true feelings to [the other person]” and “I might be afraid to reveal my innermost feelings to [the other person]”. Participants use a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 5 (*extremely true of me*) to respond to each item. In the current study, the items of this scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .84$ for the Guatemalan sample and $\alpha = .93$ for the U.S. sample.

Demographics Demographic information was collected from all participants using the Personal Information Form (Rohner and Khaleque 2005). The information collected included age, gender, ethnicity, primary language, religion, education level and employment. Guatemalan participants’ ethnicity was assessed on a continuous scale, referred to as a line test (see

Participants section for description). Questions on the Personal Information Form also asked about relationships, including if the participant had ever been in an intimate relationship, if the intimate relationship was still on-going, the length of the intimate relationship, and the nature of the intimate relationship (e.g., girlfriend/boyfriend, unmarried cohabitating, spouse, non-romantic friend, other).

Procedure

This study followed APA ethical guidelines and was approved by the IRB of the appropriate institution. The university in Guatemala where the research was conducted did not have an official IRB, and instead relied on the researchers' home institution. However, permission was obtained from the relevant administration and faculty at the participating university in Guatemala.

U.S. participants were recruited from college psychology courses at a private institution and received partial course credit for participating. Guatemalan participants were approached in their classrooms at a private university and asked to participate, but did not receive an incentive to do so. The surveys provided to the Guatemalan participants were rigorously translated into Spanish by various bilingual researchers and consultants. Participants from both countries completed the surveys individually while in group settings. The order of the scales in the survey was: Adult PARQ: Mother Short Form, IRAQ, Adult PARQ: Father Short Form, FOI, Adult PAQ Short Form, and the personal information form. The survey took approximately 30 min to complete.

Results

Data, including item scores, scale scores, and total-test scores were cleaned for potential out-of-range values. Three out-of-range values were found: one on the PARQF total-test score and two on the PAQ total-test score. These out-of-range values resulted from participants skipping questions, and having lower total-test scores than the minimum value. These three total-test scores were subsequently excluded from all future analyses.

Before testing our hypotheses about FOI (as measured by the IRAQ and the FOIS) and its relation to maternal and paternal acceptance-rejection, interpersonal anxiety, and overall psychological adjustment, we computed a 2 X 2 factorial MANOVA to determine if there was a significant difference on these variables between the U.S. sample and the Guatemalan sample, as well as between men and women. The dependent variables were PARQM, PARQF, FOIS, PAQ, and IRAQ, while the predictor variables were gender (men, women) and sample (U.S., Guatemala). Sufficient correlations existed between the dependent variables to conduct

the MANOVA. The multivariate interaction effect of gender x sample was not statistically significant ($p = .271$). Further, the multivariate effect of gender was not statistically significant ($p = .349$); however, the multivariate effect of sample was statistically significant, Wilks Lambda = .871, $F(2, 176) = 5.212$, $p < .001$. The multivariate effect of sample accounted for 12.9% of the total multivariate variance.

Follow up univariate ANOVAs were conducted on each dependent variable to determine the location of the statistically significant multivariate effect of sample. With five dependent variables in the analysis, these effects were evaluated against a Bonferonni-adjusted alpha level of .01 (.05/5). However, for the dependent variables of PARQM and IRAQ, a significant Levene's tests suggested unequal error variances across groups, and therefore we used a more stringent alpha level of .001 to evaluate the ANOVAs for those two variables. The locus of the statistically significant multivariate effect of sample was a function of maternal acceptance-rejection, $F(2, 180) = 13.167$, $p < .001$, and paternal acceptance/rejection, $F(2, 180) = 14.390$, $p < .001$. Specifically, Guatemalans ($M = 48.34$, $SD = 13.81$) reported more rejection from their fathers than U.S. participants ($M = 40.60$, $SD = 14.53$). There was also a difference between the samples on maternal acceptance-rejection, with Guatemalans ($M = 40.83$, $SD = 11.73$) reporting greater levels of perceived maternal rejection than U.S. participants ($M = 35.35$, $SD = 13.27$). There were no differences between the samples on psychological maladjustment, fear of intimacy, or interpersonal relationship anxiety, suggesting that even though the samples perceived different levels of rejection, these differing levels did not lead to different levels of maladjustment. See Table 1 for more information on the MANOVA and ANOVAs.

Due to differences between the samples on some of the major variables in the study, correlations were conducted separately for Guatemalan and U.S. participants. The correlation matrices appear in Table 2 (see the table for details on the correlation coefficients). For Guatemalans, none of the potential predictors (PAQ, PARQM, PARQF, IRAQ, and age) significantly correlated with FOIS. For Guatemalans, maternal acceptance-rejection, paternal acceptance-rejection, and interpersonal relationship anxiety significantly correlated with psychological maladjustment. For U.S. participants, psychological adjustment, maternal acceptance-rejection, paternal acceptance-rejection, and interpersonal relationship anxiety significantly correlated with FOIS. Further, for U.S. participants, maternal acceptance-rejection, paternal acceptance-rejection, and interpersonal relationship anxiety significantly correlated with psychological maladjustment.

Indirect Effects Testing

Given that research has suggested that parental acceptance-rejection and psychological maladjustment are both strong

Table 1 Multivariate and Univariate Analysis of Variance for PAQ, PARQM, PARQF, FOI, and IRAQ

Source	Multivariate						Univariate															
	PAQ		PARQM		PARQF		FOI		IRAQ		PAQ		PARQM		PARQF		FOI		IRAQ			
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	
Gender (G)	1.125	.349	.031																			
Sample (S)	5.212	***	.129	.050	.823	.000	13.167	***	.068	14.390	***	.074	.158	.692	.001	1.016	.315	.006				
G x S	1.289	.271	.035																			

*** $p < .001$. η^2 = Partial eta square; PAQ = psychological adjustment; PARQM = maternal acceptance/rejection; PARQF = paternal acceptance/rejection; FOI = fear of intimacy; IRAQ = interpersonal relationship anxiety

predictors of fear of intimacy, PROCESS software (Hayes 2013) was used to examine psychological maladjustment as a potential mediator of the relationship between maternal and paternal acceptance-rejection (separately) and FOIS (see Figs. 1 and 2). This was only done with data from the U.S. participants. For Guatemalans, a mediation model was not conducted, as none of the potential hypothesized predictors (PAQ, PARQM, PARQF, IRAQ, age) significantly correlated with FOIS.

PROCESS (Hayes 2013) utilizes bootstrapping to estimate indirect effects, and as such makes no assumptions about the sampling distribution of the test statistics, is good for use with smaller sample sizes, does not need a standard error to make an inference about an indirect effect, is applicable for a range of complexity in models, and is parsimonious. Due to these advantages, we utilized PROCESS (Hayes 2013) to estimate the distribution of the indirect effect with bootstrapping (we used the recommended 5000 resamples; Preacher and Hayes 2008) to generate a 95% confidence interval (95% CI) for evaluating the indirect effect. Specifically, if the 95% CI does not contain zero, the indirect effect is considered significant (Hayes 2013; Fairchild and Mackinnon 2009). Results are presented in terms of unstandardized regression weights.

U.S. Fathers Results revealed at the onset that greater paternal rejection significantly predicted greater fear of intimacy,

$b = .38, SE = .11, t(98) = 3.36, p < .01$. In the indirect effects testing, results indicated that paternal rejection was a significant predictor of psychological maladjustment ($b = .38, SE = .10, t(98) = 3.81, p < .001$), and psychological maladjustment was a significant predictor of greater fear of intimacy scores, $b = .52, SE = .10, t(98) = 4.96, p < .001$. Further, the indirect effect of paternal rejection to fear of intimacy through psychological maladjustment was significant, $b = .19$, bootstrap $SE = .06, 95\% CI [.08, .33]$. Therefore, participants who reported higher levels of rejection from fathers subsequently reported greater levels of psychological maladjustment, which in turn was related to greater fear of intimacy. This relationship is illustrated in Fig. 1. It is important to note that in the presence of the mediator (psychological adjustment), the direct effect of paternal acceptance-rejection on fear of intimacy disappeared, which indicated that psychological maladjustment mediates the relationship between paternal rejection and FOI, $b = .19, SE = .11, t(98) = 1.71, p = .09$. The overall model accounted for 29% of the variance in FOI scores, with the indirect effect accounting for 8% of the total variance in FOIS scores.

U.S. Mothers First, analyses revealed that greater maternal rejection significantly predicted greater fear of intimacy,

Table 2 Correlations for Guatemalan and U.S. Sample on Predictor and Outcome Variables

Measure	PAQ	PARQM	PARQF	FOI	IRAQ	Age
PAQ	–	.495***	.364***	.506***	.640***	.012
PARQM	.363***	–	.434***	.364***	.485***	-.076
PARQF	.338**	.461***	–	.325**	.157	-.068
FOI	.184	.028	-.017	–	.435***	-.020
IRAQ	.524***	.331**	.195	.080	–	-.030
Age	-.115	.376***	.209*	-.076	.010	–

Guatemalan sample correlations are below the diagonal and U.S. sample correlations are above the diagonal. *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

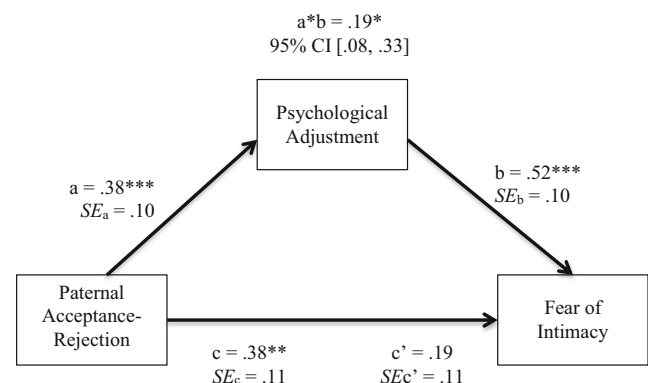


Fig. 1 Psychological adjustment mediates the relationship between paternal acceptance-rejection and fear of intimacy. Note that higher acceptance-rejection scores indicate greater rejection, and that higher psychological adjustment scores indicate greater maladjustment

$b = .46$, $SE = .12$, $t(99) = 3.85$, $p < .001$. Second, the meditational analyses indicated that maternal rejection predicted psychological maladjustment ($b = .56$, $SE = .10$, $t(99) = 5.61$, $p < .011$), and psychological maladjustment also significantly predicted fear of intimacy, $b = .48$, $SE = .11$, $t(98) = 4.31$, $p < .001$. Additionally, the indirect effect of maternal rejection on fear of intimacy through psychological adjustment was significant, $b = .27$, bootstrap $SE = .09$, 95% CI [.13, .48]. This suggests that as maternal rejection increases, psychological maladjustment increases, which in turn increases fear of intimacy. Like the results with fathers, in the presence of the mediator (psychological adjustment), the direct effect of maternal acceptance-rejection on fear of intimacy disappeared, $b = .19$, $SE = .13$, $t(99) = 1.51$, $p = .14$. The meditational model for mothers is shown in Fig. 2. The overall meditational model accounted for 27% of the variance in fear of intimacy scores, with the indirect effect accounting for 12% of the total variance accounted for in FOIS scores.

Discussion

We addressed three questions in our study: (a) Is the level of FOI (as measured by the IRAQ and FOIS) among adults (both men and women) significantly associated with adults' remembrances of parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance-rejection in childhood? (b) Does the level of adults' relationship anxiety and overall psychological maladjustment affect (e.g., mediate, moderate, or affect in some other way) relationships between remembrances of parental acceptance-rejection in childhood and FOI? (c) Is the pattern of relationships among IPARTheory variables, FOI (as measured by the IRAQ and the FOIS), and gender similar in the two different cultural contexts of the United States and Guatemala? Our questions were partially supported: aspects of IPARTheory were related to FOI, but only in the United States. In addition,

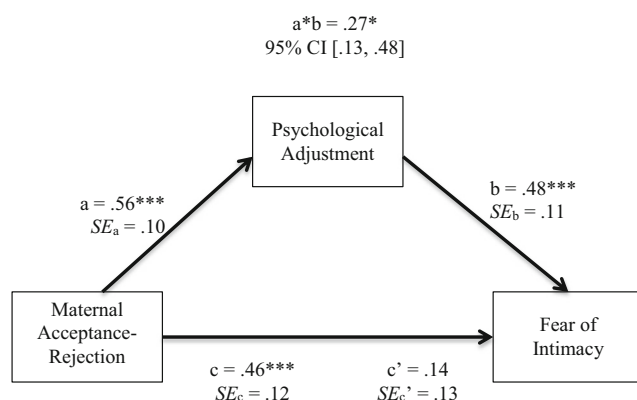


Fig. 2 Psychological adjustment mediates the relationship between maternal acceptance-rejection and fear of intimacy. Note that higher acceptance-rejection scores indicate greater rejection, and that higher psychological adjustment scores indicate greater maladjustment

psychological maladjustment mediated the relationships among parental rejection and FOI in the U.S.A. only, even though maladjustment correlated with maternal acceptance-rejection and paternal acceptance-rejection, as expected, in both the U.S. and Guatemala. This suggests that while parental rejection is associated with psychological maladjustment in both cultural contexts, the connection between parental acceptance-rejection and fear of intimacy seems to be less than universal—at least based on our current samples.

One possibility is that FOI, at least as measured for this study, is not defined or understood similarly in both cultural contexts, as evidenced by the low reliability for the IRAQ scale in the Guatemalan sample. Rohner et al., (2019) did find scalar equivalence for the IRAQ measure in a large multicultural sample that included a Guatemalan sample. The Guatemalan sample was quite small compared to the other samples in that study (and accounted for less than 3% of the total sample in Rohner and colleagues' study), though, and might not have had the statistical power to bring questions of equivalence to the surface. For example, the IRAQ might measure interpersonal relationship anxiety (IRA) rather than FOI, which is measured by the FOIS. IRA should be a construct theoretically related to FOI, but is only correlated with FOI among U.S. participants; however, scores on the IRAQ are correlated with maternal rejection in both samples (though not with paternal rejection). This suggests that IRA is related to parental (or, at least maternal) rejection in accordance with IPARTheory's predictions in both cultural contexts—but because IRA (measured by the IRAQ) and FOI (measured by the FOIS) are only correlated in the U.S. and not Guatemala, it is possible that FOI does not function in the same way in both cultures. Future research should focus on identifying and defining culturally-specific ways of measuring and understanding fear of intimacy.

While not a central focus of the current study, it is interesting to note the differences in parental acceptance-rejection in the U.S. and Guatemala. For example, Guatemalan participants reported more rejection from their fathers and their mothers than did U.S. participants. So, while parental acceptance-rejection was related to psychological maladjustment in both samples as hypothesized by IPARTheory, Guatemalans experienced more rejection, but not more maladjustment. It is difficult to understand this pattern of relationships utilizing the framework of IPARTheory; however, it is possible that the parenting practices measured in the IPARTheory scales have different cultural valences and outcomes in the two samples. For example, based on parenting practices within each culture—which Ashdown and Faherty (2020) argue are always engaged in by parents with the goal of leading to culturally-valued outcomes in their children—perhaps the culturally-valued and culturally-specific outcomes of accepting or rejecting parental behavior are more or less extreme in these different cultural samples. Further, since

parenting practices are a form of cultural practices, it is possible that both cultures have different expectations about the level of acceptance necessary, which both directly lead to psychological well-being in each culture respectively. Future research should explore why Guatemalans perceive more rejection from their parents, and why this does not seem to have a proportional influence on their maladjustment as IPARTheory would suggest it should.

While past research has found that parental acceptance-rejection in Guatemala tends to follow the general expectations of IPARTheory (e.g., greater rejection correlating with greater psychological maladjustment), there is evidence from the current study as well as some previous studies (e.g., Faherty et al. 2016) that the correlations and predictions posited by IPARTheory are not as strong or robust in data from Guatemalan samples as in other cultures. This could be due to unique cultural beliefs about parenting (Ashdown and Faherty 2020) and psychological adjustment in Guatemala. It could also be an example of a quantitative, but not a qualitative, difference. The fact that the tenets of IPARTheory hold together in a general way in Guatemala might be more meaningful than any statistical differences in the size of correlations or other types of analysis. Exploring this issue would make for interesting future research.

We found that IPARTheory constructs predicted fear of intimacy (FOI) for U.S. participants but not Guatemalan participants. The mediation models we conducted indicate that perceived rejection from mothers and from fathers indirectly leads to greater FOIS scores via greater psychological maladjustment among U.S. participants. In other words, as parental rejection leads to increases in psychological maladjustment, that maladjustment leads to increases in an individual's FOI. This fits with the theoretical claims of IPARTheory and the acceptance-rejection syndrome—that as people experience greater rejection from parents, they will experience other long-term consequences, particularly in their own psychological adjustment and future relationships.

As with all research, there are some limitations to our study. Although our survey was carefully translated into Spanish, it was not subjected to a strict or formal back-translation process. Instead, measures that had been back-translated into Peruvian-appropriate Spanish were adjusted to be appropriate for Guatemalan Spanish by a bilingual Spanish/English speaker who had spent significant time in both Peru and Guatemala. This was then checked for accuracy by another bilingual Spanish/English speaker. In addition, Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory rests on the importance of individuals' perception of acceptance or rejection. Therefore, participants' reports of acceptance and rejection are subjective and should always be interpreted with that in mind.

While we have sufficient sample sizes from each sample (and overall) for our analyses, we have compared two different groups based on relatively few variables. The sizes of each

sample did not allow us to conduct a factor analysis on the variables, which will be important for future researchers to consider. Caution is necessary when interpreting these results, as there is still a large amount of variance left unexplained when predicting fear of intimacy—even in the U.S., where the predictive model was significant. It is also important to note that we did not include a culture-level variable in this study because our goal was to simply explore these variables in two different cultural contexts. So, while we can document and postulate about differences between these two cultural groups, we cannot unpackage this finding or explain why the cultural difference exists (Bond and van de Vijver 2011). This seems to be a logical and important next step for future research.

Even with these limitations, the current study contributes to the literature by providing evidence that perceived maternal rejection is related to interpersonal relationship anxiety in samples from both the United States and Guatemala, and that both maternal and paternal rejection are related to fear of intimacy in the U.S. sample. It is vital that parents, as well as clinicians, understand that the way that parents interact with their children can have lifelong consequences. Based on our findings, it is also important that parents recognize that ensuring their children feel warmth and acceptance while young may influence the quality of their interpersonal relationships and intimacy later in life.

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