# INTERPERSONAL ACCEPTANCE



## Inside This Issue

The 5th International Congress on Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection was held June 24-27, 2014 at the Free International University of Moldova (ULIM) in Chisinau, Moldova. The Congress has been convened by the International Society for Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection (ISIPAR) every two years in different locations around the world.

The Moldova ISIPAR Congress was an event of significant academic magnitude and importance to the international community of scholars and the Republic of Moldova. The Congress provided this diverse body of scholars with an excellent venue for presenting the cutting-edge research related to the impact of child rearing on personality



The Congress focused on nine primary themes, supported by presentations from academics and professionals from 19 different countries. Presenters came to the Congress at ULIM from regional and European universities such as Masaryk University, Saratov Gagarin State Technical University, Yuri GUniversity of Ionnianagarin State Technical University of Saratov, Bogazici University, Bar Ilan University, i, Netanya University, and Bar-Ilan University; from universities from the United States and Canada including CUNY York College, University of Connecticut, Marymount University, University of Tulane, and Pennsylvania State University, and University of Ottowa; and from Moldovan universities including ULIM, Medical University, Moldova State University, and State Pedagogical University "Ion Creanga".

Moldova benefited from the presence of renowned scholars on its soil, an opportunity to enrich local academic life with the guests from many other countries, and the prospects of implementing scientific findings into clinical and social practices. Topics for these presentations included:

1.	Parental acceptance-rejection theory, including the known and expected consequences of perceived interpersonal acceptance-rejection.

2.	Psychological and behavioral adjustment of children and adults resulting from perceived acceptance-rejection.

3.	Consequences of interpersonal acceptance-rejection in family interactions, including mother-child and father-child relations, as well as relations between husbands and wives, and brothers and sisters.

4.	Intimate partner violence and and other forms of acceptance-rejection between girlfriends and boyfriends, husbands and wives, and in different ethnic groups internationally.



5.	Resilience and coping with rejection.

6.	Methodological issues in the scientific study of interpersonal acceptance-rejection.

7.	Children's perceptions of teacher acceptance-rejection in schools, and other academic issues.

8.	Implications of interpersonal acceptance-rejection for the development of serious psychiatric illness.

9.	Gender (sex) differences in the experience of interpersonal acceptance-rejection—for example the effects of mothers' versus fathers' accepting-rejecting behaviors on sons versus daughters.

The Congress participants were moved and inspired by the warmth, hospitality, and efficiency of their Moldovan hosts. This momentous academic event will be followed up by further collaborative projects and exchanges in Moldova and beyond.

It was also announced that the site for the 6th ISIPAR Congress will be held in Madrid, Spain in 2016.

The mission of ISIPAR is to support and encourage research and practice related to issues of interpersonal acceptance and rejection, including but not limited to parental acceptance-rejection, peer acceptance-rejection, acceptance-rejection in intimate adult relationships, and acceptance-rejection in other attachment relationships throughout the life span. Visit www.isipar.org for more details and to become a member of this international organization.

In conjunction with ULIM, this Congress was produced by Project Casa Mare, a Moldovan NGO focusing on professionalizing workers and students who service clients in social and mental health fields. Visit www.projectcasamare.org for more information.
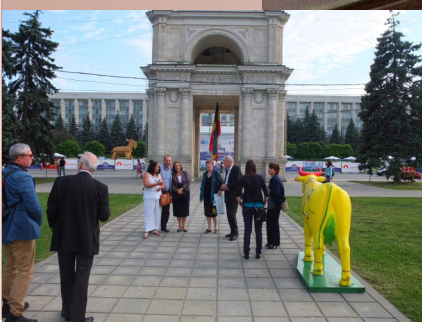
# A First-Timer's Impression of the 5th International Congress on Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection

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My emotional experience from attending the 5th *International Congress on Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection* for the first time felt like a scholarly homecoming. The conference was held in Chisinau, Moldova, a location far from my home in New Orleans, Louisiana. Having traveled to other countries in the past I was surprised at my initial trepidation. Though the conference organizers had assured all participants of our safety despite nearby political conflict in the Ukraine, I was still worried about safety. The opening session of the Congress allayed any worries I had.

The warm welcome from local officials—translated into English for all participants—made it clear that the country of Moldova felt honored to host such an important conference. The continued positive remarks by local and state officials underscored another observation—the prescient vision of this conference. Having the courage to locate the conference in a country and city not part of the traditional luxury-vacation locales emphasized ISIPAR's commitment to under-represented countries. Sitting among the international audience of diverse scholars, my headphones magically translating the words of the speakers into English, was a transformative experience. For the first time in my scholarly life I felt like a member of a committed, global, multicultural, multilingual and scholarly community.

To have a room full of international scholars devoted to parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory) affirmed my initial attraction to the theory, a theory that I have used since the completion of my doctoral dissertation in 1993. My first exposure to Rohner's PARTheory laid out in his 1986 book, '*The Warmth Dimension'* led to my development of a parallel theory and associated measure related to childhood experiences of *racial* acceptance and rejection. It was professionally and personally gratifying to have participants from all over the world resonate to the findings of my program of research.

There were many issues that impressed me at the Congress. One was the depth of scholarship represented in the wide variety and applications of PARTheory. As I listened and furiously jotted down notes I marveled at the creative and thoughtful ways this theory is being applied. High standards of scholarship were evident in the quality of papers presented, as were the thoughtful and respectful comments offered from the audience.

I was especially impressed with the eagerness and enthusiasm of our student hosts! This cadre of young scholars was able to address every question and need. What was most impressive, however, was the clear warmth and camaraderie of returning participants. Spontaneous laughter, lively discussions, and smiling faces underscored the feeling I gained from my first-time attendance of this conference—an experience of global respect and interpersonal acceptance.

# PARTheory Gets a New Name:

## Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory)

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From this time forward, parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory) should be known as **interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory (IPARTheory)**. The name change recognizes the fact that PARTheory has been transitioning since 1999 from its long-term and initial focus on parental acceptance-rejection to issues of acceptance-rejection in all important classes of interpersonal relationships throughout the life span.

Before changing its name, I waited until a solid body of evidence had accumulated supporting the theory's basic postulates that children and adults in many classes of relationships other than parent-child relationships understand themselves to be cared about (i.e., accepted or rejected) in the same ways that children do in parent-child relationships, and that individuals in these relationships tend to respond to perceptions of acceptance-rejection in the same ways that children do when they perceive themselves to be accepted or rejected by their parents. I did this in recognition of the fact that PARTheory (now IPARTheory) is an evidence-based theory. That body of evidence is now available (see for example Rohner, Khaleque, and Cournoyer, 2012). I should note here, however, that little in the theory and body of evidence supporting it changes as a result of this name change. The name-change simply recognizes the fact the theory has evolved into a life span perspective pertinent to all important classes of interpersonal relationships throughout life (in effect it is a womb to tomb perspective).

For several years I have been considering making this name change but didn't do it because I thought the acronym that seemed to flow most naturally from the term "interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory" (i.e., IARTheory) would be confusing. Researchers and practitioners worldwide who are familiar with the acronym PARTheory would not know that IARTheory is really PARTheory under a new name. I mentioned this in one of my presentations on June 25, 2014 at the ISIPAR conference in Chisinau, Moldova. At that point Parminder Parmar spoke up and suggested that we rename the theory IPARTheory. The acronym IPARTheory sounds and looks a great deal like its parent acronym PARTheory, so it seemed unlikely to cause significant confusion for those people who are accustomed to seeing and using the term PARTheory. There appeared to be general agreement in the audience with Parminder's suggestion. So, at that moment an old theory was reborn with a new name.

I request that from this time forward, those of you who draw from PARTheory and associated measures refer to IPARTheory, probably with a caveat such as "(formerly known as PARTheory)". In this way you make it clear to your reader that you are working from a widely-known theory under a new name.

**Reference**

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## Review of *Parental Alienation: The Handbook for Legal and Mental Health Professionals*

### Coping with Parental Alienation

The basic parental alienation (PA) scenario is a common one in family courts throughout the world, and it is likely to be familiar to many readers of *Interpersonal Acceptance*. Two parents become involved in a high-conflict separation or divorce. The family separates. One parent has primary custody of a young child. The child, who was close to both parents prior to the parental conflict, begins to express hatred, fear, or contempt for one parent—the target parent—who is almost always the noncustodial parent. The child may refuse visitation with the target parent. If this is a case of PA then, by definition, there is no legitimate justification for the child's rejection of the formerly beloved target parent. Instead, the rejection is the direct result of the intentional or unintentional actions and statements of the parent with whom the child is aligned, often referred to as the alienating parent.

The alienating parent may believe, and attempt to convince anyone who will listen, that there is good reason for the child's rejection of the target parent that has nothing to do with the alienating parent's behavior. The alienating parent's weapon in these cases is often an allegation of child sexual abuse. Allegations of sexual abuse are usually impossible to conclusively disprove, and no matter how unlikely they are they often lead "cautious" judges to immediately impose temporary supervised visitation on the targeted parent. *Cautious* is in quotes because the indiscriminate imposition of supervised visitation in response to dubious allegations of abuse is actually anything but cautious. It represents a serious danger to the long term well-being of the child if the allegation is false. Imposing supervised visitation when sexual abuse is alleged in the context of PA is usually the beginning of the end of the relationship between the targeted parent and the child. Once an order for supervised visitation is imposed, the alienating parent and the alienating attorney can sit back and wait for time to complete the job that they have started—the destruction of the

child's relationship with the target parent. If the allegation is false, and the target parent has minimal contact with the alienated child, it is very unlikely that any new evidence will emerge. After enduring supervised visitation for months or years, the targeted parent will often give up on having any relationship with the child, sometimes under the threat of criminal prosecution should he or she insist on pursuing visitation or custody.

When judges and other legal and mental health professionals fail to recognize cases of PA for what they are, the consequences can be tragic. Alienated children risk the permanent loss of a loving parent. Targeted parents can lose their children forever. If false allegations of sexual abuse lead to a wrongful criminal conviction, targeted parents can also lose their reputation, money, career, psychological and physical well-being, and even their freedom.

To help prevent or mitigate catastrophic outcomes, legal and mental health professionals need to be able to recognize and respond effectively to cases of PA. *Parental Alienation: The Handbook for Legal and Mental Health Professionals* (Lorandos, Bernet, & Sauber, 2013) can help with this task. This text is an invaluable, comprehensive, up-to-date resource for professionals—custody evaluators, attorneys, and judges—who must cope with cases of PA. The editors and contributors to this text include the world's foremost authorities on PA.

The book is divided into two sections. The first section, *"Strategies for Legal and Mental Health Professionals"* focused on helping professionals recognize and respond to cases of PA. The first step is to determine whether or not a child's rejection of a parent is due to PA or to other causes. In Chapter 2, Bernet and Freeman described some of the many possible reasons that a child might reject or refuse contact with a parent. For example, a child might reject a parent for legitimate reasons such as maltreatment. Bernet described eight possible explanations for children's rejection of a parent, of which PA is only one.

Chapters by Darnell, Worenklein, and Warshak described differences among mild, moderate, and severe cases of PA, and how legal and therapeutic responses to PA need to take severity into account. Campbell's chapter addressed the problem of sexual abuse allegations that arise in the context of custody disputes. Although some children who make false reports of sexual abuse are deliberately indoctrinated by malicious parents, the more common scenario is the one described by Campbell in a case that shows how false allegations of sexual abuse can arise as the unintentional result of parents' mutual hatred, blame, and paranoia—without any deliberate attempt to coach a child to lie. Campbell provided guidelines for assessing allegations of sexual abuse, and for distinguishing between true and false allegations of sexual abuse. Some of these guidelines are obvious. For example, allegations are likely to be false when a parent makes sexual abuse allegations only after prior unsuccessful attempts to gain sole custody, or to harm the other parent. Other suggested approaches to assessing the validity of sexual abuse allegations are more technical, for example, using the MMPI-2 to determine if a parent is at risk for making false allegations.

Sauber, in a comprehensive chapter entitled "Reunification Planning and Therapy," described how mental health professionals can assist the courts in crafting plans for custody and visitation, and provide reunification psychotherapy to the victims of PA (including the alienating parent).

Finally, when all else fails, the burden falls to the targeted parent's attorney to protect the targeted parent and the alienated child in court. The last two chapters in the first section, by Lorandos and Barden, who are both psychologist-attorneys and prolific legal and scientific scholars, succinctly described strategies for the successful litigation of PA cases.

The second section of the book described the history, law, and science of PA. The term *parental alienation* is relatively new, but the phenomenon is not—as Rand noted in a fascinating chapter on the history of the phenomenon. She described an 1818 divorce between the Marquess and Marchioness of Westmeath in which the child told the target parent—the Marchioness—that "Papa and Duke of Buckingham have pointed out what sort of woman you was [sic]. I never wish to see your face again." Even highly intelligent people can become victims of PA. Rand describes the case of one Albert Einstein who, during an acrimonious divorce, accused his former wife of "poisoning" his children against him.

In the second chapter of the second section, Baker—who has conducted important empirical studies of PA—described how to evaluate empirical research and how to scientifically defend the concept of PA from attacks by alienating attorneys.  Lorandos provided an impressive review of 60 PA disputes that reached the Canadian or American appellate courts. These 60 case histories from appellate court decisions illustrate the enormous financial and psychological costs that can result when PA is not quickly recognized and dealt with by the courts. Lorandos also provided examples of PA cases that do not fit the scenario described at the beginning of this review. For example, in *In re M.K.T*, the alienators were child protection caseworkers and a foster parent, rather than a divorcing parent. *In re M.K.T* also illustrates the costs in time, money, and apparently suffering, that PA cases can cause.

Dum and Brockhausen provide international perspectives on PA. Laws against PA have been promulgated in several countries, most notably in Brazil. As Brockhausen observed, Brazil was the first country to adopt national legislation (in 2010) to address the problem of PA. Several jurisdictions in Mexico have also passed legislation addressing PA.

In the next chapter, Bernet described his attempt to have PA included as a diagnosis in the DSM-5. Although PA was not included there, language that *was* included can be used to address PA in the form of a clinical diagnosis. For example, the description of the diagnosis "parent-child relational problem" includes the following example: "Cognitive problems may include negative attributions of the other's intentions, hostility toward or scapegoating of the other, and unwarranted feelings of estrangement. Affective problems may include feelings of sadness, apathy, or anger about the other individual in the relationship." Bernet also described how other DSM-5 diagnoses could be used by clinicians in PA cases.

The last chapter was written by Lowrance, a Chicago Domestic Relations Court judge, and author of two books related to PA. She provided specific suggestions for judges on how to craft effective custody plans and interim orders in PA cases. She addressed common judicial misconceptions such as "PA is not in the DSM-5, so it cannot be real." Another problem she discussed is the serious potential for harm to the child when judges use supervised visitation in order to appease an anxious, alienating parent.

A CD included with the text contains a *Supplemental Reference Guide for Parental Alienation.* The CD includes Word files containing motion templates for use in the litigation of PA cases, as well a bibliography of scientific publications related to PA, and an index to representative North American appellate court cases. The authors promised to update the *Supplemental Reference* every few years.

In summary, *Parental Alienation: The Handbook for Legal and Mental Health Professionals* is the most useful, up-to-date, guide to coping with cases of PA. It describes in detail how to assess cases in order to determine whether PA is likely, or whether something else is responsible for a child's rejection of a parent. The book provides valuable suggestions for psychotherapists about how to effectively help alienated children and their parents. This book should be required reading for every custody evaluator, family psychotherapist, domestic law attorney, and family court judge.

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# Continuing Exploration of Factors Associated with Children's Acceptance or Rejection of Hypothetical Peers with Undesirable Characteristics

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In the initial summary of our research for this newsletter (Barnett, Sonnentag, & Wadian, 2012), we described findings from three studies (Barnett, Livengood, Sonnentag, Barlett, & Witham, 2010; Barnett, Sonnentag, Livengood, Struble, & Wadian, 2011; Sonnentag, Barlett, Livengood, Barnett, & Witham, 2009) that examined children's perceptions of and anticipated responses to hypothetical peers with various undesirable characteristics (i.e., being a poor student, a poor athlete, extremely overweight, extremely aggressive, extremely shy, or having the symptoms of ADHD). The review highlighted the role of various factors in children's anticipated response to peers with an undesirable characteristic including (a) the specific type of undesirable characteristic, (b) the children's attribution of fault to the peer for having an undesirable characteristic, (c) the children's gender, (d) the peer's reported desire, effort, and success in changing his or her undesirable characteristic, (e) and the children's perceived similarity to the peer. The purpose of this review is to provide a brief update of some of the findings that have emerged from our recent studies involving participants ranging in age from 7 tthrough 14 years.

**General, Onset, and Perpetuation Fault Attributions.** As described in our initial newsletter summary, our research has demonstrated that the more children attribute fault to a peer for his or her undesirable characteristic, the less favorably they typically anticipate responding to that peer (Barnett et al., 2011; Sonnentag et al., 2009). In an extension of this research, we recently conducted two studies to examine the extent to which children's rejection of peers with various undesirable characteristics is associated with more subtle fault attributions concerning whether the peers are (a) generally responsible for their undesirable characteristic, (b) responsible for the onset of their undesirable characteristic, or (c) responsible for the perpetuation of their undesirable characteristic (Barnett, Wadian, Sonnentag, & Nichols, in press). Results indicated that the children agreed more strongly that the peers were responsible for the perpetuation than the onset of their undesirable characteristics (Studies 1 and 2). Furthermore, the more strongly the children agreed that (a) an aggressive peer is generally at fault for his/her undesirable characteristic (Study 1) and (b) peers who are aggressive, overweight, shy, or a poor student are

at fault for the onset of their undesirable characteristics (Study 2), the less favorably they anticipated responding to these peers. These findings are consistent with attribution theory and research (e.g., Weiner, 1986, 1995) suggesting that an individual who is perceived as personally responsible for an undesirable personal circumstance or condition tends to be devalued and treated relatively harshly. However, contrary to our expectation, attributing responsibility to forces "outside the peer's control" (i.e., parents, biology) for his/her undesirable characteristic was not found to be associated with a relatively favorable response to any peer with an undesirable characteristic (Study 2).

**Desire/Source of Effort/Outcome.** In a prior investigation (Barnett et al., 2010), we explored the extent to which children's anticipated responses to hypothetical peers with undesirable characteristics are influenced by information that each peer (a) desired (or did not desire) to change the characteristic, (b) exerted effort (or did not exert effort) to change the characteristic, and (c) was successful (or unsuccessful) in changing the characteristic. In general, children anticipated responding more favorably to peers who were successful in overcoming an undesirable characteristic than those who were unsuccessful. However, across both outcome conditions, peers who wanted to change and exerted effort to change were rated more favorably than were peers who reported no effort to change an undesirable characteristic, regardless of whether they had (or had not) expressed a desire to change that characteristic. Therefore, a peer's effort to change an undesirable characteristic was found to be especially important in children's anticipated reactions to that peer.

In a recent follow-up to this study (Barnett, Sonnentag, Wadian, Jones, & Langley, manuscript under review), we explored a question that was left unanswered by the previous investigation: How will children perceive peers with undesirable characteristics whose effort to change is not self-motivated, but motivated by an adult authority (i.e., a parent, teacher, or doctor)? Specifically, we explored the extent to which children's perceptions of hypothetical peers with various undesirable characteristics are influenced by information that each peer (a) desired (or did not desire) to change the characteristic, (b) was self-motivated (or other-motivated) to change the characteristic, and (c) was successful (or unsuccessful) in changing the characteristic. Once again, our results indicated that the children anticipated responding more favorably to peers who were successful in overcoming an undesirable characteristic than peers who were unsuccessful. Regardless of the peers' outcome, the children anticipated responding more favorably to peers who tried to change than peers who relied on the effort of adult authorities to motivate change. Furthermore, children perceived successful peers as experiencing more positive affect than their unsuccessful counterparts, especially if the success was presented as a fulfillment of the peers' desire to change their undesirable characteristic. Finally, the children's ratings reflected the belief that, among peers who failed to change their undesirable characteristic, lacking the desire to change increases the relative likelihood that the characteristic would be permanent.

Fostering Acceptance Through Storybooks. Beyond exploring various factors that are associated with children's acceptance or rejection of peers with various undesirable

characteristics, we have begun a new line of research investigating whether storybooks can be used to mitigate young children's rejection of peers with undesirable characteristics. In our first study (Wadian, Barnett, & Sonnentag, 2013), second- through fourth-grade students were read a storybook that described a relatively popular boy who interacted with a stigmatized (i.e., effeminate or obese) boy. As predicted, the children's anticipated responses to both stigmatized storybook characters (and, especially, the obese storybook character) became more favorable after the relatively popular storybook character was described as having associated with him.

In a recent follow-up to this study (Wadian, Barnett, & Sonnentag, manuscript in preparation), we read third- and fourth-grade students a storybook describing an average weight boy interacting with an obese boy. As in our prior study (Wadian et al., 2013), children's attitudes toward the obese storybook character were assessed before and after the other boy interacted with him in the story. Also included in this study was an index of the extent to which children could identify with the storybook character who interacted with the obese storybook character. As an extension of our prior study (Wadian et al., 2013), the children were asked to complete a measure assessing their general attitudes toward obese peers before, and one week after, being read the storybook. The results concerning the children's attitudes toward the obese storybook character were consistent with those found in our prior study (Wadian et al., 2013). Furthermore, the more strongly children could identify with the storybook character who interacted with the obese storybook character, the more improvement children displayed in (a) their attitude toward the obese storybook character immediately after being read the storybook, and (b) their general attitude toward obese peers one week after being read the storybook. The "destigmatization by association" (Neuberg, Smith, Hoffman, & Russell, 1994) findings in these studies are consistent with research suggesting that storybooks depicting instances of positive contact between identifiable in-group and out-group members may enhance some child-readers' evaluation of peers who are members of the stigmatized out-group (Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Slone, Tarrasch, & Hallis, 2000; Vezzali, Stathi, & Giovannini, 2011).

**Conclusion.** In sum, our recent research has continued to explore factors that are associated with children's anticipated responses to hypothetical peers with various undesirable characteristics. The research has provided support for the use of storybooks depicting positive instances of interpersonal contact to mitigate young children's negative attitudes toward peers with undesirable characteristics. Our future research, conducted in more naturalistic settings, will continue to examine (a) the factors that influence children's rejection of peers with various undesirable characteristics and (b) the efficacy of various intervention strategies that could potentially enhance children's acceptance of such peers.

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# ANNOUCEMENTS



6TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON INTERPERSONAL ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION

MADRID, SPAIN

JUNE 2016

## DETAILS FORTHCOMING

For further information or to volunteer, contact Miguel Ángel Carrasco (macarrasco@psi.uned.es), Chair of the local organizing committee

# CENTRAL AND SOUTH AFRICAN REGIONAL COMMITTEE FORMED

Oladimeji "Deji" Ogundipe (globaldon1@ymail.com), Chair of the newly formed Central and South African Regional Committee, is the International Society for Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection Regional Representative for Central and South Africa. The objective of the Committee is to draw the attention of interested individuals and groups in the region to participate in the mission of ISIPAR on a regional basis. Deji gathered a group of scholars in early July to create a work plan. The group now has a Facebook presence, and interest is being generated to acquire members in the Society and attract research and clinical applications in this region of Africa.

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# *ISIPAR'S MISSION:*

*Change the world...*

*by caring*

*by affection*

*by acceptance*

*R. P. Rohner 7/10/14*

# THE ROHNER CENTER WELCOMES TWO NEW POST DOCS

The Rohner Center has two visiting scholars from Turkey working with us this year.

**Behire Kuyumcu,** Ph.D., is a psychological counselor in Psychological Services in the Guidance and Counseling Psychology Department at Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey. She will continue her study of the "Relationship Between Partner Acceptance-Rejection, Dyadic Coping, And Marital Satisfaction" during her year with the Rohner Center.

**Nilgün Ongider**, Ph.D., is a Clinical Psychologist at the P.S. Yasam Private Family Counseling Center, Izmir, Turkey. She is collaborating with Prof. William Bernet, Department of Psychiatry, Vanderbilt University, and the Rohner Center in her study entitled "Perceived Parental Rejection and Children's Psychological Adjustment in the Context of Parental Alienation: A Bicultural Comparison."