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Biculturalism and Parental Acceptance and Rejection



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Biculturalism is an acculturation process through which individuals change their unicultural identity as a result of contact with members of other culture(s). Some earlier researchers viewed biculturalism as a unidirectional process involving acquisition of the new cultural values through interaction with members the host culture(s), and loss of the old (culture of origin) cultural values (Gordon, 1964). But current proponents of the bicultural perspective view acculturation as a combination of both old and new cultural values in which almost every aspect of behavior could change, including dress patterns, food habits, language, and others (Berry, 2005; Oetting & Beauvais, 1990). Given the global trend of increasing mobility and diversity, a growing number of people are becoming either bicultural or multicultural. Russell and Teitelbaum's (1992) study, for example, showed that more than 100 million people live outside their country of origin. A large number of U.S. born second- or third- generation descendants are going through the process of biculturalism as they adapt to mainstream American culture, along with their own ethnic culture (Khaleque, Rohner, Nahar, & Sharif, 2008).

A number of researchers have emphasized the importance of biculturalism and multiculturalism for understanding developmental issues, including parent-child relationships (Benet-Martinez, Lee, & Leu, 2006) and mental health-related problems (Sorenson & Golding, 1988). Until recently, however, little work has been done on the relationship between biculturalism, parental acceptance-rejection, personality... **Continued on Page 2**

The Cognitive and Neurobiological Scars of Childhood Emotional Maltreatment

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"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." This often-used aphorism displays the misconception that the general public may have about the possible impact of emotional maltreatment. Here, I would like to discuss studies that our lab has performed over the past three years concerning the long-term negative impact of childhood emotional maltreatment on cognition and the brain.

Impact of Childhood Emotional Maltreatment on Cognition

One in ten children growing up in Western societies experience childhood emotional maltreatment (Gilbert, et al., 2009). Emotional maltreatment encompasses any act of commission (e.g., verbal abuse) or omission (e.g., emotional neglect) that is potentially harmful or insensitive to the child's emotional development (Egeland, 2009; Gilbert, et al., 2009).

It is well established that childhood emotional maltreatment has a profound and enduring negative impact on behavioural, emotional, and social functioning (Egeland, 2009; Gilbert, et al., 2009; Rohner, 2004). For instance, during emotionally abusive episodes negative self-associations are explicitly handed to the child (for example "You are such a stupid child. You are worthless;" see Rose, 1992). Thereafter, these children may incorporate these negative cognitions into negative self-inferential styles, dysfunctional self-attitudes, and low self-worth (Beck, 2008; Rohner, 2004). This has been corroborated by an abundance of studies showing a link between emotional maltreatment and these negative self-associations (Alloy, Abramson, Smith, Gibb, & Neeren, 2006; Gibb, 2002). Recently, we found that negative self-associations develop not only when they are explicitly directed toward the child during emotionally abusive episodes, but they also seem to develop in the context of emotional neglect, where the meaning is mostly suggested rather than explicitly stated (e.g., "I am a worthless child, because mommy doesn't give me any attention;" van Harmelen, de Jong, et al., 2010). Furthermore, we found that in both patients and healthy controls, emotional maltreatment is related to negative self-associations on an

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Biculturalism and Parental Acceptance and Rejection

development, and psychological adjustment among ethnic minorities in the United States or internationally (Kim, Han, & McCubbin, 2007). One such study was done on Bangladeshi American parents. Results of this work showed that significantly more mothers than fathers were uniculturally (i.e., Bangladeshi) oriented, and that children perceived biculturally oriented parents—especially mothers—to be more loving and less controlling than the uniculturally oriented parents (Khaleque, Rohner, Nahar, & Sharif, 2008). Another study on Korean American mothers and children showed that low maternal American orientation was significantly related to children's perception of low maternal acceptance (Kim, & McCubbin, 2006).

Lack of any standardized and globally applicable bicultural measure may be one reason for the fact that few empirical studies have been completed on this phenomenon. J.W. Berry (personal communication, September 2, 2003), though, noted that all acculturation studies need a culturally appropriate instrument because the issues that arise during intercultural contact and acculturation vary from one situation to another. To address this problem, I attempted to develop a standardized bicultural attitude scale (Khaleque, 2006, 2008) that can be used globally. This measure is discussed next.

Bicultural Attitude Scales for Parents and Children

The Bicultural Attitude Scale (BAS) is a self-report instrument designed to measure individuals' bicultural orientations or attitudes (Khaleque, 2006, 2008). The scale was developed on the basis of items taken from the content of focus group discussions on biculturalism (Cortes, Rogler, & Malgady, 1994). The BAS has two versions: (1) The Bicultural Attitude Scale for Parents (Appendix A), and (2) The Bicultural Attitude Scale for Children (Appendix B). The original Bicultural Attitude Scales were developed in 2006, but they were revised in 2011. Both versions of the original BAS consisted of six items. The two versions were almost identical except for minor differences in wording. Each revised version consists of 12 items. Similarly, the two versions of the revised BAS are almost identical except for minor differences in wording. In both versions individuals respond to items on a four-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "not at all" to (4) "very much". Both versions are conceptually designed in such a way that a high score on the cultural values of the *country of origin* (i.e., scores at or above the midpoint of the scale) and a low score on the cultural values of the *host country* (i.e., scores below the midpoint of the scale) indicate a unicultural orientation favoring the country of origin. The opposite is also true. That is, a high score on the cultural values of the host country and a low score on the country of origin also indicates a uni-

cultural orientation. But in this case it favors the host country. On the other hand, a high score on the cultural values of both countries indicates a bicultural orientation.

To assess the reliability and validity of the original parent version of the BAS, data were collected from a sample of 66 Bangladeshi immigrant parents (33 mothers and 33 fathers) in the United States. The results of analyses showed an alpha coefficient of .80 for the scale. Preliminary evidence about the validity of the scale comes from the factor analysis of the instrument. An initial exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the ratings of respondents. Items were subjected to a principal components analysis that yielded two factors with eigenvalues exceeding unity. The two factors were rotated using an oblique rotation (direct oblimin) procedure. The rotated solution yielded two interpretable factors, namely, an orientation toward the culture of origin (Factor 1) and an orientation toward the host culture (Factor 2). Factor 1 accounted for 28% of the item variance for mothers, and 26% of the item variance for fathers. On the other hand, Factor 2 accounted for 44% of the item variance for the mothers, and 41% of the item variance for fathers. Thus the two factors together explained about 72% of the variance in mothers' cultural orientations and about 67% of the variance in fathers' cultural orientations. Results also showed that the 3 items pertaining to the cultural orientation toward the country of origin loaded highly on Factor 1 both for mothers (from .70 to .85) and for fathers (from .62 to .85). Similarly, the 3 items relating to the cultural orientation toward the host country loaded highly on Factor 2 both for mothers (from .82 to .93) and for fathers (from .72 to .96).

Although preliminary evidence reported in this paper and elsewhere (Khaleque, 2008; Khaleque, Rohner, Nahar, & Sharif, 2008) indicates high reliability and validity of the original Bicultural Attitude Scale for parents, it is based on a single study with a small sample. More studies with larger samples in different countries are needed to be confident about the psychometric properties of the scale for global applicability. Moreover, evidence about the reliability and validity of the original child version of the BAS has yet to be reported, even though the original versions of the measure for parents and children were translated into Italian and used in a study on Italian immigrant populations (Podio-Guidugli, 2010). Moreover, the revised versions of the BAS for both parents and children have been translated into Urdu for measuring biculturalism among Pakistani American parents and children (Malik, 2011). Evidence about the reliability and validity of the newly revised measure will be reported when it becomes available.

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Appendix A

Bicultural Attitude Scale for Parents (Revised)

Instructions: Please indicate your opinions by circling any one of the four response options for each question. ["Host country" means the country where you currently live and "country of origin" means the country from which you and your family originated].

1. To what extent are values of your host country a part of your life?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
2. How important is it to you to celebrate holidays in the way of your host country?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
3. How important is it to you to raise your children with values of your host country?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
4. How important is it to you to speak in the language of your host country?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
5. How important is it to you to wear the dress of your host country?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
6. To what extent do you enjoy eating food of your host country?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
7. To what extent are values of your country of origin a part of your life?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
8. How important is it to you to celebrate holidays in the way of your country of origin?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
9. How important is it to you to raise your children with values of your country of origin?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
10. How important is it to you to speak in the language of your country of origin?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
11. How important is it to you to wear the dress of your country of origin?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
12. To what extent do you enjoy eating food of your country of origin?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)

Appendix B

Bicultural Attitude Scale for Children (Revised)

Instructions: Please indicate your opinions by circling any one of the four response options for each question. ["Host country" means the country where you currently live and "country of origin" means the country from which you and your family originated].

1. To what extent are values of your host country a part of your life?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
2. How important is it to you to celebrate holidays in the way of your host country?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
3. How important is it to you to grow up with values of your host country?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
4. How important is it to you to speak in the language of your host country?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
5. How important is it to you to wear the dress of your host country?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
6. To what extent do you enjoy eating food of your host country?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
7. To what extent are values of your country of origin a part of your life?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
8. How important is it to you to celebrate holidays in the way of your country of origin?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
9. How important is it to you to grow up with values of your country of origin?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
10. How important is it to you to speak in the language of your country of origin?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
11. How important is it to you to wear the dress of your country of origin?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)
12. To what extent do you enjoy eating food of your country of origin?
Not at all (1) A little (2) Somewhat (3) Very much (4)

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explicit level as well as on a more automatic or implicit level. This is of interest because automatic associations (e.g., “I - worthless”) are thought to be spontaneous and unintentional, and become activated directly in response to certain stimuli or events (e.g., being yelled at). Therefore, automatic associations are hypothesized to play an important role in automatic affective behavior such as crying (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Gawronski, Hofmann, & Wilbur, 2006; Haefel, et al., 2007).

Negative automatic and explicit self-associations might enhance negative biases when engaged in new situations, and when retrieving memories. Therefore, emotionally maltreated individuals may get caught in a negative loop where the maltreatment may enhance negative biases, resulting in more frequent and more intense negative experiences. This in its turn may enhance negative self-associations. And this may then predispose emotionally maltreated individuals to develop or maintain a mood /or anxiety disorder (Beck, 2008). Consistent with this hypothesis, we found that both automatic and explicit negative self-associations partially mediated the relation between childhood emotional maltreatment and the severity of depression and anxiety (van Harmelen, de Jong, et al., 2010). Thus, emotional child maltreatment is an important predictor for the development of depressive and anxiety disorders in adulthood, and appears to be a stronger predictor than physical and sexual abuse (Spinoven, et al., 2010).

Neurobiological Impact of Emotional Child Maltreatment

Until recently, it was unknown whether emotional maltreatment in childhood has a similar detrimental impact on the brain. However, animal studies utilizing paradigms that resemble emotional maltreatment such as maternal separation, loss, or isolation rearing provided clear indications that emotional maltreatment might also affect the brain. These studies indicated that maternal separation and related paradigms induce a cascade of long-term alterations on brain morphology (Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar, & Heim, 2009; Sanchez, Ladd, & Plotsky, 2001). Structural alterations in the animal brain include reduced dendrite length, dendritic branching, spine density, and suppression of neurogenesis. Structural alterations in the animal brain have been observed predominantly in limbic structures (amygdala, hippocampus), and in the prefrontal cortex (PFC) (Arnsten, 2009; Lupien, et al., 2009; McEwen, 2008; Sanchez, et al., 2007; Sanchez, et al., 2001). These are key brain regions in emotion regulation and stress response (Arnsten, 2009; Cardinal, Parkinson, Hall, & Everitt, 2002; Lupien, et al., 2009; Phillips, Drevets, Rauch, & Lane, 2003), and have been found to be affected in several stress-related disorders (Elzinga &

& Bremner, 2002). Therefore, abnormalities in one of these regions might be related to the enhanced cognitive/emotional sensitivity observed in individuals reporting childhood emotional maltreatment.

Our research group investigated the neurobiological impact of childhood emotional maltreatment in a large sample of outpatients with depression and/or anxiety disorders, and healthy controls (N=181). We found that self-reported childhood emotional maltreatment was associated with a significant reduction in predominantly left dorsal medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) gray matter volume. These findings echo those of animal studies (Schubert, Porkess, Dashdorj, Fone, & Auer, 2009). Furthermore, we found that mPFC reductions related to emotional maltreatment were independent of gender and psychiatric status. Interestingly, we found mPFC reductions even in the absence of concomitant physical and/or sexual abuse during childhood. This suggests that the experience of emotional maltreatment in itself is sufficient to induce changes in brain morphology (van Harmelen, van Tol, et al., 2010).

The finding that childhood emotional maltreatment is associated with mPFC reductions is of interest when considering the fact that the mPFC plays an important role in emotion regulation and stress response (Cardinal, et al., 2002; Phillips, et al., 2003). Moreover, reduced activity in the left PFC has been particularly associated with negative emotional states (Demaree, Everhart, Youngstrom, & Harrison, 2005). Furthermore, the dorsal mPFC is essential for the regulation of autonomic and neuroendocrine stress response and arousal associated with emotional states and behavior, whereas the ventral mPFC has been implicated in generating these emotional states and behavior (Phillips, et al., 2003; Radley, Williams, & Sawchenko, 2008). Moreover, activity in the ventral mPFC has been associated with mentalizing, that is, with the ability to infer what someone else is thinking and feeling by their facial expression, tone of voice, and non-verbal communication. Maltreated individuals have been found to have poor mentalizing skills, which makes them more vulnerable to the development of psychopathology (Frith & Frith, 2001; Gabbard, 2005; Phillips, et al., 2003). The dorsal and ventral mPFC are reciprocally functionally related, and abnormalities in the function of either or both may be associated with abnormalities in emotional behavior and regulation (Phillips, et al., 2003; Radley, et al., 2008). Furthermore, the mPFC is known to attenuate the fear response by reducing amygdala activation over time (Davis & Whalen, 2001). In line with these findings, decreased blood flow in the dorsal mPFC has been associated with increased autonomic responsiveness, anxiety, and sad mood (Drevets, Price, & Furey, 2008; Phillips, et al., 2003).

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-John Lenon

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Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection Social, Emotional, and Educational Contexts

by Elias Kourkoutas and Fatos Erkman (editors)

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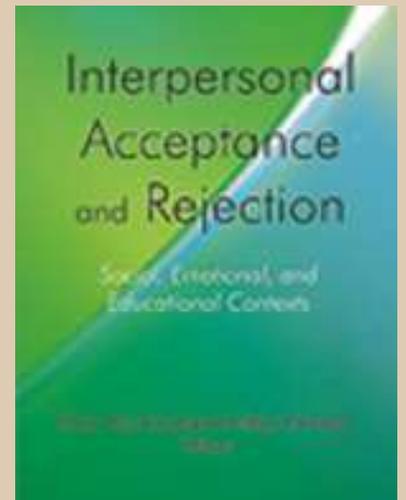
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Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection: Social, Emotional, and Educational Contexts draws on research to offer a global perspective on issues of fundamental importance to family functioning, childhood development, and adult intimate relationships, as well as to policy and practice for children, adolescents, couples, and families at risk. It draws on the perspectives of major social science disciplines such as clinical and educational psychology, anthropology, psychology, special education, and sociology, thus ensuring topics are discussed within broad theoretical frameworks. The authors cover a wide spectrum of questions and topics in relation to perceived acceptance and rejection by significant others. Chapters are set in the context of worldwide trends in the area of interpersonal acceptance-rejection. They considerably advance our knowledge of interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory and practice by tackling issues in major life contexts such as family, education, intimate relationships, and clinical-therapeutic practice.



The book presents these important issues within the context of up-to-date research on interpersonal relationships that helps strengthen family and couple relationships and enhance the quality of attachment relationships in families. As such, it constitutes a useful reference source for academic researchers, clinicians, teachers, special educators, school counselors, psychologists, and service agencies.

Contributors to this edited book come from all parts of the world, including the Americas, Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Middle East.

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NEWS FROM THE ROHNER CENTER



The Rohner Center for the Study of Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection at the University of Connecticut is pleased to introduce Professor Miguel A. Carrasco from Spain. Miguel arrived at the Rohner Center on November 1, 2010 and will be a Visiting Scholar through April, 2011. He and Ronald Rohner are working collaboratively on a body of Spanish data dealing with adult offspring's remembrances of fathers' vs. mothers' power and prestige within the offspring's families of origin, offspring's remembrances of parental (paternal vs. maternal) acceptance in childhood, and the effects of these perceptions on offspring's (men's vs. women's) current psychological adjustment. This is one in a series of studies within the International Father Acceptance-Rejection Project (IFARP).

Miguel is a clinical psychologist who specializes in personality issues, evaluation of children and adolescents, and psychological treatment.

Professor Farah Malik from Pakistan is another visiting scholar in the Rohner Center. She is chair of the Department of Psychology at GC University in Lahore, Pakistan. Farah arrived January 3, 2011 as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar in the Rohner Center. She will be with the Center until the end of October, 2011. She is at The University of Connecticut to get advanced training in PARTheory and methods, and to work collaboratively with Rohner on her project dealing with intimate partner rejection and behavioral control as risk factors for parental rejection/control of children in Pakistani and US families. Farah is also a clinical psychologist, with interests in forensic psychology, abnormal psychology, personality psychology, child abuse, and family violence.



The Cognitive and Neurobiological Scars of Childhood Emotional Maltreatment continued

As a result, mPFC dysfunctions have been implicated in many psychiatric disorders, including depressive disorders (Drevets, Price, & Furey, 2008) and anxiety disorders (Elzinga & Bremner, 2002).

Our findings of reduced mPFC have important implications because they suggest that sustained inhibition of growth or even structural damage in the brain can occur after exposure to emotional maltreatment in childhood. One way through which early life stress may lead to structural brain changes is by means of enhanced activation of neuroendocrine systems (McEwen, 2008). Furthermore, the mPFC undergoes major developmental changes during childhood and adolescence, and the mPFC is especially vulnerable to the effects of chronic stress during this developmental period (Arnsten, 2009; Lupien, et al., 2009). During chronic stress, increased secretion of glucocorticoids (i.e. the stress hormone cortisol in humans) interferes with the transcriptional mechanisms that control the expression of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a growth factor that has been linked to neuronal proliferation and plasticity (McEwen, 2008; Nestler, et al., 2002). In this way, chronic stress may inhibit cytopogenesis and increase vulnerability to attrition within the mPFC (e.g., Lupien, et al., 2009; McEwen, 2008).

Taken together, we were able to show that adults reporting childhood emotional maltreatment have reduced mPFC volume, which might be related with the

enhanced cognitive vulnerability (i.e. negative self-associations), that we found in these individuals (van Harmelen, de Jong, et al., 2010; van Harmelen, van Tol, et al., 2010). Moreover, in both studies, the impact of childhood emotional maltreatment was found independent of psychopathological status. For instance, the reduced mPFC volume was not only present in individuals with psychopathology but also in healthy controls who never developed depression or anxiety disorder. This indicates that reduced mPFC and enhanced negative self-associations do not constitute *the* pathway through which emotional maltreatment leads to the development of depressive and/or anxiety disorders. Rather, our findings are more consistent with the idea that these changes may constitute a vulnerable phenotype which, in interaction with additional risk factors such as genetic make-up alone or exposure to stressful life events during adulthood, may additionally determine who will subsequently develop a depressive or anxiety disorder (Beck, 2008; Caspi & Moffitt, 2006; Kendler, Neale, Kessler, Heath, & Eaves, 1993; Kilpatrick, et al., 2007; Rohner, 2008).

Conclusions

In summary, we have been able to show that childhood emotional maltreatment may have a severe and long-lasting impact on both brain and cognition, and that emotional maltreatment increases vulnerability to the development of depression and anxiety disorders. These

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findings extend the increasing understanding of the prolonged and adverse impact of childhood emotional maltreatment (Gilbert, et al., 2009). Nevertheless, within the scientific and public domain, the impact of childhood emotional maltreatment still seems to be considerably underestimated (Gilbert, et al., 2009), as exemplified by such common aphorisms as “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Hopefully, informing parents, teachers, general practitioners, and therapists about the negative impact of emotional maltreatment will help to reduce the occurrence of the experience.

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Other News:

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