

Paternal and Maternal Love in Childhood Moderates the Effects of Partner Rejection on Psychological Maladjustment in Adulthood

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Abstract:

This short article examines global evidence about the outcomes of perceived childhood parental love, and partner love in adulthood on the psychological adjustment and maladjustment in adulthood. The paper also explores the interaction between parental love and partner love on the psychological adjustment and maladjustment in adulthood. The results of a meta-analysis of 17 cross-cultural studies on 3,568 adults from 10 countries revealed that both parental love in childhood and partner love in adulthood have significant independent effects and interactional effects on the adults' current psychological adjustment. Results further showed that partner love has strongest effects on the adults' psychological adjustment, followed by the effects of father love and mother love. Partner love alone explains 15 percent of psychological adjustment; whereas, father love explains 4 percent and mother love explains only one percent of adults' psychological adjustment.

Keywords: parental love; partner love; moderating effects; psychological adjustment

Introduction:

Human love is based on emotional and behavioral experience which varies from culture to culture and individual to individual even in the same culture, both in how love is experienced and how it is expressed [8]. According to [14], love has three components: (1) emotional component (i.e., intimacy), (2) motivational component (i.e., passion), and (3) cognitive component (i.e., commitment). There are two distinctly different types of love, such as non-romantic love (between parents and children), and romantic love (between intimate partners). Each kind of love elicits different emotions and behaviors in different individuals [4].

Significance of Paternal Versus Maternal Love:

A review of worldwide research on the interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory reveals that father love has as great as or sometimes greater impact than mother love on children's developmental outcomes [13]. A large number of studies show that perceived paternal love (or acceptance) often has stronger implications than perceived maternal love (or acceptance) for children's positive developmental outcomes, including psychological adjustment and behavioral development [13]. Results of a multicultural meta-analytic review showed that cross-culturally father love tends to have a significantly stronger outcome on children's psychological adjustment than does mother love [7]. Moreover, in a review of a large number of cross-cultural studies, [9] have found that perceived paternal rejection tends to have stronger negative effects than perceived maternal rejection for the development of depression, conduct disorder and substance abuse in children and adults. Researchers, who found that paternal love often predicts specific child and adult outcomes better than maternal love, explored the following six issues among children,

adolescents, and adults [13]: (1) personality and psychological adjustment problems, (2) mental illness, (3) mental health and well-being, (4) conduct disorder, (5) substance abuse, and (6) delinquency. The research literature on paternal love also shows that father love tends to be deeply implicated in a large variety of outcomes including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral problems, and psychological well-being of children and adults globally. This literature further indicates that father love seems to have effects on children's lifespan development from infancy through adulthood [13]. Further, a meta-analysis showed that father love, compared to mother love, has stronger influence on daughters' psychological adjustment than on sons' psychological adjustment [1].

Study Sample and Findings:

The findings reported in this short paper is the summary result of a meta-analysis based on a total of 17 studies conducted on 3,568 respondents (1,179 men and 2,389 women) with a mean age of 25 years. Cross-culturally, the meta-analysis included respondents from 10 countries, including Bangladesh, Colombia, Finland, India, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Puerto-Rico, Turkey, and the USA. Results showed that childhood experience of parental love (both maternal and paternal love) and current partner love have significant effects on adults' psychological adjustment. The result also showed that partner love has strongest effects followed by father love, and mother love [12].

Figure 1 shows paternal (but not maternal) acceptance ($\beta = .53, t = 8.13, p < .001$) and partner acceptance ($\beta = .35, t = 5.69, p < .001$) has made significant contribution to women's psychological adjustment. Paternal acceptance also significantly mediated the relation between spouse

acceptance and psychological adjustment of women. Moreover, childhood experience of paternal acceptance has accounted for greater variability in men's and women's psychological adjustment than the

variability accounted for by the childhood experience of maternal acceptance (Figure 1).

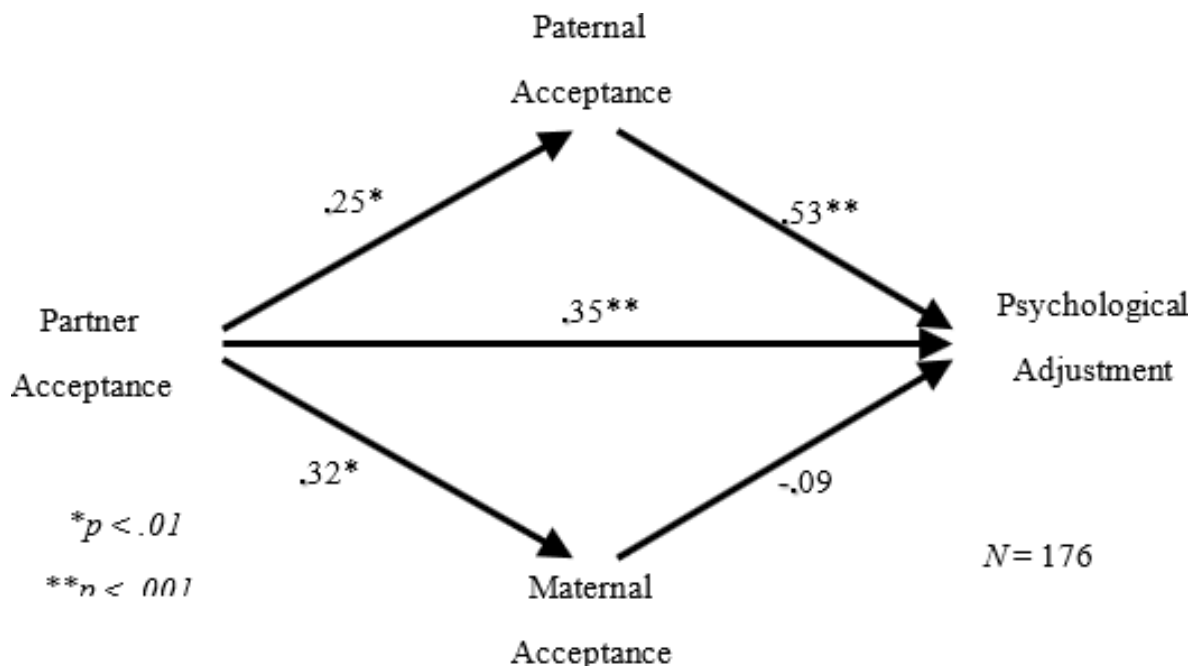


Figure 1. Effects of Partner Acceptance and Parental Acceptance on the Psychological Adjustment of Women

Effects of Perceived Partner Love on Adults' Psychological Adjustment:

Interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory-based research on intimate partner love and adults' psychological adjustment started in 2001 [3]. The first study examined the impact of love (acceptance) or lack of love (rejection) by intimate male partners on the psychological adjustment of heterosexual adult females in the U.S. It also explored the way in which remembered childhood experiences of maternal and paternal love influence the relation between current partner love and women's adjustment. The results of analysis showed that both partner love and paternal love have significant impacts on women's psychological adjustment [6,11]. Results also revealed significant independent effects of both partner and paternal love on the heterosexual women's

psychological adjustment. Parental and partner love jointly accounted for 20% of the variability in the women's psychological adjustment of which partner love alone accounts for approximately 15% of psychological adjustment, father love explains 4% and mother love only about 1% percent of variability in adult women psychological adjustment. A meta-analysis by [12] on 17 cross-cultural studies on 3,568 adults in 10 nations revealed that (1) perceived rejection by an intimate partner in adulthood was associated with the psychological maladjustment in adulthood, and (2) adults' remembrance of parental love or lack of love in childhood is also associated with their current psychological adjustment or maladjustment in adulthood. The following figure (**Figure 2**) shows interactions between parental love and partner love on the women's psychological adjustment

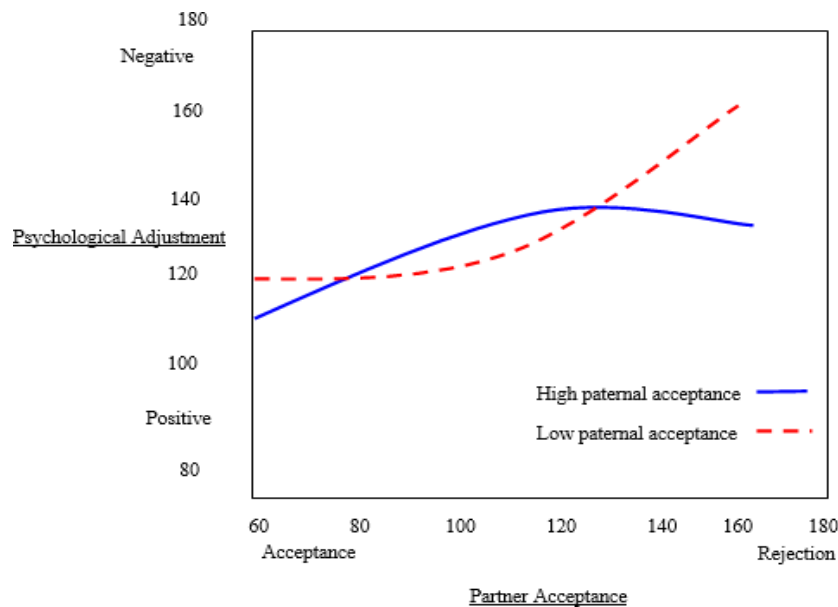


Figure 2. Interaction between Paternal Love or Acceptance and Partner Love on Psychological Adjustment of Women.

In addition, results showed significant interactions between father love and partner love on the women's psychological adjustment. This interaction can be seen in the **Figure 2**. The figure shows that heterosexual women tend to be fairly well-adjusted insofar as they perceive their male partners to be warmly loving—especially when they see their fathers as having been loving too. As their partners become less loving or rejecting, the women reported more impaired psychological adjustment, especially when their fathers were also non-loving. For them, the fact of having had a loving relationship with their fathers in childhood appears to help protect them from the more serious psychological effects of rejection by partner. Women who did not experience strong father love in childhood seem to be denied of the benefit of such a protective buffer of father love against psychological maladjustment for rejection by partners [3].

Take Home Lessons:

1. Parental love and intimate partner love have significant independent and joint effects on adults' psychological adjustment.
2. The experience of parental love in childhood has lifelong effect on the psychological adjustment of children.
3. Both father love and mother love have significant effects on children psychological adjustment, but father love has stronger effect than mother love.
4. Partner love has strongest effect on adults' psychological adjustment, followed by father love and mother love.
5. Childhood experience of father love works as a protective buffer against psychological maladjustment of women who experience partner rejection in adulthood.

Discussion:

Historically, researchers have been focusing more on the influence of mother love than the influence of father love, on children's developmental outcomes including psychological adjustment, personality, and behavioral development [10]. However, an increasing number of studies, including a meta-analysis, shows that father love, affection, and care often have as strong or even stronger effects on children's psychological and social development than do mother's love and affection [1]. Results of a recent meta-analysis of multi-cultural studies

have shown that father love has a significantly stronger relation with children's psychological adjustment than mother love cross-culturally [7]. Moreover, in a review of a large number of cross-cultural studies, [9] documented that perceived paternal rejection tends to have stronger negative implications than perceived maternal rejection for the development of conduct disorder, depression, and substance abuse. Studies further indicate that parental love, especially father love, affects children's lifespan development from infancy through adulthood [13]. Parental rejection or lack of love, especially, father neglect or love withdrawal, has consistent effects on psychological maladjustment and on behavioral malfunctioning of both children and adult offspring worldwide [5,15]. Moreover, serious and chronic parental rejection in childhood, appears to have more intense and longer-lasting emotional, social, cognitive, and behavioral consequences on children and adult offspring than perceived rejection by other attachment figures throughout life [10]. A recent meta-analysis shows different effects of paternal versus maternal love for sons and daughters. For example, remembered mother love in childhood has significantly stronger relations with adult sons' current psychological adjustment than that of adult daughters. In addition, remembered father love in childhood showed significantly stronger relations with adult daughters' psychological adjustment than did daughters' remembered mother love [1,4]. Scholars have given several explanations for the greater impact of father love than mother love on offspring's psychological adjustment. One such explanation is offspring's perceptions of parental power and prestige in the family. It is likely that if offspring consider their fathers more powerful in the familthers, they tend to be more influenced by their fathers' behaviors than by their mothers' behaviors and vice versa [2].

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