Brief Histories

A Brief History

of IPARTheory From Inception to Maturity

Prologue
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Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory) has almost six decades of research behind it. Now with hundreds of researchers and collaborators worldwide drawing from the theory and associated measures, it's time for Ronald P. Rohner—author of the theory and measures used to test it—to tell his story about how it all got started.

Please note that much of the following text was written by Rohner. Part of it, however, was derived from a much longer interview I did with him in early 2016 on the origins of his work.

A Brief History of IPARTheory From Inception to Maturity
Ronald P. Rohner
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My work on interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory (IPARTheory) started in 1959-1960, my first year in graduate school at Stanford University. At that time I had no thought that the work would eventually mature into a full-blown evidence-based theory. In fact, it started solely as the fulfillment of a class assignment in a course on Culture and Personality. The assignment was to do a cross-cultural survey using what is now called the holocultural method, where a worldwide sample of ethnographies is coded for specific variables of interest. Statistical tests are then run to see if the variables are correlated panculturally, as hypothesized by the investigator. In my case, I didn't have any ideas about what variables to code or what statistical relationships to test. So I leafed through one of my favorite textbooks from two years earlier when I had been an undergraduate psychology major at the University of Oregon.

I hoped to find a suitable topic in Coleman's (1956) ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY AND MODERN LIFE. Right away I found a statement asserting that:

> "In general. . . rejected children tend to be fearful, insecure, attention-seeking, jealous, hostile, and lonely (Wolberg). Many of these children have difficulty in later life expressing and responding to affection.
> Probably all conditions of rejection are conducive to self-devaluation and to an evaluation of the world as an insecure and dangerous place, thus inhibiting normal spontaneity and the confident reality testing essential for normal development" (Coleman, 1956, p. 117).

Just before reading these statements I had completed a year of work in Morocco. I had gone to that North African country as a universalist—believing that everything I had learned in psychology as an under-graduate (including the conclusions drawn by Coleman) was probably true for humans everywhere. Because of my life-changing experiences in Morocco, I returned to the U.S. a year later as a relativist—believing that little of what I had learned in psychology was universally true. Rather, most of it was—in my mind at that time—culturally relative. This conviction led me to seek a PhD. in sociocultural anthropology (with a focus on psychological anthropology), not in psychology per se as I had originally planned.

Now, as a relativist in my first semester of graduate school, I thought the course assignment would provide an opportunity for me to show how culture-bound psychology really was, as revealed by Coleman's assertions regarding the apparently universal effects of parental rejection on children's psychological development.

So I set about coding ethnographic descriptions of parental acceptance-rejection and children's personality dispositions in a small world-sample of societies as described by anthropologists. After doing my data analysis, I was stunned to discover that some of what Cole-man said appeared to be universally true, and some of it was not. For reasons that I cannot explain even today—almost six decades later—the results of that small, inconclusive study so captured my attention and interest that I wound up pursuing the topic of interpersonal acceptance-rejection (especially parental acceptance-rejection) for the remainder of my professional career.

Five years and several acceptance-rejection studies later, I left Stanford to come to the University of Connecticut (UCONN) as an Assistant Professor. Here, I began the Rejection-Acceptance Project. That work involved extending and expanding codes on ethnographers' descriptions of parental acceptance-rejection, along with ethnographers' descriptions of children's and adults' personality dispositions in 101 (and later 186) non-industrial societies. In effect this was an extension of my first study as a graduate student. It led in 1975 to the publication of THEY LOVE ME, THEY LOVE ME NOT (Rohner, 1975). Just after the publication of that book, however, I took a leave of absence from UCONN for two years to become a Senior Scientist in the Boy's Town Center for the Study of Youth Development at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. While at Boy's Town Center from 1975-1977 I developed and validated the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire and the Personality Assessment Questionnaire in order to be able to do intracultural research that mirrored the cross-cultural survey (holocultural) research that I had been working on in prior years.

Finally, after doing a number of intracultural studies in the Washington D.C. area and internationally—and after confirming intraculturally my cross-cultural findings about the effects of parental acceptance-rejection and other correlates of acceptance-rejection, Evelyn Rohner—my former wife—and I co-edited in 1980 a Special Issue of BEHAVIOR SCIENCE RESEARCH (now CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH) on "Worldwide Tests of Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory" (Rohner & Rohner, 1980). This was the first published use of the phrase Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory, often called PART or PAR Theory at that time). The term PARTheory stuck until I officially changed it to IPARTheory in 2014 (Rohner, 2014). The name was changed because in 1999 I came to realize that most of the central postulates in PAR-Theory probably generalized to all important attachment relationships throughout the lifespan. But because PARTheory/IPARTheory is an evidence-based theory I didn't want to change the theory's name until we had accu-mulated sufficient evidence to warrant doing so.

Abdul Khaleque did the first empirical study beyond parent-child relations. His UCONN Master's thesis (Khaleque, 2001) on intimate adult relationships was completed in 2001. (But he had already received a PhD. in 1988.) He and I revised and published his thesis in the 2008 special issue of CROSS-CULTURAL   RESEARCH on "Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory Studies of Intimate Adult Rela-tionships" (Rohner & Melendez, 2008). As an increasingly large volume of research was done nationally and internationally on different classes of interpersonal relationships worldwide, it became clear over the next several years that the major postulates of PARTheory worked panculturally and in almost all forms of attach-ment relationships throughout the life span. That's what motivated me in June, 2014 to formally change the name of the theory to IPARTheory. And the rest, as they say, is history.

References

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For more details about Rohner's work and about IPARTheory please visit :

Rohner Research Publications: www.rohnerresearchpublications.com

Rohner Center: www.csiar.uconn.edu

International Society for Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection: www.isipar.uconn.edu