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Parents' Behavior in Early Childhood: Children's and Parents' Perceptions

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Abstract

According to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory, the quality of emotional bond between parents and their children, as well as physical, verbal and symbolic behaviors that parents use to express their feelings to them, form a continuum. One end is marked by parental acceptance, while the other by parental rejection [1]. The current study aims at exploring children's perceptions about their parents' behavior towards them, as well as comparing boys' and girls' perceptions. In addition, the study aims at comparing fathers' with mothers' perceptions about their behavior towards their children, as well as comparing children's with their parents' perceptions about parental behavior. A sample of 358 children was drawn and children's mean age was 5,67 years ($SD=1,05$). Furthermore, 340 fathers participated in the study aged $M=39,74$ years ($SD=5,67$) and 355 mothers aged $M=35,71$ years ($SD=5,27$), who live in the geographical area of Epirus. Children completed the "Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire" (father and mother versions) and parents completed the "Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire". The Paired-Samples t-test was conducted comparing children's assessments per factor, comparing fathers' and mothers' assessments per factor, as well as comparing children's and parents' assessments per factor. The Independent-Samples t-test was conducted comparing boys' and girls' assessments per factor. Results showed that children perceive more acceptance by their mothers than their fathers, and boys perceive more rejection by both parents than girls. Mothers consider themselves more affectionate and less indifferent than fathers themselves. Moreover, parents' perceptions about their behaviors towards their children are more positive than children's perceptions about the parental behavior.

Keywords: Interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory; Parental acceptance; Parental rejection; Children's perceptions; Parents' perceptions; The early childhood parental acceptance-rejection questionnaire; Parental acceptance-rejection/control questionnaire

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Introduction

The family is an alive and open system, as it depends directly on its outside environment and it interacts continually with it [2]. In addition, the behavior and the difficulties of an individual are not only a personal matter but they are also related to the context which the individual belongs to and acts in, with the family being the initial and the most important one. As a result, the focus is given on the interactions and the interpersonal relationships within the family, where behavioral patterns are transferred from the one generation to the other [3,4]. Within the family,

the relationships between its members play a crucial role in their development. The members influence and interact with each other in a way that one individual's behavior can be understood in the broader field of the family members' interactions [5].

It is widely accepted that family-especially parents-play the most crucial role on child's development from early childhood to adolescence and adulthood [6,7]. Parent-child relationship is the first context of children's socialization and the early experiences of this relationship shape children's personality and future behaviors [6,8,9]. For these reasons, a great part of

family research has focused on parent-child relationships. Many researchers have focused on the Parental responsiveness and parental control as the most important aspects of parenting. Parental responsiveness refers to the degree of support, warmth and affection that parents display towards their children. Parental control refers to the demands that parents place upon their children to be mature and responsible individuals, and the rules and limits that parents set and enforce for their children [7]. Parental responsiveness and parental control contribute to what is called parental engagement [10].

Early childhood is characterized by children's deeper understanding of their interaction with their parents. In more details, they begin to understand that their behavior triggers parents' behavior and vice versa. In addition, they start to obtain a better sense of their self as capable of controlling their emotions in relation to parents' requests. As a result of children's developmental changes, parents need to set limits and at the same time encourage children's autonomy, without losing their affection [6,8,11].

As far as the mother is concerned, she is the first most important caregiver of the child. Mother-child conflicts begin at the age of 2 and increase as the child starts to speak and demand his/her independence. Because of the fact that these conflicts are more frequent between 2 and 3 years of age, they have been related to children's emotional and social development. In more details, early maternal punitive and coercive discipline can lead to the child's aggressive and later antisocial behavior [9]. In addition, mother's coercion, negativity, criticism and corporal punishment have been linked to children's impaired self-regulation and increased externalizing behavior problems, such as aggression [12]. This kind of maternal parenting may be associated with maternal maltreatment history and current maternal stress, two factors that can make mothers less sensitive towards their infants [13]. Furthermore, in a study of Combs-Ronto, et al. [12] that was based on the relationship between maternal parenting and children's early disruptive behavior, it was found that negative maternal parenting and children's externalizing behavior problems interact early during the pre-school years and create a "negative coercive cycle" until school entry. This means that both mothers and children contribute to the quality of future parent-child interactions.

As far as the father is concerned, the father-child relationship is strongly associated with children's well-being, including cognitive ability, educational achievement, psychological state and social behavior. In more details, children of involved fathers are characterized by high cognitive and linguistic ability, high levels of sociability and popularity with other children and peers, self-confidence, independence, self-control and pro-social behavior. The manner with which the father behaves to the mother within the family will influence boys' later behavior to women and girls' later expectations of men. Apart from a positive relationship with the children's mother, effective fathering involves spending time with children playing and doing activities, nurturing, disciplining them with self-control, serving as a guide to the outside world encouraging children's autonomy, protecting and income providing [13-15].

In about 1960, the psychologist and anthropologist Ronald Rohner started to develop the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PAR Theory), studying internationally the interactions between the family members and more specifically how children perceive their mother's and father's behavior. By 2000, the theory had broadened to include intimate adult relationships and other significant interpersonal relationships throughout the lifespan. This shift in emphasis in 2014 led to the transition of the theory and its name from PAR Theory to its current designation: Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPAR Theory) [16].

The Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory is an "evidence based theory of socialization and lifespan development that aims to predict and explain major causes, consequences, and other correlates of interpersonal acceptance and rejection worldwide" [17]. This theory is based on the hypothesis that people are characterized by a continuous biological emotional need for a positive response by their parents and "important others". Children's feeling of emotional security depends on the quality of their relationship with their parents. That is why parental acceptance and rejection highly influence the development of children's personality during time. The quality of emotional bond between parents and their children, as well as physical, verbal and symbolic behaviors that parents use to express their feelings to them, form a continuum. One end is marked by parental acceptance, while the other by parental rejection. Parental acceptance refers to the expression of positive feelings, love and support toward the children, whereas parental rejection incorporates indifference, absence of positive feelings, judgment, and psychological or corporal aggression toward children. Cross-cultural research findings during the past 60 years show that the same behaviors worldwide signify parental love [18,19].

According to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory, when children's need for positive response by parents and "important others" is satisfied and they experience acceptance, they develop pro-social behavior, including generosity, offer of help and empathy. These are related to positive relationships with peers, feelings of satisfaction and happiness, as well as low levels of sadness. When children's internal need for positive response by parents and "important others" is not satisfied, they may express:

(a) hostility, aggression, passive aggression, or problems with the management of hostility and aggression; (b) heightened dependence or defensive independence, depending on the form, frequency, duration, timing, and intensity of rejection; (c) impaired feelings of self-esteem; (d) impaired feelings of self-adequacy; (e) emotional unresponsiveness; (f) emotional instability; and (g) negative worldview. These personality dispositions are known as the acceptance-rejection syndrome, and they collectively represent one significant expression of psychological maladjustment. In addition, perceived parental rejection is thought to lead to the development of distorted mental representations or cognitions of self, significant others and the world in general. This rejection is likely to affect negatively not only parent-child relationships, but also intimate partner relationships in adulthood.

Research in different countries and cultures, based on

Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory and the relationships between children and their parents, has shown that the psychological adjustment of children is likely to be affected depending whether they perceive themselves to be accepted or rejected by their parents. This research is related to school-aged children and adolescents. More specifically, it has been found that perceived parental rejection severely affects children's and adults' psychological adjustment and personality development [16,19]. The most common consequences of parental rejection involve depression [20,21], conductive disorders, delinquency and substance misuse [22]. On the other hand, parental acceptance is connected with pro-social behavior in childhood, positive peer relationships in adolescence, well-being in adulthood, as well as prevention of behaviors that are related to rejection [16,17].

As far as parental acceptance-rejection perceived by children is concerned, a great variety of studies have been conducted in different countries, such as U.S.A., Pakistan, Canada, Slovenia, Turkey, India, Bangladesh and Esthonia, and were related to school-aged children and adolescents. These studies showed that:

- a) Children, both boys and girls, tend to experience the warmth and acceptance of their parents,
- b) The relationship between the parent and the child influences children's development,
- c) The way in which children perceive the acceptance and rejection of their parents and 'important others', such as teachers, affects their psychological adjustment,
- d) Parental behavior affects the way in which children perceive themselves,
- e) The mother's lack of warmth is connected with children's negative behaviors and low academic performance,
- f) During adolescence girls tend to experience more intimacy with their mothers and boys with their fathers,
- g) Parents give their children principal behavioral directions that are related to the relationships children develop with other important adult figures, such as teachers at school [23].

As far as the way in which parents perceive their own behavior towards their children is concerned, a great intercultural study was conducted in 9 countries exploring parents' perceived acceptance-rejection towards their children (7-10 years old). The countries included in this study were China, Colombia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Philippines, Sweden, Thailand and U.S.A. Results showed that:

- a) Parents perceive themselves as more accepting and less dismissive towards their children,
- b) Mothers reported higher levels of warmth and acceptance towards their children than fathers,
- c) Regarding the child's sex parents in the majority of countries reported similar levels of acceptance and rejection towards boys and girls,

- d) The parent's sex didn't seem to interact with the child's sex. This result shows that there is no universal differentiation in parental attitude towards boys and girls. The different parental treatment of boys and girls is determined by the different cultural practices [24].

Aim of the Present Study

The majority of studies that are based on the relationships between parents and their children, have used parents' references and observations in the family or laboratory environment. As a result, there is a limited picture of children's perceptions about their relationship with their parents and the parental behavior towards them. As far as the early childhood is concerned, this picture is even more limited. The present study is trying to fill this gap by investigating, for the first time on national and international level, the perceptions of preschool-1st school age children about the behavior of their parents towards them.

The present study aims at the following research questions:

- a) Are there any differences between children's perceptions about their fathers' and mothers' behavior towards them?
- b) Are there any differences between boys' and the girls' perceptions about their parents' behavior towards them?
- c) Are there any differences between fathers' and mothers' perceptions about their behavior towards their children?
- d) Are there any differences between children's and their parents' perceptions about parental behavior?

Our hypotheses in relation to the above research questions are the following:

- a) Children have more positive perceptions about their mothers' behavior than about their fathers' behavior towards them.
- b) Boys have more negative perceptions about both parents' behavior towards them than girls.
- c) Mothers have more positive perceptions of their own behavior towards their children than fathers.
- d) Parents' perceptions about their behavior towards their children are more positive than children's perceptions about their parents' behavior towards them.

Research Methodology

Participants

A sample of 358 pre-school and 1st school age children, 340 fathers (M=39,74/ SD=5,67) and 355 mothers (M=35,71/ SD=5,27) was drawn for the purpose of this study. The families live in the geographical area of Epirus in North Greece, including Ioannina, Arta, Igoumenitsa and Preveza. Epirus is one of the 9 geographical areas of Greece, embodying characteristics of both small and large cities of the country, and providing a representative example of Greece as whole. This became a key criterion for selecting Epirus as the place from which the sample of participants was drawn.

Children's age was between 4 and 8 years and the mean age was 5,67 years (SD=1,05).

Instrumentation

The study used:

- a) The "Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire" (father and mother version) which was completed by each child [25] (Translation in Greek: Giotsa A [25]) and
- b) The "Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire", which was completed by each father and each mother [26].

The "Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire" encompasses 24 items tapping in to four dimensions/factors: Warmth/Affection, Hostility/Aggression, Indifference/Neglect, and Undifferentiated Rejection. The 24 items are statements about how children feel their parents treat them. Children are asked to evaluate each statement on a Likerttype scale from 1 (almost never true) to 4 (almost always true). The scale is summed and keyed in the direction of perceived rejection. Scores from each scale are added together to produce the overall test score, which indicates the level of perceived acceptance-rejection from the parent.

The Warmth/Affection Scale of the "Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire" is composed of eight items including statements such as my father/mother "says nice things about me," "makes it easy for me to tell her things that are important to me," "is really interested in what I do," "makes me feel wanted and needed," and "makes me feel what I do is important." The Hostility/Aggression Scale is composed of six statements, including statements such as my father/mother "hits me, even when I do not deserve it," "punishes me severely when she is angry," and "says many unkind things to me." The Indifference/Neglect Scale has six items, including statements such as "pays no attention to me," "is too busy to answer my questions," and "pays no attention when I ask for help." Last, the Undifferentiated Rejection Scale incorporates four statements such as my father/mother "sees me as a big nuisance," "seems to dislike me," and "makes me feel unloved if I misbehave."

The "Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire" encompasses 24 items tapping in to four dimensions/factors: Warmth/Affection, Hostility/Aggression, Indifference/Neglect, and Undifferentiated Rejection. The 24 items are statements about how parents feel they treat their children. Parents are asked to evaluate each statement on a Likerttype scale from 1 (almost never true) to 4 (almost always true). The scale is summed and keyed in the direction of perceived rejection. Scores from each scale are added together to produce the overall test score, which indicates the level of perceived acceptance-rejection of the parent.

The Warmth/Affection Scale of the "Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire" is composed of eight items including statements such as "I say nice things about my child," "I make it easy for him/her to tell me things that are important to

him/her," "I am really interested in what he/she does," "I make him/her feel wanted and needed," and "I make him/her feel what he/she does is important." The Hostility/Aggression Scale is composed of six statements, including statements such as "I hit him/her, even when he/she does not deserve it," "I punish him/her severely when I am angry," and "I say many unkind things to him/her." The Indifference/Neglect Scale has six items, including statements such as "I pay no attention to him/her," "am too busy to answer his/her questions" and "I pay no attention when he/she asks for help." Last, the Undifferentiated Rejection Scale incorporates four statements such as "I see him/her as a big nuisance," "I seem to dislike him/her," and "I make him/her feel unloved if he/she misbehaves."

Procedure

The research was conducted through the help of Parents' Associations of nursery schools in the geographical area of Epirus in North Greece. In addition, the research was conducted following the Code of Ethics of the University of Ioannina. After approaching each family, we informed parents about the aim of the study and we asked them to complete an informed consent form concerning their children's participation in the study. After getting consent from parents, we discussed and determined a day and time convenient for all parties so that the family completes the questionnaires at home. Concerning the questionnaires' completion by the child, it took place in a quiet room with the presence and the help of the researcher, without the parents being present. Data collection lasted approximately one hour. Children were asked to complete first the demographic form and then the two versions of the "Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire" (Father and Mother). Concerning the questionnaires' completion by the parents, it took place simultaneously with their children's completion of questionnaires, with each parent being in a different room. Data collection lasted approximately twenty minutes. Parents were asked to complete first the demographic form and then the "Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire". Questionnaires were administered between May 2014 and January 2015.

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used as the principal measure of reliability. It is a measure of internal consistency of items within a scale. Thus a high alpha indicates that all items in a scale are sampling the same content area.

Concerning the "Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire", Cronbach's α coefficient for the global Mother version and Father version was excellent (0.86 and 0.89, respectively). When seen independently "Warmth/Affection" and "Hostility/Aggression" scales in the Mother version provided Cronbach's α above 0.7 (0.74 and 0.72 respectively), whereas the scales "Undifferentiated Rejection" and "Indifference/Neglect" failed to meet this threshold. In the Father version, Cronbach's α was above the .7 threshold in "Warmth/Affection" and "Hostility/Aggression" scales (0.82 and 0.75 respectively), while it was exactly .7 threshold in the scales "Undifferentiated Rejection" and "Indifference/Neglect".

Concerning the “Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire”, Cronbach’s α coefficient for the global Mother version and Father version was excellent (0.84 and 0.87, respectively). When seen independently “Warmth/Affection” in the Mother version provided Cronbach’s α above 0.7 (0.73), whereas the scales “Hostility/Aggression”, “Undifferentiated Rejection” and “Indifference/Neglect” failed to meet this threshold (0.66, 0.64 and 0.57 respectively).

Results

As far as the first and the second research question of the study is concerned, paired-samples t-test was used in order to compare children’s means per father’s and mother’s behaviors, for each one of the 4 factors of the instrument. In addition, independent-samples t-test was used in order to compare boys’ and girls’ perceptions about their father’s and mother’s behavior towards them. Again, we compared means regarding gender per factor. As far as the third and the fourth research question of the study is concerned, paired-samples t-test was used in order to compare fathers’ and mothers’ perceptions per factor. Fourthly, paired-samples t-test was also used in order to compare children’s and parents’ perceptions per factor.

- A) Are there any differences between children’s perceptions about their fathers’ and their mothers’ behavior towards them?

According to the following **Table 1**, statistically significant differences between children’s perceptions about fathers’ and mothers’ behavior were found in the factors of Warmth/Affection, Indifference/Neglect and Undifferentiated Rejection. There were no statistically significant differences in the factor Hostility-Aggression.

Table 1: Children’s perceptions about parental behavior.

Factors	M (Father)	SD (Father)	M (Mother)	SD (Mother)	t	p-value
Warmth/Affection	1,44	0,44	1,29	0,35	6,357	0
Hostility/Aggression	1,49	0,50	1,48	0,50	0,219	0.827
Indifference/Neglect	1,82	0,56	1,60	0,52	7,208	0
Undifferentiated Rejection	1,47	0,55	1,36	0,49	4,205	0

Table 2: Boys’ and girls’ perceptions about paternal behavior.

Factors	M (Boys)	SD (Boys)	M (Girls)	SD (Girls)	t	p-value
Warmth/Affection	1,48	0,45	1,41	0,43	1,517	0.13
Hostility/Aggression	1,56	0,52	1,42	0,47	2,709	0.007
Indifference/Neglect	1,89	0,55	1,75	0,55	2,431	0.016
Undifferentiated Rejection	1,55	0,60	1,40	0,49	2,468	0.014

Table 3: Boys’ and girls’ perceptions about maternal behavior.

Factors	M (Boys)	SD (Boys)	M (Girls)	SD (Girls)	t	p-value
Warmth/Affection	1,34	0,37	1,26	0,31	2,301	0.022
Hostility/Aggression	1,55	0,54	1,41	1,41	2,599	0.01
Indifference/Neglect	1,67	0,55	1,53	0,49	2,506	0.013
Undifferentiated Rejection	1,42	0,52	1,30	0,45	2,228	0.027

Concerning the above:

- 1) Children experience their mothers as more affectionate than their fathers,
 - 2) Children experience their fathers as more indifferent than their mothers,
 - 3) Children experience higher levels of undifferentiated rejection by their fathers than their mothers.
- B) Are there any differences between boys’ and the girls’ perceptions about their parents’ behavior towards them?

According to the following **Table 2**, statistically significant differences between boys and girls about the paternal behavior were found in the factors of Hostility/Aggression, Indifference/Neglect and Undifferentiated Rejection. There were no statistically significant differences in the factor Warmth/Affection.

According to the following **Table 3**, statistically significant differences between boys and girls about the maternal behavior were found in all the factors: Warmth/Affection, Hostility/Aggression, Indifference/Neglect and Undifferentiated Rejection.

Concerning the above:

- 1) girls experience their mothers as more affectionate, less aggressive and less indifferent than boys,
- 2) girls experience lower levels of undifferentiated rejection by their mothers than boys,
- 3) boys experience their fathers as more aggressive and more indifferent than girls,
- 4) Boys experience higher levels of undifferentiated rejection by their fathers than girls.

C) Are there any differences between fathers' and mothers' perceptions about their behavior towards their children?

According to the following **Table 4**, statistically significant differences between perceptions of fathers and mothers about the parental behavior were found in the factors of Warmth/Affection and Indifference/Neglect. There were no statistically significant differences in the factors Hostility/Aggression and Undifferentiated Rejection.

According to the above:

- 1) Mothers perceive themselves to be more affectionate towards their children than fathers do.
- 2) Mothers perceive themselves to be more affectionate towards their children than fathers do.

D) Are there any differences between children's and their parents' perceptions about parental behavior?

According to the **Table 5**:

- 1) Both mothers and fathers perceive themselves to be more affectionate towards their children than children perceive their parents to be towards them.
- 2) Both mothers and fathers perceive themselves to be less indifferent towards their children than children perceive their parents to be.
- 3) Both mothers and fathers perceive themselves to be less

dismissive towards their children than children perceive their parents to be.

- 4) Mothers perceive themselves to be less hostile/aggressive towards their children than children perceive their mothers to be.

Discussion

This study sought to explore children's and parents' perceptions about Parental Behavior in early childhood. More specifically, the first aim was to explore children's perceptions about their parents' behavior towards them, as well as comparing boys' and girls' perceptions. The second aim was to compare fathers' with mothers' perceptions about their behavior towards their children, as well as comparing children's with their parents' perceptions about parental behavior. The results confirmed all our hypotheses and showed the following:

- 1) Children experience greater acceptance by their mothers than their fathers. There were statistically significant differences in the factors of Warmth/Affection, Indifference/Neglect and Undifferentiated Rejection between children's perceptions about fathers and mothers. This result seems to be related to the fact that the mother is the principal and the most important care figure of the child during early childhood [9]. During this age period, the mother has a leading role in both boys' and girls' life [27]. In addition, this finding is consistent with the findings of other studies which were conducted in

Table 4: Fathers' and mothers' perceptions about parental behavior.

Factors	M (Fathers)	SD (Fathers)	M (Mothers)	SD (Mothers)	t	p-value
Warmth/Affection	1,33	0,41	1,23	0,32	4,620	0
Hostility/Aggression	1,45	0,42	1,43	0,39	0,764	0.445
Indifference/Neglect	1,65	0,51	1,51	0,41	5,115	0
Undifferentiated Rejection	1,30	0,43	1,30	0,43	0,420	0.675

Table 5: Children's and parents' perceptions about parental behavior.

Factors	M	SD	t	p-value
Warmth/Affection (child about father)	14,434	0,45	5,373	0
Warmth/Affection (father about father)	13,238	0,40		
Hostility/Aggression (child about father)	14,834	0,50	1,270	0.205
Hostility/Aggression (father about father)	14,518	0,42		
Indifference/Neglect (child about father)	18,166	0,55	5,798	0
Indifference/Neglect (father about father)	16,436	0,50		
Undifferentiated Rejection (child about father)	14,660	0,56	5,648	0
Undifferentiated Rejection (father about father)	12,971	0,43		
Warmth/Affection (child about mother)	13,020	0,35	4,125	0
Warmth/Affection (mother about mother)	12,308	0,32		
Hostility/Aggression (child about mother)	14,822	0,50	2,115	0.035
Hostility/Aggression (mother about mother)	14,278	0,39		
Indifference/Neglect (child about mother)	15,983	0,52	2,698	0.007
Indifference/Neglect (mother about mother)	15,216	0,43		
Undifferentiated Rejection (child about mother)	13,720	0,50	2,887	0.004
Undifferentiated Rejection (mother about mother)	12,907	0,42		

different countries and cultures, based on older children, from 1st school age to adolescence [28-31].

- 2) Boys experience higher levels of rejection by both parents (fathers and mothers) than girls. There were statistically significant differences in the factors of mothers' Warmth/Affection, Hostility/Aggression, Indifference/Neglect and Undifferentiated Rejection, as well as fathers' Hostility/Aggression, Indifference/Neglect and Undifferentiated Rejection, between boys' and girls' perceptions about parents. This finding is consistent with the findings of other studies which were conducted in different countries and cultures, based on older children, from school age to adolescence [32].
- 3) Mothers perceive themselves to be more affectionate and less indifferent towards their children than fathers do. There were statistically significant differences between mothers and fathers in the factors of Warmth/Affection and Indifference/Neglect. This finding is consistent with the findings of a great intercultural study which was conducted in 9 countries and was based on school age children [24]. Furthermore, this finding seems to be related to the fact that the mother is the principal and the most important care figure of the child during early childhood [9], having a leading role in both boys' and girls' life [27].
- 4) Parents' perceptions about their behavior towards their children are more positive than children's perceptions about their parents' behavior towards them. There were statistically significant differences between children and fathers in the factors of Warmth/Affection, Indifference/Neglect and Undifferentiated Rejection, as well as statistically significant differences between children and mothers in the factors of Warmth/Affection, Hostility/Aggression, Indifference/Neglect and Undifferentiated Rejection. These findings are consistent with the results of other studies showing that children's views about parenting differ from the views of their parents [33,34]. What's more, these findings are consistent with the result of a study conducted in the United States, which examined correspondence in parents' and school age children's perceptions of parenting and associations between these perceptions and children's social adjustment in the classroom. Parents' self-reports and children's reports about parents showed systematic differences, with parents perceiving themselves as more supportive than children perceived them to be [35].

As it was previously mentioned (aims of the study), the majority of studies that are based on the relationships between parents and their children, have used parents' references and observations in the family or laboratory environment. As a result, the picture of children's perceptions about their relationship with their parents and the parental behavior towards them is very limited, especially in early childhood. The present study tried to contribute to this picture by investigating, for the first time in Greece and internationally, the perceptions of preschool-1st

school age children about the behavior of their parents towards them. Consequently, the results of this study can be used as a reference point for future and more specialized studies, which will be related to parent-child relationships and the psychological functioning of preschool and 1st school-age children.

As far as the "Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire" is concerned, it can be used in many studies concerning family dynamics and close relationships. More specifically, it would be very important to explore the relation between the aggressive behavior of children and the perceived, by children and parents, acceptance-rejection. In addition, the findings of this study can be taken into account for the development of counseling programs addressed to parents, which will aim at promoting the parental expression of acceptance to the children. The above can contribute to: a) the preventive action over positive parent-child relationships and children's psychological adjustment through their lifespan, b) the reduction of the levels of rejection that parents express to their children.

However, limitations of this work should be considered and addressed too. More specifically, there are issues of generalizability, considering that the sample came exclusively from the geographical area of Epirus. Remedies for this limitation, in turn, lie in the next steps we propose.

Concerning recommendations for future research, these would involve the development of a sophisticated design and the considerable expansion of the sampling including all the geographical areas of Greece. Such a step would enhance considerably the generalizability of the results from this study. Moreover, it would be worth comparing our results with those of corresponding research in older children, in order to explore similarities and differences in their perceptions about their parents' behavior towards them, in different age groups. In addition, more demographic information of the participants, such as socioeconomic status and religion could be included, as this information can produce significant influence on a more detailed interpretation of the results.

Although these are important steps for moving this work forward and would effectively address the limitations to this study, evidence presented here gives clear indications about pre-school and 1st school age children's perceptions on parental behavior towards them. As it is mentioned by Giotsa and Touloumakos [36], parenting and its effect in child development and psychosocial adjustment is undoubtedly one of the main pillars in family studies research.

Conclusion

The present study is an important step towards contributing to the development of child and family psychology area of research in Greece and worldwide. The results showed that children perceive more acceptance by their mothers than their fathers, and boys perceive more rejection by both parents than girls. Mothers consider themselves more affectionate and less indifferent than fathers themselves. Moreover, parents' perceptions about their behaviors towards their children are more positive than children's perceptions about the parental behavior.

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