

Study of Frustration in Children Emotionally Rejected by Their Parents

Estudio de la frustración en niños emocionalmente rechazados por sus padres

E.V. GOLUBEVA [1](#); O.N. ISTRATOVA [2](#)

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ABSTRACT:

The main aim of the present study was to explore frustration responses in children emotionally rejected by their parents. The data was collected from 120 children aged 9-10 years and their parents. A multiinformant approach (parent & child) was employed to assess the problem of parental rejection. To study frustration response the children were administered the children's Form of the Rosenzweig Picture-Frustration Study. The results of the research showed that accepted children demonstrate greater flexibility in choosing a behavior model in a situation of frustration. This may indicate their better adaptation to emotionally stressful situations. The rejected children have statistically significant higher E-ED and M-ED scores than the accepted. Such responses may signal the desire of children to protect their traumatized ego by any ways, including aggression. This may be a consequence of destructive forms of communication in the family caused by emotional rejection of the children.

Keywords: Parental Acceptance/Rejection, Frustration, Rosenzweig Picture-Frustration Study, Family Drawing

RESUMEN:

El objetivo principal del presente estudio fue explorar las respuestas de frustración en niños emocionalmente rechazados por sus padres. Los datos fueron recolectados de 120 niños de 9-10 años y sus padres. Se empleó un enfoque multiinformante (padres e hijos) para evaluar el problema del rechazo de los padres. Para estudiar la respuesta a la frustración, a los niños se les administró la Forma de los Niños del Estudio Rosenzweig Imagen-Frustración. Los resultados de la investigación mostraron que los niños aceptados demuestran una mayor flexibilidad en la elección de un modelo de comportamiento en una situación de frustración. Esto puede indicar su mejor adaptación a situaciones emocionalmente estresantes. Los niños rechazados tienen puntuaciones E-ED y M-ED superiores estadísticamente significativas que las aceptadas. Tales respuestas pueden indicar el deseo de los niños de proteger su ego traumatizado por cualquier medio, incluida la agresión. Esto puede ser una consecuencia de formas destructivas de comunicación en la familia causadas por el rechazo emocional de los niños.

Palabras clave: aceptación / rechazo de los padres, frustración, Rosenzweig Picture-Frustration Study, Family Drawing

1. Introduction

The desire to be accepted by attachment figures is acknowledged to be a central human motive throughout one person's life. Affection and warmth of the caregiver are vital in childhood. A number of studies have been concerned with parental acceptance/rejection in childhood (Khaleque, 2002; Lopes, van Putten, Moormann, 2015; Rohner, 2010; Rohner, Khaleque, Cournoyer, 2012; Rohner, & Veneziano, 2001).

Parental acceptance is understood as love, care, support that children can experience from their parents and other caregivers. Parental rejection, on the contrary, refers to the absence or significant withdrawal of these feelings and behaviors. Moreover, parental rejection comprises a variety of physically and psychologically hurtful affects and behaviors: aggression and hostility, saying curses, belittling, hits, and kicks. Parental acceptance/rejection is a continuum of the affection bond between parents and their children from closeness to distance and aggression. Everyone can be placed on this continuum due to the experience one has had in childhood (Rohner, Khaleque, Cournoyer, 2012).

Constant parental affection and acceptance leads to healthy development of a child's personality. Parental rejection disrupts child's development (Istratova, 2012; Golubeva & Istratova, 2018a). The problem is compounded in children from single-parent families (Golubeva & Golubeva, 2016) or orphanage children (Golubeva & Golubeva, 2015) and continues to affect even in adulthood (Golubeva & Istratova, 2018b).

Major personality consequences of parental rejection are: immature dependence or defensive independence, impaired self-esteem, and negative world-view (Rohner, Khaleque, Cournoyer, 2012).

With regards to emotional regulation, rejected children have the following features. They are anxious and feel insecure. Parental rejection leads to depression (McGinn, Cukor & Sanderson, 2005), aggression, problems with the management of hostility (Muris, Meesters, Morren, & Moorman, 2004), emotional unresponsiveness and instability in children (Khaleque, 2002). The reason of emotional regulation problems in rejected children is the intense psychological pain produced by parental rejection. One of the emotional regulation skill is the ability to deal with frustration.

Frustration is an emotional response to the obstruction of behavior directed towards a goal. The Rosenzweig Picture-Frustration Study has stimulated much research since its introduction. There has been little known research on the factors affecting on this response in childhood, and many of them showed no individual differences. For example, it was investigated that intelligence is not related to direction and type of frustration (Angelino & Shedd, 1952), there is no effect of sex of the child on aggressive responses (Basu, 1991).

But when concerning family factors, the studies do show the affect. For example, children of divorce showed a special frustration behavior, a so called M-profile showing many impulsive reactions. It means that they avoid direct conflicts or struggle and try to deny the frustration (Kardas, Langenmayr, 1999). The studies also showed significantly higher levels of hostility, aggression, and anxiety in children (predominantly in boys) of divorced parents than in children of married parents (Spigelman, Spigelman, Engleson, 1991). There is current insufficiency of special studies focused on frustration in rejected children.

The present study purports to find out whether the response to frustration differs in accepted and rejected children.

We hypothesize that rejected children's acceptance deprivation slows their ego development in independence and responsibility aspects. This also makes them defend their ego by any means, including unconstructive ways. It is manifested in higher extrapunitive in combination with ego-defensive scores and lower intrapunitive scores.

2. Method

2.1. Sample Characteristics

The sample consisted of 120 children, fourth grade elementary school students (52 boys and 68 girls), and their parents, drawn from Taganrog city, Russia. Children ranged in age from 9

through 10 years (M=9.16, SD=1.27).

2.2. Procedures

A multiinformant approach (parent & child) was employed to assess the problem of parental rejection. The parents were administered the Scale of parental rejection (A. Barkan, 1999) and the children were administered the Family Drawing Test adopted in Russian by G.T. Chomentauskas (Chomentauskas, 1985).

To study frustration response the children were administered the children's Form of the Rosenzweig Picture-Frustration Study (Rosenzweig, Fleming, Rosenzweig, 1948).

2.3. Measures

The Scale of parental rejection (A. Barkan, 1999) includes a list of 96 traits (e.g. "smart", "kindhearted" etc.). Parents are offered to mark those traits they wanted their future child to possess (list 1) and then to mark those traits their child actually possesses (list 2). The percentage of coincided traits is the indicator of parental acceptance/rejection. If the percentage is 0-40, the child is rejected by the parents and the family situation is unfavorable. If the percentage is 41-70, the child irritates the parents from time to time but the family situation is acceptable. And if the percentage is 71-100, the child is accepted by the parents and the family situation is favorable.

The Family Drawing Test (Chomentauskas, 1985) was administered in order to assess the children's concept of their family. Participants were asked to produce a family drawing. All participants were supplied with materials (sheets of paper, colored pencils). The content of the image reflects deep, unconscious emotional experience which refers to drawn (or not drawn) members of the family and also to the author's concept of situation in the family.

Indicators of parental rejection in the drawings are as follows (Table 1).

Table 1
Parental acceptance/rejection indicators in the Family Drawing

Parental acceptance	Parental rejection
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family composition is complete• The child is close to the parent(s)• The amount of space between them is minimal• Hands extended to each other, or holding hands• The favorite parent(s) is/are drawn first, their figures are higher than children's, the outfits are beautiful, the details are carefully drawn• The outfit of the artist and mom or dad are identical	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family composition reduction (does not depict himself or the person who rejects him)• Objects, obstacles, other people, animals are there between him and other family members; large distance between the figures• The figure of the child is small, unattractive• Absence of significant parts of the body (eyes, mouth, nose, arms, legs, etc.)• Parts of the body or head are too noticeable (big mouth, long arms, fists, spread fingers)

The children's form of the Rosenzweig Picture-Frustration Study was standardized in Russia by E.E. Danilova (Danilova, 1997). The procedure attempts to evaluate typical modes of response in everyday situations of stress by allowing the individual to identify with and respond for anonymous figures in appropriate cartoon-like drawings. Scoring of the data was done in terms of the nine scoring factors specified by Rosenzweig (1948).

3. Results

The subjects were divided into 3 groups according to parental acceptance/rejection level.

Parents of 34 children (28 %) reported a high level of rejection. Only 0-40% of traits coincided in "ideal" and "actual" portraits of their child. Thus parents reject the personality of

their child and think that the child "is bad" or possesses undesirable traits. 88% of rejected children understand that their parents don't love them and don't want to deal with them. That is manifested in Family Drawing: children don't have a place in their family and this situation is unfavorable. 12% of rejected children do not have full understanding of the parental attitude towards them and are rather not satisfied with their role in the family than feel rejected.

Parents of 44 children (37 %) reported an average level of rejection. About 41-70% of traits coincided in "ideal" and "actual" portraits of their child. It means that the parents perceive a number of undesirable traits of their child and blame the child for them. But the situation in the family is acceptable in general. 77% of children of this group depict their family situation as favorable and 23% depict it as unfavorable according to Family Drawing.

Parents of 42 children (35 %) reported a low level of rejection and a high level of acceptance accordingly. About 70-100% of traits coincided in "ideal" and "actual" portraits of their child. The parents love their children, accept them as they are and appreciate them. The family situation is favorable and that is manifested in Family Drawing of 76% of children. 24% of accepted children are dissatisfied (perhaps, temporally) with the situation in the family.

If the conclusions made from the two points of view (parent & child) were discrepant, or when mother's and father's reports were discrepant, the results were excluded from the further assessment. Next, the two groups of rejected and accepted children were administered the Rosenzweig P-F Study. The final number of participants was 30 rejected and 32 accepted children.

The results of the Rosenzweig P-F Study are reported in Table 2. The responses are classified according to the direction of aggression and type of reaction. The table cells contain percentage of children whose dominant frustration response complies the pattern (E-OD, E-ED, etc.).

As shown in Table 2, among the rejected children the most frequent responses are combination of extrapunitive and ego-defense pattern (E-ED, 40%) and combination of impunitive and ego-defense pattern (M-ED, 30%). It is noticeable, that there are 4 patterns with zero frequency.

Table 2
Results of the Rosenzweig P-F Study

Responses	Rejected children, %	Accepted children, %
E-OD, combination of extrapunitive and obstacle-dominance pattern	20.0	15.6
E-ED, combination of extrapunitive and ego-defense pattern	40.0	18.8
E-NP, combination of extrapunitive and need persistence pattern	3.3	12.5
I-OD, combination of intrapunitive and obstacle-dominance pattern	0	15.6
I-ED, combination of intrapunitive and ego-defense pattern	0	12.5
I-NP, combination of extrapunitive and need persistence pattern	0	0
M-OD, combination of impunitive and obstacle-dominance pattern	6.7	12.5
M-ED, combination of impunitive and ego-defense pattern	30.0	12.5
M-NP, combination of impunitive and need-persistence pattern	0	0

Total	100	100
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Accepted children, on the contrary, do not have any predominant pattern of responses, almost all the patterns have approximately equal frequencies. And there are only 2 patterns with zero frequency.

In order to investigate the differences among rejected and accepted children in relation to the type of reaction and direction of aggression when frustrated we used ϕ^* criterion (Fisher's angular transformation). Zero frequencies were excluded from the analysis because of risk of unreasonable differences overestimating.

The statistical analysis shows the significant differences in predominance of responses in the ego-defensive category of the rejected group (see Table 3).

Table 3
Test statistics

	E-OD	E-ED	E-NP	I-OD	I-ED	I-NP	M-OD	M-ED	M-NP
ϕ_1 (rejected children)	0.93	1.37	0.37	-	-	-	0.52	1.16	-
ϕ_2 (accepted children)	0.81	0.90	0.72	-	-	-	0.72	0.72	-
ϕ^*	0.45	1.86	1.40	-	-	-	0.79	1.71	-
p-level	>0.05	<0.05	>0.05	-	-	-	>0.05	<0.05	-

Children, whose frustration response is a combination of extrapunitive and ego-defense pattern, consider external circumstances to be the cause of the conflict. The subjects blame the person depicted in the picture (or the person who is talked about) for what happened. It means that their ego demands defense and makes them ignore their own responsibility and shift the blame onto others due the lack of contact with guilt feelings.

This is illustrated by responses of a boy Kolya I. (9 years old).

Picture number 22 depicts a class, a boy at the front door, a teacher:

- "You're late again!"
- Why are you shouting at me?!

Picture number 23 depicts a boy sitting at a table. There is a woman nearby. There is a plate on the table.

- "It's really a pity that the soup is cold."
- "You neglected me again, I hate cold soup!"

Children, whose frustration response is a combination of impunitive and ego-defense pattern, don't think that it is necessary to blame anybody. But one of the reasons for such a response may be the influence of social desirability. Some children expect their parents to show love and warmth and therefore they yearn to be amenable.

This is illustrated by responses of a girl Natasha B. (10 years old).

Picture number 17 depicts a child lying in bed. Parents are near:

- We are leaving now, and you have to sleep.
- OK.

Picture number 5 depicts an adult and a girl standing in front of a toy store window. The girl points to the doll.

- I would buy you this doll if I had more money.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the differences in the response to frustration in accepted and rejected children. The study included 120 children and their parents. As it is known, there is a problematic relation between parental rejection and children's perceptions of parental rejection (Rohner, Khaleque, Cournoyer, 2012). Therefore a multiinformant approach (parent & child) was employed to study parental rejection. If the conclusions made from the two points of view were discrepant, the results were excluded from the further assessment. However, the results of these excluded subjects may also be of interest and examination of them may be the prospect of further study.

Next, the subjects were divided into 3 groups according to the level of parental acceptance/rejection: high rejection, average rejection, low rejection. The two extreme groups (high rejection and low rejection) were compared on type and direction (in combination) of frustration response.

The hypothesis of our study has been confirmed. The results of the research showed that accepted children demonstrate greater flexibility in choosing a behavior model in a situation of frustration: almost all possible reactions are expressed approximately equally. This may indicate their better adaptation to emotionally stressful situations.

The rejected children have higher E-ED and M-ED scores than the accepted. Such responses may signal the desire of children to protect their traumatized ego by any ways, including aggression. This desire may lead to low tolerance to frustration, and consequent lack of control over aggressive impulses (Ferreira, Capitaó, 2013). This may be a consequence of destructive forms of communication in the family caused by emotional rejection of the children.

It is noticeable, that there were patterns with zero frequency in children's responses. They were excluded from the statistical analysis because of risk of unreasonable differences overestimating. But it is clear that the accepted children have higher I-OD and I-ED scores than the rejected. It means that accepted children have healthy ego and are able take responsibility for frustrating situations.

5. Conclusion

In spite of different limitations of the study, it has considerable practical importance to child and family psychologists and offers many research prospects in the problem of frustration in children emotionally rejected by their parents.

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1. Southern Federal University, 105/42, Bolshaya Sadovaya Str., Rostov-on-Don, 344006, Russia. E-mail: ev_golubeva@mail.ru

2. Southern Federal University, 105/42, Bolshaya Sadovaya Str., Rostov-on-Don, 344006, Russia
