

**PARENTAL ACCEPTANCE-REJECTION AND MORAL DISENGAGEMENT: MODERATING ROLE OF LOCUS OF CONTROL IN YOUNG ADOLESCENTS**Syeda Fatima Hasnain<sup>1</sup>, Sara Ishaq<sup>\*2</sup>, Dr. Farah Malik<sup>3</sup>, Wafa Kamran<sup>4</sup>**Original Article**

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**Abstract**

*The present study investigated the relationship between parental acceptance-rejection/control, locus of control and moral disengagement among adolescents. It was hypothesized that there would be positive relationship between parental acceptance rejection, locus of control and moral disengagement among adolescents. In addition, locus of control would moderate the relationship between parental acceptance rejection and moral disengagement of the adolescents. Using convenient sampling technique 188 students of 9th -12th grades studying in public schools and colleges of Lahore were taken with an age range of 13 to 18 years (M= 14.89, S.D=1.29). Urdu versions of Parental Acceptance Rejection Questionnaire/Control (Rohner, 2004), Locus of Control Scale (Mueller & Thomas, 2000) and Moral Disengagement Scale (Bandura et al., 1996) were used. Results of correlation analysis indicated that children who perceived their mothers' rejecting /controlling were less morally disengaged and had external locus of control. The results of moderation through regression analysis indicated that locus of control moderated the relationship between the mother's acceptance-rejection/control and moral disengagement. However, there was non-significant correlation between father's acceptance- rejection/control and moral disengagement. Locus of control did not moderate the relationship between the father's acceptance-rejection/control and moral disengagement. - In addition, there were significant gender differences in fathers' acceptance-rejection/ control. The results of the study were discussed in Pakistani socio-cultural context.*

**Keywords:** parental acceptance-rejection, locus of control, moral disengagement, adolescents.

**Introduction**

The quality of parent-child relationship is integral to children's growth and development in a particular culture. This relationship plays a crucial role in various aspects of child development such as language acquisition, gender and cultural role orientation, belief and attitudes, and moral development (Breiner et al., 2016). Parents are considered primary agents of facilitating child's socialization, exerting a significant influence on their multifaceted development (Bornstein, 2015).

Studies have indicated that parental attitudes towards their children can shape their developing sense of self and self-esteem, which in turn can impact their social and emotional functioning later in life (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2019). Similarly, development of moral justification in a child is a crucial domain in which parental influence plays a significant role. The literature has consistently demonstrated that the moral development of children is significantly influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of their parents (Loudová & Lašek, 2015). Pastorelli et al. (2021) discovered that parental warmth and support are significant predictors of empathy and prosocial behavior in children.

Given the significant role that parents play in shaping children's multifaceted development (Bornstein, 2015), parental acceptance-rejection and moral disengagement are two important constructs in the study of adolescent development and behavior - Parental acceptance/ rejection refers to the extent to which parents provide emotional warmth and support versus emotional rejection and neglect to their children (Rohner & Khaleque, 2012). The manner in which child interpret their parents' engagements with them influences their conduct in subsequent stages of life. On the other hand, moral disengagement refers to a process of justifying or excusing one's own immoral behavior or actions, allowing individuals to avoid feelings of guilt or shame (Bandura et al., 1996). Albert Bandura introduced the theory of moral disengagement as an extension of his more general social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) according to which moral development of an individual is greatly shaped by social and personal factors. This suggests that an individual's moral identity is not solely molded by parental influence; rather, it is a multifaceted outcome of broader socialization. Various agents like family, community, school, church, media, work, and peer groups each play essential roles in the process (Malan & Smit, 2001).

During the initial developmental course, Children tend to internalize their initial beliefs and principles from their parents despite their limited understanding of moral concepts. Over time, they might start to doubt the moral teachings they learned from their families and instead adopt external standards of moral principles. They may also adopt external guidelines for their moral behavior. This can lead to their involvement in behaviors deemed socially unacceptable, without feeling guilty or condemning themselves. However, the act of disengagement is linked to an individual's perception of their ability to control events that impact them (Tillman et al., 2018; Qasim et al., 2020).

Recent studies have indicated that the correlation between parental acceptance-rejection and moral disengagement could be influenced by the locus of control in young adolescents (Concha-Salgado et al., 2022). The concept of locus of control pertains to an individual's perception regarding the degree of influence they possess over the events that occur in their life. An internal locus of control reflects a conviction in personal control and accountability, whereas an external locus of control reflects a belief that external factors, such as chance or destiny, exert a more significant impact on determining outcomes (Nieben et al., 2022). Thus, literature review suggests that an individual's perception of control over life events, whether internal or external, influences how they internalize parental values and engage in moral disengagement. In view of this the current study investigated the moderating role of locus of control in relationship between parental acceptance- rejection and moral disengagement among adolescent Results of the present study will indicate important findings that can be used to understand parent child relationship with regard to the mechanisms which are in involved in the disengagement of moral beliefs

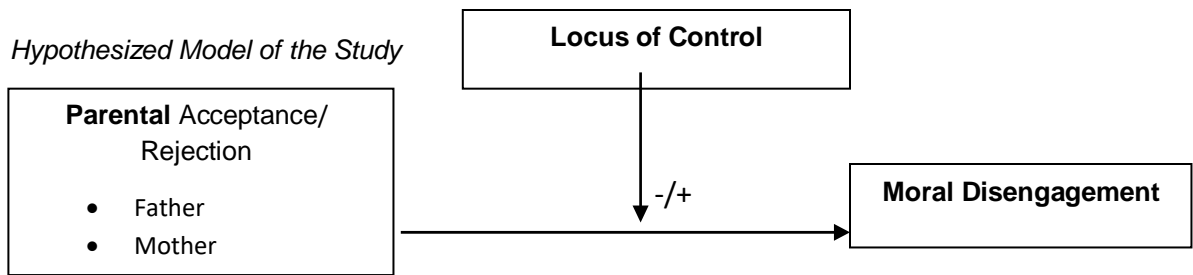
### **Study Objective**

To find out moderating role of locus of control between parental acceptance-rejection and moral disengagement in adolescents

### **Hypothesis**

H1: Locus of control would moderate the relationship between parental acceptance rejection and moral disengagement in adolescent

Figure 1



### Research Design

Correlational research design was used in current study.

### Sample

The sample of 188 adolescents (boys= 107, girls=81) with an age range of 13 to 18 years was recruited using convenient sampling technique from public schools and colleges in Lahore. The sample comprised of 146 students of 9<sup>th</sup>- 10<sup>th</sup> grade ( $M= 14.43$ ,  $SD=.95$ ) and 42 students of 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade ( $M= 16.48$ ,  $SD=1.01$ ). During the data collection period, the final board exams were being conducted for intermediate students, resulting in a smaller pool of available students compared to matric students. For this study, a total of 76 girls were recruited from two Government schools. Only adolescents who were enrolled in either matriculation or intermediate classes and belonged to intact families, where both parents were present and living together, were included in the sample. Students from single-parent families or those attending private institutions were not included in the sample. Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of the Sample ( $N=188$ )

Variables	Total ( $N=188$ ) $M$ ( $SD$ )	Boys ( $n=107$ ) $M$ ( $SD$ )	Girls ( $n=81$ ) $M$ ( $SD$ )
Age (in years)	14.89(1.29)	15.20(1.45)	14.48(.90)
Marks Obtained in Previous Exam (%)	78.02(10.52)	77.57(11.34)	78.61(9.37)
Class	$f$ (%)	$f$ (%)	$f$ (%)
9 <sup>th</sup>	85(45.2)	55(51.4)	30(37)
10 <sup>th</sup> ( $M= 14.43$ , $SD=.95$ )	61(32.4)	17(15.9)	44(54.3)
11 <sup>th</sup>	28(14.9)	22(20.6)	6(7.4)
12 <sup>th</sup> ( $M= 16.48$ , $S. D=1.01$ )	14(7.4)	13(12.1)	1(1.2)
Family System			
Nuclear	124(66)	64(59.8)	60(74.1)
Joint	64(34)	43(40.2)	21(25.9)
Father Education			
Illiterate	1(.5)	1(.9)	0(0)
School degree	33(17.6)	25(23.4)	8(9.9)
College degree	63(33.5)	41(38.3)	22(27.2)
Professional degree	91(48.4)	40(37.4)	51(63)
Mother Education			
Illiterate	12(6.4)	10(9.3)	2(2.5)
School degree	46(24.5)	28(26.2)	18(22.2)
College degree	79(42)	48(44.9)	31(38.3)
Professional degree	51(27.1)	21(19.6)	30(37)

### Measuring Instrument

**Demographic Information Sheet.** Demographic information sheet included variables such as age, monthly family income, family system, parents' education, number of siblings, birth order, education, and percentage of marks in last final exam and source of help in studies other than being taught by teachers at school or college.

**Child Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire, Short Form (CPARQ, Rohner, 2004).** This self-report measure consists of 29 items, each rated on a 4-point scale. It assesses perception about parental warmth and rejection among children and adolescents up to 18 years old. Separate forms for father and mother are provided to evaluate each parent's position along a continuum of warmth and rejection towards their children. The higher the total score, the more rejection adolescents tend to experience. In the study, the Urdu version of this scale was used, with a reliability coefficient of .85 for the father form and .87 for the mother form.

**Locus of control scale (LOC-S; Mueller & Thomas, 2001).** This is a 10 items scale which measures individual's perceived capacity to exert influence over the occurrences in their personal life. High scores are indicative of an external locus of control. This scale was translated into Urdu for the present research and reliability of scale was 0.74.

**Moral disengagement scale (MDS; Bandura et al., 1996).** The MDS assesses eight mechanisms of moral disengagement: Moral justification, Euphemistic language, Advantageous comparison, Displacement of responsibility, Diffusion of responsibility, Distorting consequences, Attribution of blame, and Dehumanization. This scale has 32 items and the total score is indicative of respondent's inclination towards moral disengagement. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The scale's Cronbach coefficients exhibit a range of .65 to .71. Higher the score, higher is the moral disengagement and vice versa. This scale was also translated into Urdu for the present research and the reliability coefficient was .71

### Procedures

After presenting research proposal to institutional review board, official permission from the respective authors of the scales and authorities of the educational institutions was taken. For the purpose of data collection, students were approached during their scheduled class time as instructed by the school authorities. In government girls' schools, data collection was carried out in the presence of researchers, while the respective teacher left the classroom. However, in boys' schools and colleges, a teacher accompanied the researchers during the data collection process. The students who expressed their willingness to participate were provided with written consent forms which explained the nature of the research. They were assured of their privacy and utilization of information solely for research purposes. In addition, participants were informed about their freedom to withdraw from the study at any point in time. The overall response rate of participants was 85%.

### Results

The data analytic strategy involved Pearson-product moment correlation, independent samples t-tests for gender differences and hierarchical regression analysis for moderation. The results revealed that there is no significant correlation between father's acceptance-rejection/control with locus of control and moral disengagement. However, mother's rejection/control was significantly negatively correlated with moral disengagement and had significant positive correlation with locus of control. There were significant gender differences in fathers' acceptance-rejection/ control suggesting that girls perceived more rejection and strict behavioral control ( $M=89.75$ ,  $SD=10.72$ ), from their fathers as compared to boys ( $M= 86.40$ ,  $S.D =10.73$ ,  $t(186) = -2.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ) No significant gender differences were found in mothers' acceptance-rejection/ control, locus of control and moral disengagement.

**Table 2.** Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Moral Disengagement

Moral Disengagement	$\Delta R^2$	B
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	0.06*	
Control variables		
Step 2 <sup>b</sup>	0.03*	
CPARQ (Father)		0.16
CPARQ (Mother)		-0.24*
Step 3	0.01	
Locus of Control (LOC)		0.11
Step 4	.04*	
PARQC (Father) X LOC		-0.06
PARQC (Mother) X LOC		0.24*
Total $R^2$	.14**	
N	188	

Note.<sup>a</sup> Control variables included age, gender, father's education, mother's education and source of help in studies.

<sup>b</sup>CPARQ = Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire, Child Version.

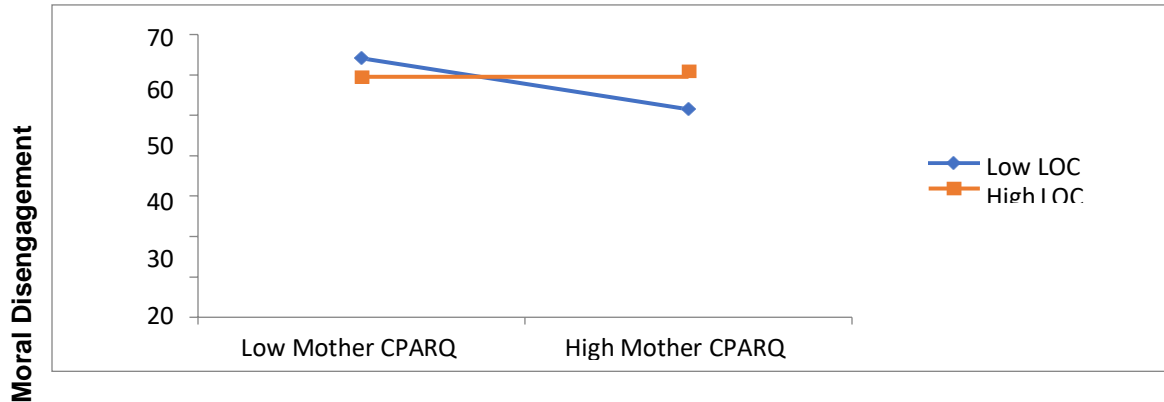
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

The above table presents the results of regression analysis for moral disengagement as criterion variable. The first step in the analysis was to enter control variables including age, gender, father's education, mother's education and source of help in studies, in the equation. Step 1 explained 6% variance in moral disengagement,  $F_{\text{change}}(5, 182) = 2.44$ ,  $p = .04$ . In Step 2, parental acceptance-rejection/control (Father and Mother) were entered in the equation after centering, by taking deviations of scores from means following Aiken and West (1991) to avoid the problem of multicollinearity. These variables explained additional 3% variance in moral disengagement,  $F_{\text{change}}(2, 180) = 2.98$ ,  $p < .05$ . Here, mother's acceptance-rejection/control emerged as a significant negative predictor of moral disengagement. However, father's acceptance-rejection/control was a non-significant positive predictor of moral disengagement. Thus, this model explains that adolescents who perceived their mothers to be accepting were more morally disengaged.

In Step 3, centered values of locus of control were entered in the equation and it further explained 1% variance in moral disengagement,  $F_{\text{change}}(1, 179) = 2.17$ ,  $p > .05$ . However, this model was insignificant and locus of control did not emerge to be a significant predictor of moral disengagement. In Step 4, interaction terms of father's acceptance-rejection/control and mother's father's acceptance-rejection/control with locus of control were entered that further explained 4% variance in moral disengagement,  $F_{\text{change}}(2, 177) = 3.54$ ,  $p = .03$ . Interaction terms were obtained by multiplying centered locus of control with father and mother form of CPARQ/Control independently. Thus, the results indicated that locus of control did moderate the relationship between the mother's acceptance-rejection/control and moral disengagement (as stated in hypothesis 1) which implies that negative relationship between mother's acceptance-rejection/control and moral disengagement changed when the moderating role of locus of control was taken into account. Locus of control was not a moderator in relationship between the father's acceptance-rejection/control and moral disengagement. Collectively all these variables accounted for 14% variance in moral disengagement,  $F(10, 177) = 2.93$ ,  $p < .01$ .

For further information of significant interaction, simple slope analysis was run using two way unstandardized with simple slopes (Dawson, 2013), to calculate regression weights of moral disengagement and locus of control. Its graphical representation, given in figure 2, suggested that more the adolescents perceived their mothers to be rejecting, more they were morally disengaged when they had external locus of control as compared to internal locus of control,  $B = -1.54, p < 01$

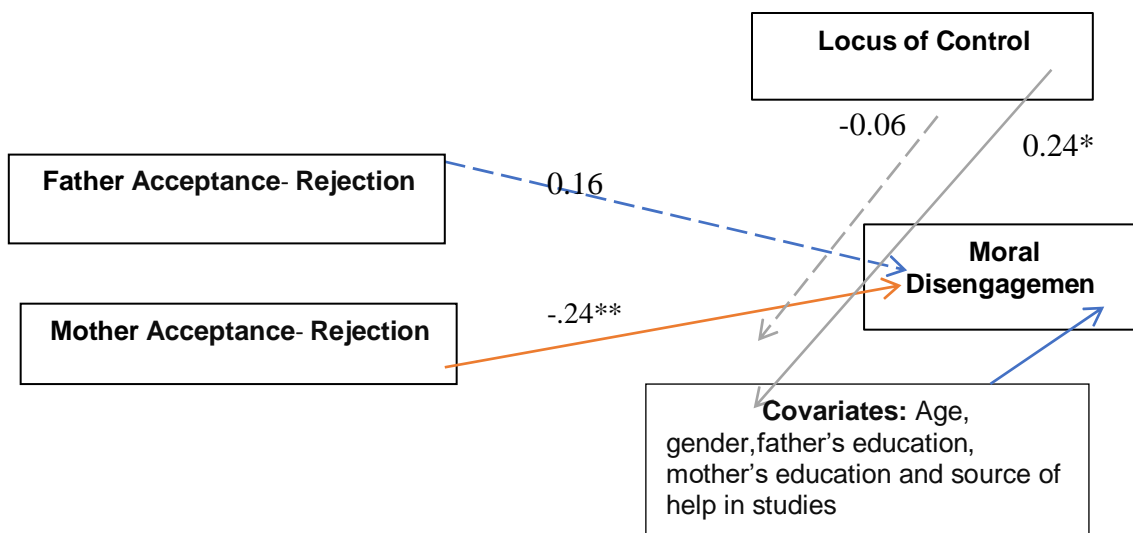
**Figure 2.** Interaction plot for Moral Disengagement (N=188)



*Figure 2. Moderating role of locus of control (LOC) in the relationship between moral disengagement and Mother’s Acceptance-Rejection Control (CPARQ) (two way unstandardized with simple slopes)*

Thus, the findings of the regression analysis pertaining to moral disengagement, as presented in Table 3 and Figure 2, indicate that maternal rejection/control positively predicted moral disengagement more strongly in adolescents having an external locus of control, while, more the adolescents perceived their mothers to be rejecting, less they were morally disengaged when they had internal locus of control -

*Figure3: Figural Representation of Results for Main Variables in the Study*



## Discussion

The results of this study revealed significant moderating effect of locus of control between parental acceptance /rejection and moral disengagement. This finding suggests that adolescents with an internal locus of control tend to display lower levels of moral disengagement when experiencing maternal rejection/control. In contrast, adolescents with external locus of control were likely to be more morally disengaged in case of maternal rejection/control.

The concept of locus of control pertains to the degree to which individuals perceive their ability to regulate events that impact them (Spector, 2008; Hellriegel et al., 2010). In this regard, adolescents who exhibit an external locus of control are more susceptible to the influence of external factors, (i.e., parental rejection), while those with an internal locus of control are more inclined to exercise control over their moral agency and make determinations regarding ethical principles (Nowicki et al., 2018). The significant role locus of control as moderator in this research indicated that adolescents exhibiting an external locus of control experience reduced levels of individual accountability for their conduct, which could potentially result in a greater likelihood of disregarding ethical principles in response to parental rejection (Nieben et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2019). In addition, adolescents with an internal locus of control tend to experience a greater sense of personal accountability for their actions and are less inclined to forsake moral code in response to parental disapproval (Bandura, 2002; Ju-Je et al., 2014).

In the Pakistani cultural context, children tend to spend more time with their mothers. Mothers play a significant role in disciplining a child and regulating their behaviors, choices, and impose certain demands due to which these children lack autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2002) and have external locus of control. Therefore, in cases where mothers are perceived as exhibiting rejection and exerting control over their children's behaviors and decisions, and imposing demands that limit their autonomy, it has been observed that children are more likely to display moral disengagement. However, when children are accepted by their mothers, they feel secure and confident. They own responsibility for what they do, displaying an internal locus of control and reduced morally disengagement. Other than this, the non-significant results of father's acceptance rejection with moral disengagement and locus of control may have statistical explanations (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2012). This could also be explained by the relinquishing of direct authority of fathers over family members. With increased Industrialization fathers became less involved in child rearing practices due to their demanding jobs therefore, accounting for greater responsibility on women to take care of their children. Owing to this role segregation, fathers became the sole economic providers and mothers became responsible for the educational and moral development of their children (Hayes et al., 2004).

Moreover, the study indicated significant gender differences as girls perceived more rejection and strict behavioral control from their fathers as compared to boys. In Pakistani cultural context, girls experience increased behavioral control from their fathers. Men tend to exhibit greater autonomy and personal freedom as compared to women (Malik, 2010). The above-mentioned limited number of choices and increased regulation of various behaviors might be perceived as parental rejection by the girls.

The findings of the study yield valuable implication for professionals in the field of psychology and counseling who specialize in family therapy, as well as for those who provide treatment to minors exhibiting behavioral issues. This research contributes significantly to the

existing body of literature on indigenous perspectives by examining the role of parental acceptance-rejection and locus of control in predicting moral disengagement.

### Conclusion

The role of parents in shaping and structuring the moral development of their children is of utmost importance. This research highlighted the phenomenon of moral disengagement among early adolescents in connection with their locus of control and the degree of acceptance or rejection they experience from their parents. Results signify the moderating role of locus of control in the relationship between maternal acceptance or rejection and moral disengagement.

### Limitations and Suggestions for the Study

The research did not assess the impact of peer influence on the phenomenon of moral disengagement. Subsequent investigations ought to integrate the influence of peers and examine its impact on moral disengagement concerning the identical variables that are being scrutinized. Furthermore, educators hold a significant position in the academic and personal development of students. The present study did not examine the level of acceptance or rejection of teachers in relation to moral disengagement. Subsequent investigations may be conducted to examine the acceptance and rejection of teachers in conjunction with other constructs identified in the present study.

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