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To cite this article: Jennifer Gerber Moné & Zeynep Biringen (2012) Assessing Parental Alienation: Empirical Assessment of College Students' Recollections of Parental Alienation During Their Childhoods, *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 53:3, 157-177, DOI: 10.1080/10502556.2012.663265

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2012.663265>



Published online: 26 Apr 2012.



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Assessing Parental Alienation: Empirical Assessment of College Students' Recollections of Parental Alienation During Their Childhoods

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Using characteristics of parental alienation syndrome (PAS) and related concepts as a conceptual guide, the authors created an assessment tool to measure young adults' perceptions of experiencing parental alienation during childhood. A sample of undergraduates (N = 227) completed the newly developed Relationship Distancing Questionnaire (RDQ) as well as the Mother–Father Peer Scale, Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, and Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale. Results suggested one's perception of experiencing parental alienation is a diverse construct and has adequate psychometric properties. The RDQ is the first empirical assessment of perceived parental alienation during childhood. Attention is called to the importance of both the RDQ as a retrospective measure and the need for a valid assessment of a contemporaneous measure of parental alienation.

KEYWORDS alienated child, assessment, conflict, divorce, parent–child relationships, parental alienation

A parent's attempts to alienate the other parent from the children is believed to be a main reason for the distance experienced in parent–child relationships, particularly in high-conflict families (Gardner, 1985), and has been linked with difficulties in children's adjustment, including internalizing and

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externalizing behavior problems and school performance (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 1992; Kelly, 2000; Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger, & Lorenz, 1999; Summers, Forehand, Armistead, & Tannenbaum, 1998). To expose the detrimental effects children can experience as a result of this type of behavior, Gardner (1985) coined the term *parental alienation syndrome* (PAS).

Although he described how to differentiate between PAS and allegations of child sexual abuse, he asserted that as many as 90% of “disputed custody cases” showed signs of PAS. He developed and used the Sexual Abuse Legitimacy Scale (SALS) to assess for PAS until 1990, but stopped use of the measure due to problematic scoring procedures (for a review see Faller, 1998; Gardner, 1998); for example, the SALS was not empirically validated in connection with other measures (Faller, 1998) and was often scored incorrectly (Gardner, 1998). The connection between PAS and child sexual abuse was not empirically tested, and thus the accuracy of Gardner’s prevalence rating, and potentially the assessment tool, suffers from lack of empirical focus.

More recently, the concept of parental alienation has been freed from a connection with child sexual abuse, and further, Kelly and Johnston (2001) focused on the negative feelings engendered in the alienated child. Regardless of the focus of alienation, whether the emphasis is on parents instigating it or on children who experience its negative effects, currently there is no valid measurement device to measure it, be it the contemporaneous thoughts and feelings of parental alienation or a retrospective account of such experiences during childhood. To go beyond clinical accounts of the detrimental effects brought about by attempts at parental alienation while growing up, valid assessment tools are crucial in moving the concept out of a solely clinical focus. Dunne and Hendrick (1994) posited the importance of retrospective accounts of parental alienation. Therefore, as a first empirical step, we decided to focus on the recollections of parental alienation during childhood, and developed the Relationship Distancing Questionnaire (RDQ). The following information describes the process used to create and validate this new self-report measure.

FOUNDATION FOR THE ITEMS WITHIN THE RELATIONSHIP DISTANCING QUESTIONNAIRE

When parental alienation occurs, a child develops characteristic behavioral and cognitive responses. Gardner (1987) used eight exemplars to describe children’s characteristic responses to PAS. Many of these qualities are supported by others familiar with parent or child alienation (Cartwright, 1993; Kelly & Johnston, 2001). These eight characteristics include a campaign of denigration; weak, frivolous, or absurd rationalizations; lack of ambivalence;

reflexive support of the alienating parent; “independent thinker” phenomena; presence of borrowed scenarios; absence of guilt over cruelty to and exploitation of the alienated parent; and spread of animosity to friends or family of the alienated parent. A campaign of denigration refers to a child’s avoidance of, talking to, seeing, or expressing his or her hatred of the alienated parent (Cartwright, 1993). Weak, frivolous, or absurd rationalizations describe the child’s trivial complaints about the alienated parent. For instance, the child might say, “Mom is always mean to me because she makes me take out the trash.” Lack of ambivalence is expressed by recognizing only negative qualities about the alienated parent, failing to identify any of his or her positive traits. Conversely, reflexive support of the alienating parent occurs when the child views the alienating parent as an “ideal” caretaker (Cartwright, 1993), without noting any of that parent’s downfalls (Kelly & Johnston, 2001). “Independent thinker” phenomena is exhibited when the child claims that it is his or her own choice to reject the alienated parent, that the child has not been influenced by others, and that it is his or her own choice not to like the alienated parent. In reality, the child is not an independent thinker, but borrows the alienating parent’s language, themes, and allegations about the alienated parent. The presence of borrowed scenarios refers to the rote, coached responses the child makes regarding the alienated parent (Cartwright, 1993; Kelly & Johnston, 2001). Absence of guilt over cruelty to and exploitation of the alienated parent refers to the child’s outward display of negativity toward the alienated parent (Kelly & Johnston, 2001). In this sense, the child might rationalize his or her behavior by saying, “He doesn’t want to see me anyway” (Cartwright, 1993). Last, spread of animosity to friends or the family of the alienated parent is observable when the child uses similar tactics as those used on the alienated parent, but extends these to others closely associated with the alienated parent (Gardner, 1987; Kelly & Johnston, 2001).

Although these eight characteristics were used as a guide in developing the RDQ, we were also interested in a more global description of parental alienation. Therefore, the RDQ includes items that relate to Gardner’s (1987) descriptions as well as an individual’s perceptions and feelings that one parent consciously or unconsciously strained the parent–child relationship with the ex-spouse.

Guiding the creation of items were three predominant theoretical perspectives. First, family systems theory was utilized. Using a family systems perspective, marital conflict can lead to a parent–child coalition (Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990). Overly close parent–child relationships are often associated with parental control tactics, such as “guilt induction,” which are displayed to keep the parent–child “emotional alliance” (Fauber et al., 1990, p. 1112). Interestingly, this theoretical assertion parallels what authors describe regarding the onset of parental alienation. Per systems theory, one aspect of the family system can affect other parts

of the system; this is referred to as the *spill-over hypothesis* (Cox, Paley, & Harter, 2001). Consequently, emotions one parent feels can “spill over” and affect others who are in relationships with that parent. This theoretical assertion has empirical support: If parental conflict occurs, the children experience the affect of the parents (Cummings & Davies, 1994).

A second theory driving the creation of the RDQ was feminist theory. Feminist theory was included to counter the assumptions fraught in the PAS literature. For instance, although there is no empirical support for this, mothers are blamed as the primary instigators of PAS (Gardner, 1992) and are pathologized with labels such as histrionic, paranoid, borderline, sexually uninhibited, and passive-aggressive. Rather than including such assumptions in the creation of the RDQ, feminist theory was employed to bring neutrality to the description of parental alienation.

Third, because experiencing parental alienation is believed to affect parent–child relationships, and attachment theory describes the emotional connection between parents and children, attachment theory was utilized in the creation of the RDQ. According to attachment theory, if there is a secure attachment to one’s parents or primary caregivers, then an individual has the best chance of success with various aspects of life, including one’s thoughts, feelings, behavior, and social and intimate relationships (Colin, 1996).

This inquiry was designed to add to the foundation of attachment theory by postulating that relationship representations about attachment figures can be affected not only by actual interactions (epitomized by the concepts of parental sensitivity [De Wolff & van Ijzendoorn, 1997]), but also by the representational influence of close figures. Such influence is especially plausible given that children do not yet have advanced cognitive and reasoning skills to form independent opinions and representations of each attachment figure. Because parental alienation deals with caregivers and their role in forming a connection with their child, attachment theory also has guided the creation of the RDQ.

In this initial phase of the development of the RDQ, we decided to administer it to all available young adults, not differentiating between divorced or intact families, as conflict and bad-mouthing occur in both family structures and can have deleterious effects on child development (Cummings & Davies, 1994).

METHOD

Participants

Participants ($N = 227$) were recruited from five human development and family studies (HDFS) undergraduate classes at a large public university in the western United States. All students, regardless of whether their parents

were still married or not, were invited to participate. Of the 382 questionnaires distributed, 227 usable surveys were returned, for a return rate of nearly 60%.

The sample consisted of 210 women and 17 men, with an average age of 21.3 years ($SD = 4.44$) and a range in age from 18 to 49. The majority (62.8%) of participants were majoring in a social sciences field (e.g., HDFS, social work, sociology), 15.9% of the sample had not yet declared a major, 7.5% were majoring in life sciences (e.g., biology, equine science, zoology), and the remaining 13.8% were divided between majors including speech and communications, theatre and art, business, and sports medicine. Among the 227 participants, 89.8% were White, 3.5% Asian, 3.5% Hispanic, 1.8% racially mixed, and the remaining 1.4% of students were either African American or Native American. Regarding parents' education, 18.2% of the participants' mothers and 20% of the fathers had a high school degree or less; 29.8% of mothers and 13.7% of fathers completed some college; 32% of mothers and 39.4% of fathers graduated from college; and 19.6% of mothers and 26.5% of fathers engaged in graduate work.

The majority (66.5%) of students in the sample came from intact families, 0.9% from parents currently separated, 8.8% from divorced families with neither parent remarried, 17.6% from remarried families, and 6.2% from families in which a parent was deceased. Participants who experienced the death of a parent were not included in the analyses.

Procedure

The instructors of five HDFS courses granted the first author permission to invite students to voluntarily participate in a study, either for extra credit or to be entered into a drawing to receive a free pizza. The first author asked students during class to voluntarily participate in the study by answering some questions regarding their families of origin. The questionnaires were distributed and students were asked to return them within 1 week to receive the incentive. Questionnaires were collected during subsequent class sessions until the deadline passed. Students were not penalized if they declined to participate and additional extra-credit options were offered when extra credit was available.

Retest data were collected in two ways. First, in one of the original classes, the researcher returned approximately 4 weeks after the original questionnaire distribution. Students were again asked to voluntarily complete the RDQ, especially if they participated the first time. In appreciation for their assistance, students were offered a small candy bar. Second, because insufficient retest data were received, students in an entirely separate HDFS class were given only the RDQ. Nearly 4 weeks later these students were retested. Participants from this "retest" class did not complete the other questionnaires, and therefore are not included in the sample size reported earlier.

Thirty-nine participants completed the test–retest. Confidentiality throughout the entirety of the study was maintained through use of the numerical codes for each participant.

Measures

RELATIONSHIP DISTANCING QUESTIONNAIRE

The RDQ measures the extent to which an individual felt alienated from one or both parents during childhood due to parental alienation. Participants were asked to recall their own and their parents' actions, words, and feelings related to parental alienation. The RDQ includes questions such as, "My parent tried to get me to think bad things about my other parent" and "I expressed anger or extreme dislike toward my parent due to my other parent's putdowns." To ensure that the RDQ measured an individual's perceptions of parental alienation and to assess content validity, in addition to using Gardner's (1985) descriptions, three experts in the field of divorce and conflict were asked to evaluate the measure. Based on their suggestions, some changes in wording occurred. A well-known conflict researcher, E. Mark Cummings (personal communication, January 30, 2002), suggested a ninth dimension, direct alienation. This scale was added and reflects the overt attempts one parent can make to alienate a child from the other parent. In summary, the RDQ contains items relating to Gardner's concepts as well as other aspects of parental alienation. Three items relating to each characteristic of parental alienation were dispersed throughout the measure and items contained positive and negative wording to minimize response sets. Also included were three items as filler questions.

The RDQ has 30 questions, each rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very often false*) to 6 (*very often true*). Items are listed in the middle, with responses for the mother and father in separate columns on either side. For each item, participants rate the truth of the statement related to how they felt toward each parent while growing up. Scoring is based on 27 items, not including the filler questions. One's experiences of being alienated from a parent due to parental alienation have not previously been tested empirically; as such, it is unknown whether it is a unidimensional or multidimensional construct. Therefore, individual scale scores as well as total alienation scores were separately computed for mothers and fathers and both the total score and the factor scores were used in the validation of the measure. Scores for total alienation felt toward mothers include items from the Father scale related to bad-mouthing because the questions' phrasing relate to the level of alienation felt toward one's mother due to the bad-mouthing of one's father. Similarly, scores for total alienation felt toward one's father include the three items on the Mother scale related to bad-mouthing.

MOTHER–FATHER PEER SCALE

The Mother–Father Peer Scale (MFP Scale; Epstein, 1983), a self-report questionnaire with 56 Likert-type questions, assesses childhood memories of parental encouragement of independence or overprotection, parental acceptance or rejection, and one’s parent idealization. Scores on the three scales are created separately for mothers and fathers; the three scales are inter-correlated .36 to .53. For the purposes of validating the RDQ, the MFP Scale provided a measure of convergent validity; analyses were conducted using the acceptance/rejection and parent idealization scales because these best represented aspects related to parental alienation. The MFP Scale was normed on a population of male and female college students, wherein the test–retest reliability was found to range from .88 to .93. Further, reports indicate it has reasonable external validity (Biringen, 1990). The MFP Scale has been found to correlate highly with the Baron’s Ego Strength Inventory, Ego Strength Scale, Eysenck’s Neuroticism/Extraversion, Guilford–Zimmerman Temperament Survey, Primary Emotions and Traits Inventory, and the Self-Esteem Inventory (Biringen, 1990).

To remain consistent throughout the questionnaires, permission was granted by the author to slightly alter the directions. For the MFP Scale, the words “or mother [father] substitute” were removed so that respondents answered the statements using recollections of their mothers and fathers, rather than other parental figures.

INVENTORY OF PARENT AND PEER ATTACHMENT

The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) is a self-report instrument measuring the affective and cognitive dimensions of adolescents’ current relationships with their parents and peers. The IPPA was included to provide a measure of convergent validity for the RDQ. The 25 items for each of the mother, father, and peer sections on the revised version are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*almost never or never true*) to 5 (*almost always or always true*). The IPPA contains three scales as well as a total attachment score. Only the total attachment score and alienation scale, which assesses the extent of anger and alienation between the respondent and the mother or father, were used and only mother and father sections were scored. These two scales were used due to the fit between them and the concept of parental alienation. The IPPA has been normed on participants ranging in age from 16 to 20 years old. For a group of 18-to 20-year-olds, the inventory yields high test–retest reliability scores of .93 for total attachment. Internal reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) scores for the revised version are .87 for Mother total attachment and .89 for Father total attachment. With respect to validity, the

IPPA has moderate to high associations with other measures of family relationship scales. According to Armsden and Greenberg (1987), scores from the measure have been closely related to the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and many of the Family Environmental Scale scales. Scores on the IPPA are also related to life satisfaction and state of emotion. Furthermore, higher scores on parental attachment scales indicate lower levels of loneliness, and lower amounts of conflict between parents. The scale also discriminates between delinquent and nondelinquent adolescents (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

Like the other questionnaire, permission was granted by the developers to slightly alter the directions of the IPPA. Words relating to a caregiver or stepparent were omitted so that participants answered the questionnaire regarding their relationships with their mothers and fathers only.

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT SCALE

The Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) was included to provide further convergent validity. It contains 48 questions about parent behavior that participants answer on a 3-point format: *true*, *sort of true*, or *false*. As designed, the scale assesses dimensions of conflict properties, perceived threat, and self-blame. However, only the Conflict Properties scale was used in this research. The Conflict Properties scale contains items relating to respondents' perceptions of the frequency, intensity, and resolution of their parents' arguments. Although the scale was originally developed for young children, it has been validated for use with college students. In using the CPIC with a sample of college students, Bickham and Fiese (1997) reported coefficient alphas reaching to .95 for Conflict Properties. Over a 2-week time frame, test-retest reliability for the Conflict Properties scale also reached .95. Furthermore, Bickham and Fiese obtained nearly an identical factor structure to the original and concluded that the CPIC is a reliable and valid measure that can be used by college students.

To retain consistency, permission was granted by the authors to slightly alter the directions. The change directed participants to respond with respect to the conflicts between their mother and father, rather than a parent's current spouse or partner.

RESULTS

Factor Analysis of the Relationship Distancing Questionnaire

All items were included in a principal components factor analysis, which was used to determine whether the RDQ had nine separate dimensions, a single dimension of perceiving parental alienation, or some intermediate

number of factors. The Mother and Father sections of the RDQ were analyzed separately. Using a varimax rotation with eigenvalues >1 , seven factors were found for the Mother section. Based on factor loadings of .3 and higher, the following factors were identified for the Mother section: negativity without guilt, complaints and avoidance, rejection, other's influence, father's bad-mouthing of mother, father's bad-mouthing producing negativity toward mother, and independent thinker. Clearly, none of the factors on the Mother section of the RDQ were identical to the qualities previously described by Gardner. For this reason, the empirically derived factors were used in further testing of the RDQ. Table 1 displays the factors derived for the Mother section of the RDQ compared to the Father section of the RDQ. Table 2 reports the composition of each factor on the Mother section of the RDQ. Together, the seven factors account for nearly 60% of the measure's variance.

Factors for the Father section were similar, but not identical, to those of the Mother section of the RDQ. The six factors making up the Father section are entitled avoidance and negativity without guilt, rejection, other's influence, mother's bad-mouthing of father, general alienation toward father, and independent thinker. Table 3 displays the composition of each factor on the Father section of the RDQ. It is interesting that items making up factors in the Father section did not always load onto the same factors as they did in the Mother section. Second, only six factors were identified for the Father section, compared to the seven factors from the Mother section. Together, the six factors for the Father section accounted for 62% of the total variance. Like those of the Mother section, the empirically derived factors of the Father section were used in subsequent analyses due to their superiority over the literature-driven scales.

Reliability of RDQ Factors

As reported in Table 4, Cronbach's alpha to test the reliability of factors in the Mother section yielded alpha levels above .80 for three factors, and one factor had a poor alpha coefficient of .24. Such a low alpha might be due to the fact that only three items made up the factor, or that the items' content was diverse, affecting the similarity of responses. The highest alpha levels were achieved by the two factors negativity without guilt and rejection. Together, the seven factors making up the Mother section reached an alpha level of .76.

Alpha levels for factors in the Father section, also shown in Table 4, were also generally above .70; one reached .92, and another only reached .55. The factor reaching the highest alpha level was avoidance and negativity without guilt. Together, the six factors in the Father section reached an alpha level of .79.

Tables 5 and 6 display the intercorrelations among the factors for the Mother and Father sections, respectively. Several of the correlations

TABLE 1 Empirically Derived Factors for the Relationship Distancing Questionnaire

Factor	Description
Mother factors (7 total)	
Negativity without guilt	Included items related to negativity to or about one's parent without feeling guilt
Complaints and avoidance	Included items relating to complaints that led to avoidance of the mother, her friends, and family
Rejection	Included items relating to avoidance of mother due to the father's parental alienation
Other's influence	Included items relating to influence of other's opinions regarding the mother. This factor is the closest to Gardner's because it incorporates all three items relating to his description of "other's influence," plus another item suggests that attitudes toward one's mother were not the respondent's own
Father's bad-mouthing of mother	Included items relating to father's direct parental alienation of the mother and the father's campaign of denigration toward the mother
Father's bad-mouthing producing negativity	Incorporated some of the same items as the previous factor as well as the remainder of the items related to father's direct parental alienation of the mother and father's campaign of denigration toward the mother
Independent thinker	Included two items related to Gardner's description of a child being an independent thinker, and one relating to rationale for negative comments made about one's mother
Father factors (6 total)	
Avoidance and negativity without guilt	Included items related to negativity to or about one's parent without feeling guilt, avoidance of father, and avoidance of father's family and friends
Rejection	Incorporated items relating to complaints, avoidance of the father and the father's family and friends, and avoidance due to the mother's alienation
Other's influence	Included items relating to the influence of other's opinions; this factor is nearly identical to the Gardner scale because it incorporated all three items relating to his description of "other's influence" plus another item that suggests attitudes toward one's father were not the respondent's own
Mother's bad-mouthing of father	Included items relating to mother's direct parental alienation of father and mother's campaign of denigration toward the father
General alienation toward father	Included items relating to avoidance of father, complaints about one's father, bad-mouthing by mother, and attitudes adopted from other people
Independent thinker	Comprised of the three items relating to Gardner's exemplar; identical to literature-driven scale

are substantial, primarily because several items cross-loaded on different factors. However, the low correlations among several dimensions indicate that parental alienation is comprised of distinct aspects. Thus, from the intercorrelations of the factors, experiencing parental alienation is composed of separate, yet overlapping characteristics.

TABLE 2 Empirically Derived Factor Loadings for Relationship Distancing Questionnaire Mother Section

	Negativity Without Guilt	Complaints and Avoidance	Rejection	Other's Influence	Father's Bad-Mouthing of Mother	Father's Bad-Mouthing Producing Negativity	Independent Thinker
Felt bad due to thoughts or saying mean things to mother	0.844						
Guilty due to mean things said to mother	0.826						
Strong negativity but no guilt toward mother	0.734						
Shouldn't have complaints	0.443	0.403					
Had no complaints		-0.676					
Avoid talking about mother with others		0.641		-0.300			
Mother was ideal	-0.326	-0.630	-0.459				
Personal qualities hindered closeness to mother	0.320	0.561	0.404				
Complaints that kept me from visiting		0.478	0.382			0.419	
Difficult relationship with her led to avoidance of extended family			0.767				
Poor relationship; avoidance of her friends			0.741				
Positive things about mother	0.414	0.436	0.573				
Avoiding mother's name			0.503				
Look forward to mother's family and friends		0.319	0.355				
Other's opinions affected attitudes toward mother				0.772			
Other's opinions led to my same opinions				0.730			

(Continued)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Negativity Without Guilt	Complaints and Avoidance	Rejection	Other's Influence	Father's Bad-Mouthing of Mother	Father's Bad-Mouthing Producing Negativity	Independent Thinker
Other's comments shaped view of mother				0.632			
Own attitudes toward mother				-0.595	0.830		
Father said mean things so I'd be upset with mother					0.784		
Father tried getting me to think bad about mother						0.727	
Need to side with father in argument with mother						0.599	
Avoidance of mother due to father's bad-mouthing			0.433		0.314	0.459	
Anger to mother due to father's putdowns					0.415	0.419	
Avoidance of mother due to father's portrayal							0.681
Made up own mind about mother							0.579
No one influenced thoughts of mother							0.396
Good reason for mother's negativity about father		-0.363					
% of variance explained	11.00	10.65	10.60	8.75	6.95	6.09	5.47

TABLE 3 Empirically Derived Factor Loadings for Relationship Distancing Questionnaire Father Section

	Avoidance and Negativity Without Guilt	Rejection	Other's Influence	Mother's Bad-Mouthing of Father	General Alienation Toward Father	Independent Thinker
Felt bad due to thoughts or saying mean things to father	0.857					
Guilty due to mean things said to father	0.826					
Strong negativity but no guilt toward father	0.718					
Shouldn't have complaints	0.582					
Positive things about father	0.565	0.518			-0.472	
Father was ideal	-0.561	-0.396			0.337	
Look forward to father's family and friends	0.551	0.364				
Poor relationship; avoidance of his friends	0.388	0.694				
Avoidance of father due to mother's bad-mouthing		0.645		0.354		
Difficult relationship with him led to avoidance of extended family	0.454	0.640				
Avoidance of father due to mother's portrayal		0.638		0.372		
Anger to father due to mother's putdowns		0.632				
Complaints that kept me from visiting	0.314	0.619			0.328	
Good reason for father's negativity about mother		-0.366	0.762			
Other's comments shaped view of father			0.749			
Other's opinions affected attitudes toward father						

(Continued)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Avoidance and Negativity Without Guilt	Rejection	Other's Influence	Mother's Bad-Mouthing of Father	General Alienation Toward Father	Independent Thinker
Other's opinions led to my same opinions			0.724			
Mother tried getting me to think bad about father				0.813		
Mother said mean things so I'd be upset with father				0.794		
Avoiding father's name	0.311	0.354		0.474	0.698	
Need to side with mother in argument with father	-0.431				-0.584	
Had no complaints	0.491	0.418			0.504	
Personal qualities hindered closeness to father					0.444	
Avoid talking about father with others	0.324					
No one influenced thoughts of father						0.737
Made up own mind about father						0.670
Own attitudes toward father			-0.414		-0.413	0.448
% of variance explained	16.72	13.95	8.41	8.30	8.23	6.38

TABLE 4 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability for Relationship Distancing Questionnaire Empirically Derived Factors

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Alpha Coefficient
For Mother section ^a			
Negativity without guilt	14.88	7.20	0.85
Complaints and avoidance	20.58	8.26	0.82
Rejection	14.41	6.72	0.85
Other's influence	8.41	3.80	0.66
Father's bad-mouthing of mother	5.71	2.90	0.67
Father's bad-mouthing producing negativity toward mother	7.62	3.05	0.58
Independent thinker	13.69	2.78	0.24
All factors together			0.76
For Father section ^b			
Avoidance and negativity without guilt	30.76	14.05	0.92
Rejection	23.11	11.01	0.89
Other's influence	8.81	4.11	0.72
Mother's bad-mouthing of father	7.42	4.18	0.79
General alienation toward father	19.76	8.50	0.84
Independent thinker	14.40	3.02	0.55
All factors together			0.79

^aValid *N* = 224. ^bValid *N* = 223.

TABLE 5 Intercorrelations for Relationship Distancing Questionnaire Empirically Derived Factors for the Mother Section

	MF1	MF2	MF3	MF4	MF5	MF6
MF1 Negativity without guilt						
MF2 Complaints and avoidance	0.87**					
MF3 Rejection	0.83**	0.89**				
MF4 Other's influence	0.14*	0.21**	0.25**			
MF5 Father's bad-mouthing of mother	0.25**	0.28**	0.42**	0.24**		
MF6 Father's bad-mouthing producing negativity toward mother	0.40**	0.50**	0.61**	0.23**	0.54**	
MF7 Independent thinker	-0.34**	-0.42**	-0.34**	-0.21**	-0.16*	-0.22**

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level. **Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

With respect to test-retest reliability, the scale means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for the RDQ total scores and each factor on the Mother and Father sections are presented in Table 7. Pearson correlations to determine test-retest reliability were completed using retest questionnaires that were matched to the original RDQ measure. In general, the RDQ scores have promisingly high test-retest reliability. Specifically, the Mother and Father total scores have excellent test-retest reliability, as do the majority of the Mother and Father factors. The fourth factor on the RDQ Mother

TABLE 6 Intercorrelations for Relationship Distancing Questionnaire Empirically Derived Factors for the Father Section

	FF1	FF2	FF3	FF4	FF5
FF1 Avoidance and negativity without guilt					
FF2 Rejection	0.92*				
FF3 Other's influence	0.35*	0.42*			
FF4 Mother's bad-mouthing of father	0.57*	0.66*	0.38*		
FF5 General alienation	0.89*	0.86*	0.49*	0.54*	
FF6 Independent thinker	-0.33*	-0.39*	-0.56*	-0.41*	-0.44*

*Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

TABLE 7 Test-Retest Reliability for Relationship Distancing Questionnaire (RDQ) Total Scores and Empirically Driven Factors

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r</i>	Valid <i>N</i>
RDQ Mother Total	56.00	14.65	.94*	
RDQ Mother Retest Total	55.18	13.31		34
RDQ MF1	14.32	7.43	.95**	
RDQ MF1 Retest	14.44	6.50		25
RDQ MF2	20.20	8.70	.94**	
RDQ MF2 Retest	20.24	8.49		25
RDQ MF3	14.44	8.57	.96**	
RDQ MF3 Retest	14.56	7.75		25
RDQ MF4	9.00	3.96	.53**	
RDQ MF4 Retest	11.67	4.34		24
RDQ MF5	5.75	3.07	.90**	
RDQ MF5 Retest	5.38	2.73		24
RDQ MF6	7.60	3.67	.95**	
RDQ MF6 Retest	6.88	2.91		25
RDQ MF7	13.40	2.90	.64**	
RDQ MF7 Retest	13.56	2.63		25
RDQ Father Total	59.12	17.02	.88**	
RDQ Father Retest Total	58.35	15.96		34
RDQ FF1	29.52	13.10	.94**	
RDQ FF1 Retest	28.88	13.89		25
RDQ FF2	22.24	10.34	.94**	
RDQ FF2 Retest	22.32	10.74		25
RDQ FF3	9.38	4.17	.64**	
RDQ FF3 Retest	8.38	3.57		24
RDQ FF4	6.75	3.57	.91**	
RDQ FF4 Retest	6.63	3.99		24
RDQ FF5	18.96	8.24	.88**	
RDQ FF5 Retest	18.08	7.53		25
RDQ FF6	14.00	3.08	.42*	
RDQ FF6 Retest	12.12	1.88		25

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level. **Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

section, other's influence, has the lowest test-retest reliability, but is still a moderate correlation. Similarly, the sixth factor on the RDQ Father section, independent thinker, has the lowest test-retest reliability but is also in the moderate range for correlations.

TABLE 8 Correlations for Relationship Distancing Questionnaire Mother Scores and External Measures' Scores

	RDQM	MF1	MF2	MF3	MF4	MF5	MF6	MF7
MFP2	-0.59	-0.73	-0.76	-0.77	-0.26	-0.28	-0.44	0.34
MFP3	-0.49	-0.65	-0.73	-0.70	-0.27	-0.21	-0.44	0.24
CPIC	0.48	0.39	0.39	0.44	0.12	0.55	0.42	-0.21
IPPAM	-0.54	-0.71	-0.74	-0.73	-0.23	-0.25	-0.43	0.34
IPPA3	0.55	0.64	0.68	0.68	0.27	0.26	0.45	-0.24

Note. RDQM = RDQ Mother Total score; MF1 = negativity without guilt; MF2 = complaints and avoidance; MF3 = rejection; MF4 = other's influence; MF5 = father's bad-mouthing of mother; MF6 = father's bad-mouthing producing negativity toward mother; MF7 = independent thinker; MFP2 = mother's acceptance versus rejection; MFP3 = parent idealization; CPIC1 = Conflict Properties; IPPAM = Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) Mother Attachment; IPPA3 = IPPA Mother Alienation.

For $r > .13, p < .05$; $r \geq .18, p < .01$.

Validity of the RDQ Factors

This section discusses convergent validity of the empirically derived factors of the RDQ as well as the RDQ total scores; other evidence for the RDQ's validity is offered elsewhere (Moné & Biringen, 2006). Table 8 displays the correlation matrix for the RDQ Mother total score and the empirically derived factors for the Mother section of the RDQ with respect to the external measures. The moderate to high correlations between the RDQ Mother total score and the other measures of family functioning and social relationships support the RDQ's convergent validity. Specifically, with respect to the scores on the MFP Scale, higher scores for the RDQ Mother total were associated with higher ratings of mothers' rejection. This pattern appears for all but the seventh factor in relation to the MFP rejection scale. For the seventh factor, independent thinker, higher scores were significantly associated with higher recollections of mother's acceptance. The RDQ Mother total and the first six factors were negatively related to recollections of mother idealization. Because the idealization scale refers to a child's unrealistic views regarding parental perfection and an inability to accept parents' faults, it makes sense that higher parental alienation toward one's mother was associated with a less idealized view of one's mother in childhood.

Table 9 shows the correlation matrix for the RDQ Father total score and the empirically derived factors for the Father section of the RDQ with respect to the external measures. The same trends appear for father scores as mother scores. For instance, higher parental alienation toward father is associated with recollections of father's rejection. However, like the independent thinker factor on the Mother section of the RDQ, higher scores on the independent thinker factor on the Father section of the RDQ were related to recollections of father's acceptance. Finally, higher parental alienation toward one's father, as evidenced by the RDQ Father total score, is related to a less idealized view of one's father during childhood. Overall, the pattern

TABLE 9 Correlations for Relationship Distancing Questionnaire (RDQ) Father Scores and External Measures' Scores

	RDQF	FF1	FF2	FF3	FF4	FF5	FF6
MFP2	-0.64	-0.76	-0.75	-0.30	-0.41	-0.72	0.28
MFP3	-0.55	-0.71	-0.67	-0.33	-0.34	-0.74	0.30
CPIC	0.53	0.55	0.57	0.21	0.56	0.53	-0.24
IPPAF	-0.59	-0.74	-0.72	-0.29	-0.35	-0.69	0.26
IPPA3	0.59	0.69	0.69	0.28	0.37	0.66	-0.23

Note. RDQF = RDQ Father Total score; FF1 = avoidance and negativity without guilt; FF2 = rejection; FF3 = other's influence; FF4 = mother's bad-mouthing of father; FF5 = general alienation; FF6 = independent thinker; MFP2 = father's acceptance versus rejection; MFP3 = parent idealization; CPIC = Conflict Properties; IPPAF = Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) Father Attachment; IPPA3 = IPPA Father Alienation.

For $r > .13$, $p < .05$; $r \geq .18$, $p < .01$.

of correlations between the RDQ factor scores and the MFP Scale scores suggests the RDQ factors tap into related, albeit somewhat different constructs.

As expected based on the previous literature related to conflict and parent-child relationships, scores from both the Mother and Father sections of the RDQ show strong associations with the CPIC conflict measure. That is, the more one recalls experiencing alienation from a particular parent (as evidenced by RDQ total scores), the higher one rates the level of interparental conflict. This might indicate that the more conflict that occurs between parents, the more likely it is that the child might recall experiencing the pressure to side with one parent over another.

With respect to the IPPA, higher scores for the RDQ totals were negatively related to parent-child relationship quality. Higher RDQ total scores for the Mother and Father sections of the RDQ were negatively related to parent attachment on the IPPA. This pattern repeated for most of the factor scores as well. In relation to the IPPA parent alienation score, RDQ scale scores for both the Mother and Father sections were positively associated with the IPPA parental alienation score. Higher RDQ total scores and higher scores for all but the independent thinker factor were connected to higher parent alienation scores on the IPPA, indicating a strong measure of convergent validity.

DISCUSSION

The results from the principal components analysis, reliability, and validity testing suggest the RDQ as a legitimate tool to test young adults' recollections of experiencing parental alienation toward one or both parents. The RDQ shows adequate psychometric qualities, indicating it is a reliable and valid assessment. This new assessment helps to fulfill Dunne and Hedrick's (1994) indication of the need for retrospective reports of parental alienation,

and offers a measurement tool for further investigation of recollections of alienation.

Results indicate moderate correlations between the RDQ Mother and Father factors; the correlations are not too high, which gives credence to the idea that similar, but distinct constructs are being measured. As well, the identification of separate characteristics of parental alienation, with good alpha levels for each factor, suggests a multifaceted construct (Gardner, 1985; Kelly & Johnston, 2001). It is interesting that seven factors were generated for the Mother section of the RDQ, whereas only six were generated for the Father section. It is possible that one's sense of being alienated from one's mother is more differentiated than that for one's father. Replication of this research is needed to expand whether experiencing parental alienation with respect to mothers versus fathers actually looks different.

A few caveats are in order. First, the RDQ measures a young adult's perceptions about the occurrence of alienation during childhood and adolescence; it does not measure whether parental alienation actually occurred. Second, this is clearly a retrospective measurement device. It was not created to assess whether alienation is currently occurring. As Lampel (2002) suggested, there is a need to determine the presence of alienation while it is happening. We would underscore the need to determine this need through empirical rather than clinical means via the development of reliable and valid assessment tools.

Second, too few men were included in the testing of the RDQ; therefore, it might not adequately represent their experience or the accuracy of the psychometric properties with respect to young adult males. It should be noted, however, that analyses excluding male participants yielded the reported pattern. Third, the RDQ employs intricate wording and detailed instructions; if it is used with children, adolescents, or adult populations without education beyond high school, additional psychometric testing is necessary.

Finally, caution must be taken when identifying the level of felt alienation. The "high" RDQ total scores reported in this study were not as high as the maximum level on this assessment. The highest score during this project reached 125 and is not close to the highest score of 162. In fact, responses to individual items were skewed such that only 2% to 10% of respondents indicated that they had experienced any parental alienation. It could be that the respondents felt moderate parental alienation or mere estrangement from one parent, as Kelly and Johnston (2001) described. Further inquiry is needed to empirically generate distinct delineations among low, moderate, and severe feelings of parental alienation.

Despite these caveats, in addition to Moné and Biringen (2006), this is one of only a few published accounts on recalled parental alienation, and offers the RDQ as a valid and reliable assessment tool. Future research with varied ages and diverse populations as well as potential interviews,

observations, or both will supplement this initial information on individuals' perceptions of parental alienation. Most important, the instrument paves the pathway toward investigating theoretical issues on parental alienation and how it can impact the development and maintenance of close relationships with caregivers, suggesting that negative representations offered by at least one parent could guide and cloud the representations of the child.

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