Perceived Parental Reactions Scale

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The Perceived Parental Reactions Scale (PPRS) assesses gay, lesbian, and bisexual (LGB) individuals’ perceptions of their parents’ initial reactions to their coming out. It evaluates eight theoretical dimensions of perceived parental reactions, including negative shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, general homophobia, and parent-focused concerns.

Description

The PPRS is a 32-item scale wherein self-identified LGB individuals are asked to rate their mother’s or father’s initial reactions to their coming out. Maternal and paternal reactions are rated on separate versions of the scale, which are identical except for references to parent gender. Individuals are required to think back to the week their mother or father found out about their sexual orientation and indicate agreement or disagreement with several possible reactions (e.g., cried tears of sadness) using a 5-point Likert scale. The PPRS was developed on the basis of Weinberg’s (1972) love versus conventionality theory and Savin-Williams’ (2001) initial reactions model.

The scale was initially developed to assess nine theoretical dimensions of parents’ initial reactions to coming out, including negative shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, general homophobia, parent-focused concerns, and child-focused concerns. Four items assess each dimension. Items assessing the child-focused dimension were later removed based on the results of the initial scale development study. Child-focused items were written to address parental responses of concern for their child (e.g., “My mother was worried about my chances of finding a relationship partner”), which were initially conceptualized as positive reactions from parents. However, these items did not correlate with the PPRS total as expected and lowered overall reliability estimates (i.e., alpha) in both the mother and the father versions of the scale. The result, therefore, was a 32-item scale assessing eight theoretical dimensions of perceived parental reactions.

Response Mode and Timing

During administration, individuals are provided with copies of the mother and father versions of the PPRS, asked to read the instructions carefully, and asked to respond to each item by circling a number on a Likert scale. Respondents should complete the PPRS only if (a) they have directly disclosed their sexual orientation to a parent or (b) they have had direct discussion with a parent about their sexuality following the parent’s discovery of their sexual orientation through other means (e.g., parent discovered gay material on the Internet, read a diary, or was told by someone else). It takes approximately 15 minutes to complete both the mother and the father versions of the PPRS.

Scoring

Before calculating the scale total, Items 1, 5, 8, and 10 are reverse scored. The PPRS total score is obtained by summing all items, with possible scores ranging from 32 to 160. Higher scores represent more negative perceived reactions from parents. Items assessing the various theoretical domains are as follows: negative shock (Items 13, 18, 23, 28), denial (Items 14, 19, 24, 29), anger (Items 15, 20, 25, 30), bargaining (Items 16, 21, 25, 31), depression (Items 17, 22, 26, 32), acceptance (Items 1, 5, 8, 10), general homophobia (Items 3, 6, 9, 11), and parent-focused concerns (Items 2, 4, 7, 12). Despite these various theoretical domains, the scale should be used as a whole, because factor analyses have not yet supported the use of individual domain scores as discrete subscales.

Reliability

The reliability of the PPRS has been examined in two independent empirical investigations. In the initial development study (Willoughby, Malik, & Lindahl, 2006), the PPRS was administered to 72 gay men (ages 18 to 26) recruited from LGB community- and university-based organizations. Participants were ethnically diverse (39% Hispanic, 39% White-Anglo European, 10% Caribbean/African American, 12% Mixed/Other). The majority of participants had completed some college or a bachelor’s degree (83%), whereas others reported high school (15%) or elementary school (1%) as their highest level of education. Of the 72 respondents, 70 were out to their mothers and 45 were out to their fathers. Means and standard
deviations for the PPRS total score were as follows: mother version $M = 90.16$, $SD = 35.21$; father version $M = 86.87$, $SD = 31.73$. In this study, all items on both the mother and the father versions of the PPRS showed item-total correlations of .40 or above and demonstrated good internal consistencies (mother version [$n = 70$, $\alpha = .97$; father version [$n = 45$, $\alpha = .97$]). Using a subset of participants, both versions of the PPRS showed good test-retest reliability after a 14-day interval (mother version [$n = 19$, $r = .97$; father version [$n = 12$, $r = .95$]).

The mother version of the PPRS was administered as part of a larger protocol examining the family and peer relationships of LGB young people. Participants included 81 young men (69%) and women (31%), who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. Ages ranged from 14 to 25 ($M = 19.70$, $SD = 1.76$), and the sample included young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds (54% White-Anglo European, 20% Hispanic/Latino, 14% African/Caribbean American, 6% Asian, and 6% Mixed/Other). Participants were recruited from LGB social and college groups, as well as via study advertisements and friend referrals. Of the 81 young people, 65 were out to their mother. In this sample, the mean of the PPRS total score was 89.64 ($SD = 34.37$). Similar to the development study, all items showed item-total correlations of .39 and above. Internal consistency was also adequate ($n = 65$, $\alpha = .97$).

Validity

Initial evidence supports the construct validity of the PPRS. First, as reported by Willoughby et al. (2006), gay men reporting to have grown up in families with low masculinities, as measured by the Behavior Assessment Scale for Children (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004), showed significantly lower scores on the father version of the PPRS compared to the mother version ($M = 86.87$, $SD = 34.37$). This finding supports the construct validity of the PPRS.

Exhibit

Perceived Parental Reactions Scale—Mother Version

Instructions: Think only about your mother when filling out this questionnaire.

Think back to the week when your mother first became aware of your sexual orientation. Read the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by circling a number. Remember, there are no correct or incorrect answers. These are your opinions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The week when I told my mother I was gay/lesbian/bisexual (or when she found out I was gay/lesbian/bisexual) she:

1. supported me
2. was worried about what her friends and other parents would think of her
3. had the attitude that homosexual people should not work with children
4. was concerned about what the family might think of her
5. was proud of me
6. believed that marriage between homosexual individuals was unacceptable
7. was concerned about the potential that she wouldn’t get grandchildren from me
8. realized I was still “me,” even though I was gay/lesbian/bisexual

References


Identity encompasses a coherent sense of one’s values, beliefs, and roles, including but not limited to gender, race, ethnicity, social class, spirituality, and sexuality. Identity development is an active process of exploring and assessing one’s identity and establishing a commitment to an integrated identity. Marcia (1966) generated a four-status model for understanding ego identity development based on the processes of exploration and commitment to identity: (a) foreclosure (commitment without prior exploration), (b) moratorium (withholding commitment during the process of exploration), (c) achievement (commitment following exploration), and (d) diffusion (a lack of commitment and exploration). Fassinger and colleagues described two models of gay and lesbian identity development that define sexual identity development as including four phases (awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis) conceptualized along the dimensions of individual and group membership identity (Fassinger & Miller, 1996; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Building upon the work of Fassinger and colleagues, Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, and Vernaglia (2002) conceptualized a developmental model of sexual identity that more broadly establishes sexual orientation identity as just one of six components of individual sexual identity (i.e., perceived sexual needs, preferred sexual activities, preferred characteristics of sexual partners, 

9. believed that homosexuality was immoral  
10. thought it was great  
11. would have had a problem seeing two homosexual people together in public  
12. was concerned about having to answer other people’s questions about my sexuality  
13. kicked me out of the house  
14. didn’t believe me  
15. yelled and/or screamed  
16. prayed to God, asking him to turn me straight  
17. blamed herself  
18. called me derogatory names, like “faggot” or “queer”  
19. pretended that I wasn’t gay/lesbian/bisexual  
20. was angry at the fact I was gay/lesbian/bisexual  
21. wanted me not to tell anyone else  
22. cried tears of sadness  
23. said I was no longer her child  
24. told me it was just a phase  
25. was mad at someone she thought had “turned me gay/lesbian/bisexual”  
26. wanted me to see a psychologist who could “make me straight”  
27. was afraid of being judged by relatives and friends  
28. severed financial support  
29. brought up evidence to show that I must not be gay/lesbian/bisexual, such as “You had a girlfriend/boyfriend; you can’t be gay/lesbian/bisexual.”  
30. was mad at me for doing this to her  
31. wanted me not to be gay/lesbian/bisexual  
32. was ashamed of my homosexuality

*The 5-point scale is repeated following each item.

Measure of Sexual Identity Exploration and Commitment

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