



Insecure attachment and depressive symptoms: The mediating role of rumination, empathy, and forgiveness

Jeni L. Burnette^{a,*}, Don E. Davis^b, Jeffrey D. Green^b, Everett L. Worthington Jr.^b, Erin Bradfield^c

^a University of Richmond, Department of Psychology, 28 Westhampton Way, Richmond, VA, 23173, United States

^b Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology, 806 West Franklin Street, Richmond, VA 23284 USA

^c Duke University, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Box 90086, 9 Flowers Drive, Durham, NC 27708 USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 July 2008

Received in revised form 3 October 2008

Accepted 13 October 2008

Available online 28 November 2008

Keywords:

Attachment

Forgiveness

Empathy

Rumination

Depression

ABSTRACT

The authors investigated the associations between attachment, empathy, rumination, forgiveness, and depressive symptoms via the framework of attachment theory. Participants ($N = 221$; 141 F and 80 M) completed a battery of questionnaires. We hypothesized that (a) anxious and avoidant attachment would be negatively linked to dispositional forgiveness; (b) the anxious attachment–forgiveness link would be mediated through excessive rumination; (c) the avoidance attachment–forgiveness link would be mediated through lack of empathy; and (d) the insecure attachment–depression relation would, in turn, be partially mediated by the forgiveness process. SEM modeling confirmed these propositions, revealing the potential deleterious outcomes associated with insecure attachment and unforgiving responses to offenses.

© 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Research generally points to the benefits of replacing anger with forgiveness for individuals, relationships, and societies. For example, forgiveness promotes harmony, trust, and reconciliation and improved mental well-being and physical health (e.g., [Toussaint & Webb, 2005](#); [Worthington & Scherer, 2004](#)). Despite benefits, evolutionary perspectives suggest that people are predisposed to respond with vengeance. However, after initial unforgiving motivations are evoked, forgiveness can be reached if the victim values the relationship, cares about the offender, and feels secure in the relationship ([McCullough, 2008](#)). When is this transformation of motivation more attainable? This study maintains that differences in motivation to forgive are representative of differences in relationship orientation. More specifically, we integrate attachment theory with an evolutionary theory of forgiveness to explore if excessive rumination and an inability to empathize help explain the links between insecure attachment and reduced forgiveness found in previous research ([Burnette, Taylor, Worthington, & Forsyth, 2007](#)). Specifically, we focus on *forgiveness*, or the dispositional tendency to be more or less forgiving across time, people and situations ([Roberts, 1995](#)). We also extend past work by examining the mental health ramifications (i.e., depressive symptoms) of insecurely attached individuals' responses to offenses.

1.1. Attachment theory

Attachment research initially focused on how children experience a sense of security in relationships with their primary caregivers. [Bowlby \(1969/1982\)](#) contended that human beings are born with an innate but adaptable motivational system selectively designed to promote safety by inducing a need to seek proximity to attachment figures, especially in response to threat. The theory has been extended to relationships throughout the lifespan ([Hazan & Shaver, 1987](#)). Across this work, most researchers agree that the attachment system varies along two distinct dimensions of anxiety and avoidance (e.g., [Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996](#)).

Relational conflicts, such as interpersonal offenses, activate the attachment system. In times of relationship threat, according to [Fraley and Shaver \(2000\)](#), the avoidance dimension should influence the *strategies* individuals use to regulate their attachment needs, whereas the anxiety dimension should predict *affective processes*. Consequently, these two components of the attachment system manifest themselves differently in social interactions. Individuals high in avoidance expect others to act in an uncaring and rejecting manner, and often respond to conflict with blame, aloofness, and withdrawal (e.g., [Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004](#)). In contrast, individuals low in avoidance anticipate that others will be responsive to their needs, and therefore are more likely to respond with communication, compassion, and support-seeking. Highly anxious individuals exaggerate potential negative consequences of conflict, and tend to respond with anger,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 804 289 8113; fax: +1 804 2871905.
E-mail address: jburnet2@richmond.edu (J.L. Burnette).

hurt, and excessive rumination as opposed to the more emotionally regulated responses typical of individuals low in attachment anxiety (Simpson et al., 1996).

1.2. Attachment, rumination, empathy, and forgiveness

Drawing from attachment theory research, we suggest that these general patterns of conflict management also will be revealed in the forgiveness process. Scholars suggest that forgiveness is a motivational transformation that inhibits relationship-destructive responses and instead promotes positive behaviors, thoughts, and feelings toward the offender (e.g., Worthington, 2005). A plethora of research has shown that attachment anxiety and avoidance can hinder this transformation process (Burnette et al., 2007; Finkel, Burnette, & Scissors, 2007; Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2005; Lawler-Row, Younger, Piferi, & Jones, 2006; Mikulincer, Shaver, & Slav, 2006). However, it is not yet clear what the mediating mechanisms are in the link between insecure attachment and reduced forgiveness. Based on attachment theorizing (e.g., Fraley & Shaver, 2000) and past forgiveness research, we examine rumination and empathy as potential mediators.

When experiencing an attachment threat (e.g., a transgression), anxiously attached individuals have difficult regulating their emotions. They become preoccupied with uncertainty about whether they are cared for, tend to amplify the negative consequences of relationship difficulties, and often ruminate excessively (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005). Building on this research and work linking excessive rumination to reduced state and dispositional forgiveness (e.g., Barber, Maltby, & Macaskill, 2005; Brown & Phillips, 2005; Burnette et al., 2007; Kachadourian et al., 2005; McCullough et al., 1998; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005), we hypothesize that anxiously attached individuals' lack of forgiveness is mediated by rumination. In contrast, when avoidant individuals experience an attachment threat, they seek psychological and even physical distance, downplay or devalue the worth of the relationship, and derogate the offender (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). In times of threat, these strategies have been shown to impede helping behavior (e.g., Wayment, 2006) and emotional identification with others (e.g., Pietromonaco et al., 2004). These social support processes are hindered, in part, by the inability to empathize with others (Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999) and this lack of empathy has, in turn, been linked to reduced forgiveness, (e.g., Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005; Bono, McCullough, & Root, 2008). Thus, for individuals high in avoidance, we hypothesize that empathy mediates the attachment–forgiveness link.

1.3. Attachment, forgiveness processes, and depression

We also examine the mental health ramifications (i.e., depressive symptoms) of insecurely attached individuals' responses to offenses. Considerable attention has been given to the role of interpersonal processes in the insecure attachment–depression link (e.g., Roberts, Kassel, & Gotlib, 1996; Simpson & Rholes, 2004). For example, research has revealed that insecurely attached individuals' inability to harness social support contributes to negative health outcomes (e.g., Besser & Priel, 2008). Similarly, we suggest that insecurely attached individuals' responses to interpersonal offenses will contribute to depressive symptoms. Lack of empathy is an aspect of the forgiveness process that has been linked to reduced well-being including more depressive symptoms (e.g., Lee, Brennan, & Daly, 2001) and excessive rumination also has negative mental health consequences (Thomsen, 2006). Additionally, a great deal of research supports the link between unforgiving motivations and reduced life satisfaction, psychosomatic symptoms and depression (e.g., Bono et al., 2008; Lawler-Row & Piferi,

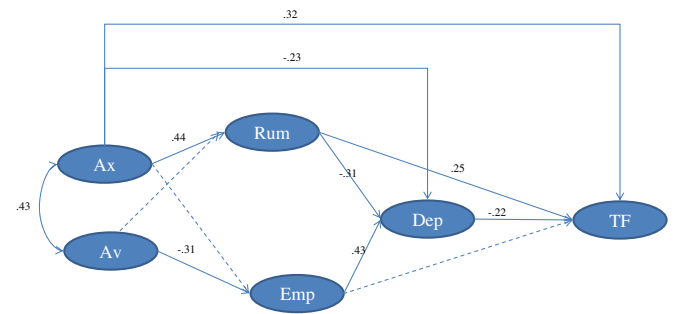


Fig. 1. Attachment, forgivingness, rumination, empathy, and depressive symptoms (Model 2). Note: dotted lines = non-significant paths. Ax = anxious attachment; Av = avoidant attachment; Rum = rumination; Emp = empathy; Dep = depression; TF = forgiveness.

2006; Orth, Berking, Walker, Meier, & Znoj, 2008). Building on this work, we propose an overall process model that examines the links between interpersonal (e.g., forgivingness and empathy) and intra-personal responses (e.g., rumination) to offenses and depressive symptoms for insecurely attached individuals (see Fig. 1).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

We recruited 221 undergraduate students (141 women) to participate (4.6% African American, 0.9% Asian American, 87.2% Caucasian, 4.1% Hispanic, and 3.2% other). All participants reported being involved in a romantic relationship for at least two months ($M = 19.30$ months; $SD = 15.85$). Most indicated their relationship status as dating steadily (2.3% friendship, 10.9% dating casually, 79.5% dating steadily, 4.5% engaged, 0.9% married, and 1.8% other). Participants completed a battery of assessments (see Table 1).

2.1.1. Attachment

We used the 36-item Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) to assess attachment anxiety and avoidance (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). The measure consists of two subscales, Anxiety (e.g., “I worry about being abandoned”) and Avoidance (e.g., “Just when my partner starts to get close, I find myself pulling away”). Responses are assessed on a 7-point scale, with scores ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

2.1.2. Forgivingness

We used the Trait Forgivingness Scale (TFS; Berry et al., 2005), a 10-item measure of forgivingness (e.g., “I can usually forgive and forget an insult,” “I am a forgiving person”), with endpoints 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Five studies added evidence for validity and reliability (Berry, et al., 2005).

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, Intercorrelations, and Reliabilities of Subscales.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	Alphas
1. Avoidant attachment	2.96	1.09						.93
2. Anxious attachment	2.63	.98	.43*					.93
3. Empathy	2.87	.63	-.31*	-.11				.53
4. Rumination	4.65	1.31	.09	.40*	.22*			.92
5. Forgivingness	3.33	.55	-.16*	-.40*	.42*	-.34*		.75
6. Depression	13.57	10.90	.25*	.52*	-.10	.44*	-.44*	.92

* $p < .05$.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات