Vulnerability attachment style to depression and lack of forgiveness: investigation the role of affect control

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Abstract

Objective: Despite growing evidence regarding the relationship between depression and lack of forgiveness, there are some ambiguities. In this Article three questions in two separated study were investigated: first, is there any difference between individual with vulnerable attachment styles to depression and individual without vulnerable attachment in terms of lack of forgiveness. Second, whether there is a relationship among vulnerable attachment, affect control and lack of forgiveness. Third, to what extent lack of forgiveness is affected by vulnerable attachment components and affect control.

Method: in Study 1 (N= 112), participants completed the vulnerability attachment style questionnaire and Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory. In Study 2 we included the affective control Scale and Participants (N= 145) completed three scales. Data analysis with Shapiro-Wilk normality test, non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test, Pearson correlation and Multiple Regression analysis.

Results: In first study, Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was a statistically significant difference between non-vulnerable and vulnerable attachment styles groups, in lack of forgiveness. Second Study result, replicated the association between lack of forgiveness and vulnerable attachment style. In addition affect control and attachment styles have some correlate with transgression related interpersonal motivations.

Conclusions: The current study has provided an evidence that lack of forgiveness may be regarded as a predisposing factor and antecedent to depression. However the relationship between attachment, affect control and forgiveness still requires further investigation.

Keywords: affect control, attachment, depression, forgiveness.
Introduction

Interpersonal transgressions and violations of the others’ rights occur in all communities. In such transgressions, people usually show different reactions (e.g., forgiveness, unforgiveness or revenge) (1). Meanwhile, forgiveness which is one of human virtues and is recommended in all divine religions, has been of interest to researchers during the last recent decade. It is a widely held view that forgiveness is positively associated with some aspects of mental health (2-8) and physical health as well (8-12).

There is no generally accepted definition for forgiveness, however, one almost agreed, defined forgiveness as a change in the individual’s emotional and behavioral reactions towards the transgressor; including replacement of negative emotions such as anger, fear or hostility with positive emotions like compassion and empathy, and replacement of desire to avoid the transgressor or revenge with benevolence (13-17). Although differences of opinion still exist, there appears to be some agreement that forgiveness is a complex process with cognitive, emotional, behavioral, interpersonal and motivational aspects (18), and several theoretical models explain this process with more emphasize on one of these.

McCullough and colleagues proposed a theoretical model with Focus on motivational aspect and suggested that tow motivational systems have significant role in forgiveness. The first one is tendency to avoid the offender (avoidance motivation) and the second one is tendency to reciprocate and making the transgressor feel like victim (revenge motivation). They believe that forgiveness take place when victim doesn’t avoid facing offender and refrains from thinking to taking revenge (19). In result, it has commonly been assumed that forgiveness is a way to cope with interpersonal conflicts (13), and therefore can be related to mood. According to recent reports, there is negative association between forgiveness and depression: depressed persons Less can be forgiven (20) and individuals with lack of forgiveness are more depressed (21-22); there are various explanations in this regard. Some researchers rely on personality basic trait, specially agreeableness, neuroticism and extraversion to lighten the relations between depression and forgiveness (22-24). Others more interested in mediated factors For instance negative rumination. Findings have shown that depressed patients tend to ruminate unhappy memories (25), while rumination with unhappy and frustrated memories is associated with lack of forgiveness (26-28). However the causal direction is not clear.

More recently, literature has emerged that offers interesting findings about role of Attachment in association between forgiveness and depression. Attachment theory, illustrate the importance of the bond between primary caregivers and child on future relationships (29). The findings indicate that insecure attachment styles are a risk factor for depression (30-32). So, there is some evidence about relationship between insecure attachment orientation and unforgiving (33, 34) and definitely, secure attachment orientation and forgiveness (16). But, what is the mechanism of this relationship?

There are lots of commonalities between forgiveness and attachment, for example, factors such as empathy, emotion regulation, and trust are involved in both of them (16). The mediating role of empathy has been studied and approved (33), However, the role of emotion control and regulation, is less studied.

Attachment style affects the concerns about the expression and control of strong emotions. Bowlby believed that anxiously attached children and adults are afraid of expressing their anger to an attachment figure, because they are worried about the consequences of expressing these emotions (e.g., rejection) (35). On the other hand, when a
person is exposed to interpersonal transgression, he will experience mental suffering which is usually associated with strong emotions such as fear, anxiety, angry and hostility. In such situations, if the victim can withstand these negative emotions and successfully manage them, he may forgive the offender (36), but it not always easy to forgive.

Un-forgiveness is also associated with emotions such as resentment, depression, hostility, hatred, fearfulness and anger (37) which are difficult to tolerate. Worthington (2001) suggested that victims may try to reduce the intensity of these negative emotions through some actions such as retaliation, revenge, seeking legal justice, avoiding the transgressor, etc. (36). According to this explanation, people who find it hard to tolerate intense emotions, have difficulties to control and manage them, and are worried about their emotion expressions; may be more prone to lack of forgiveness.

This study aims to answer three questions: first, whether people with vulnerable attachment styles to depression are different from people without vulnerable attachment in terms of lack of forgiveness. Second, whether there is a relationship among vulnerable attachment components, affect control and lack of forgiveness. Third, to what extent lack of forgiveness is affected by vulnerable attachment components and effect control. To answer these questions, two studies were conducted, the results of which are presented as follows.

Study 1
In Study 1, we examined the hypothesis that individual with vulnerable attachment styles to depression are differ from individual with non-vulnerable attachment style.

Materials and Methods
Participants and Procedure
The present study applied a Cross Sectional Survey design. In this study 137 volunteer students filled out Questionnaires. All subjects were undergraduates, Iranian and Persian. All the voluntaries were given information about the purpose of study, and It was explained them about volunteers and gave their written consent. Finally, 112 (50 female, 62 male) participants completed all Questionnaires. The participants were aged from 18 to 35 years old (mean age = 23.40; ±SD = 3.58 years). According to the vulnerability Attachment Scale scores their results fell into three groups; subjects with total score under the cut-off point (<57), in without vulnerable attachment style group (non-vulnerable group) (N:31, 13 female, 18 male); subjects with both high insecurity mistrust score (>30) and high proximity score (>27) in insecure anxious attachment style group (N:45, 19 female, 26 male); and subjects with both high insecurity mistrust score (>30) and low proximity score(<27) in insecure avoidant attachment style (N:36, 18 female, 18 male).

Measures
Vulnerable attachment styles to depression:
Vulnerability attachment style questionnaire (VASQ) is a short questionnaire which evaluates the subject’s behavior, feelings and attitudes towards the attachment figures in order to predict the risk of psychiatric disorders, especially depression in the general population. This questionnaire contains 22 questions and the answers are arranged by five-point Likert scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The scale outcomes are 5 different indicators including total score: the sum of scores for all the questions, and cut-off point> 57 that indicates the existence of insecure attachment in the subject. Two subscales
derived from factor analysis including ‘insecurity-mistrust’ component with 12 questions about the inability to trust others and prediction of rejection by them and cut-off point > 30; ‘proximity-seeking’ component with 10 questions about the dependence on and the need to rely on others and cut-off point > 27. Two combined indicators including insecure anxious attachment style resulted from high scores in both ‘insecurity-mistrust’ and ‘proximity-seeking’ subscales; and insecure avoidant attachment style resulted from high score in ‘insecurity-mistrust’ and low score in ‘proximity-seeking’. The validity of this test is assessed against Attachment Style Interview (ASD). The ability of this scale to predict depression disorder is in some cases better than other self-reporting scales, and its test-retest reliability is satisfactory (38). Reliability analysis on this Iranian sample found the ‘proximity-seeking’ Cronbach α: 0.753 and ‘insecurity-mistrust’ Cronbach α: 0.832 indicating high internal reliability. As illustrated later, participants were divided into three groups based on VASQ scores.

Lack of forgiveness:
In order to assess the lack of forgiveness, Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (19) has been used. This scale was created based on McCullough and colleagues theoretical model and assesses the motivations of revenge and avoidance toward an offender in everyday interpersonal situations. So it has two subscales: revenge with 5 items and avoidance with 7 items. The answers are arranged by five-point Likert scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. This scale has been shown to have adequate reliability and validity. Construct validity has been supported; Internal consistency reliabilities (alpha) for both subscales have been in the range from .86 to .93; and test-retest reliabilities have been in the range of .44 to .65 (19). The results of investigation the Psychometric Properties of Iranian version, revealed that the Transgression- Related Interpersonal Motivations inventory is a reliable and valuable instrument (39).

Statistics
Statistical analysis was done by using SPSS software for Windows (version 23). Due to the rejection of hypothesis of the underlying normal distribution of groups, non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare the three groups.

Results
Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the vulnerable attachment style questionnaire scores, and Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations scores, for non-vulnerable attachment style sample, Insecure anxious attachment style sample, and Insecure avoidant attachment style sample.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the three samples on VASQ and TRIM.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Non-vulnerable attachment style sample</th>
<th>Insecure avoidant attachment style sample</th>
<th>Insecure anxious attachment style sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attachment total score (VASQ)</td>
<td>M=50.93</td>
<td>M=63.63</td>
<td>M=70.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD=2.9</td>
<td>SD=3.4</td>
<td>SD=4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insecurity-mistrust subscale</td>
<td>M=24.51</td>
<td>M=39.94</td>
<td>M=34.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD=4.19</td>
<td>SD=4.6</td>
<td>SD=3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proximity-seeking subscale</td>
<td>M=26.41</td>
<td>M=23.63</td>
<td>M=35.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD=3.89</td>
<td>SD=2.57</td>
<td>SD=2.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a statistically significant difference between groups in Avoidance Motivation score ($\chi^2 = 36.908$, $p = 0.0001$) and Revenge Motivation score ($\chi^2 = 17.572$, $p = 0.0001$). The results of Kruskal-Wallis test and Pairwise Comparisons results are provided in Table 2.

At the Pairwise Comparisons there was a statistically significant difference between non-vulnerable group and both two vulnerable attachment style groups in Avoidance and Revenge Motivations. Insecure anxious attachment style group, and Insecure avoidant attachment style group had no significant difference in two transgression motivations.

Table 2. The Kruskal-Wallis test results for difference between 3 groups in Avoidance and Revenge motivations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vulnerability Attachment Style groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>Pairwise Comparisons</th>
<th>Std. Test Statistic</th>
<th>Adj. Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Motivations</td>
<td>Non-vulnerable attachment style group</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26.42</td>
<td></td>
<td>non vulnerable-Insecure voidant</td>
<td>-5.208</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insecure avoidant attachment style group</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>67.79</td>
<td><strong>36.908</strong></td>
<td>non vulnerable-Insecure anxious</td>
<td>-5.567</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insecure anxious attachment style group</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>68.19</td>
<td></td>
<td>Insecure avoidant-Insecure anxious</td>
<td>-0.055</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenge Motivations</td>
<td>Non-vulnerable attachment style group</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37.45</td>
<td></td>
<td>non vulnerable-Insecure avoidant</td>
<td>-2.482</td>
<td>0.039*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insecure avoidant attachment style group</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td><strong>17.572</strong></td>
<td>non vulnerable-Insecure anxious</td>
<td>-4.189</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insecure anxious attachment style group</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>69.11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Insecure avoidant-Insecure anxious</td>
<td>-1.654</td>
<td>0.295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study 2

In Study 2, we effort to answer two questions: 1) is there a relationship between vulnerable attachment components, affect control and lack of forgiveness; 2) what extent lack of forgiveness is affected by vulnerable attachment components and affect control.

Materials and Methods

Participants and Procedure

The present study applied a correlational design. In this study 192 volunteer filled out Questionnaires. Like previous study all subjects were undergraduates’ student, Iranian, Persian and explained to them the purpose of study and gave their written consent. Finally, 145 (69 female, 79 male) voluntaries completed all Questionnaires. The participants were aged from 18 to 47 years old (mean age = 23.41; ±SD = 3.93 years).
Measures

Vulnerable attachment components

Like previous study Vulnerability attachment style questionnaire was used. This scale consist of two subscales derived from factor analysis and indicated two main components of insecure attachment: ‘insecurity-mistrust’ with 12 questions about the inability to trust others and ‘proximity-seeking’ with 10 questions about the dependence on and the need to rely on others (38). In this study scores of these two subscales have been used.

Lack of forgiveness

We used Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM) like study 1 to measure the avoidance and revenge motivations.

Affect control

Affective Control Scale (ACS) was designed by Williams to assess fear of losing control over emotions expression or reactions to emotions (40). Items are rated on 7 point Likert type scales and compose four subscales: fear of anger, depression, anxiety, and positive emotion. Reliability and validity of ACS has been approved. Test retest reliability (r=0.78) and Internal consistency for the subscale scores (anger =0.72, depression= 0.91, anxiety= 0.89, positive affect = 0.84) was satisfactory (40). Validity and reliability of Iranian version of ACS, have been studied and approved; Internal consistency for all items (α: 0.84) indicating high internal reliability (41).

Statistics

Normality of the data was examined by the Shapiro-Wilk test. Pearson correlation was used to investigate the relationship between lack of forgiveness (avoidance and revenge motivations), affect control, and vulnerable attachment components; and multiple regression analysis (Backwards elimination) was used to investigate the impact of vulnerable attachment and affect control on lack of forgiveness. In this a full set of theoretical derived variables is reduced to the most parsimonious model by removing not statistically significant variables. All analysis was done by using SPSS software for Windows (version 23).

Results

The results of correlation analysis between lack of forgiveness (avoidance and revenge motivations), VASQ proximity-seeking subscale, VASQ insecurity-mistrust subscale, as well as affective control subscales are shown on the table 3.

Table 3.

Correlational coefficients, means and standard deviations of the variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. TRIM Avoidance Motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. TRIM Revenge Motivation</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>14.44</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the correlations are statistically significant and between .30 and .60. There was no significant correlation between proximity seeking component and revenge motivation.

A linear regression model (Backwards elimination) was used to determine how much of variance of lack of forgiveness can be predicted by vulnerable attachment components and affect control. Separate linear regression models were created for avoidance and revenge motivations using the six variables (two vulnerable attachment components and four affective control subscales). For avoidance motivation, insecurity mistrust score and proximity seeking score was a significant predictor. The sum of the effect sizes for insecurity mistrust score and proximity seeking score indicates that, 27.7% of variance in avoidance motivation is accounted for by these two predictors. For Revenge Motivation, there was only one significant positive predictors: insecurity mistrust. The sum of the effect sizes for insecurity mistrust score, indicates 25.3% of variance in the revenge motivation is accounted by this predictor (table. 4).

Table 4
Regression model assessing vulnerability attachment components predicting Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Avoidance Motivation</th>
<th></th>
<th>Revenge Motivations</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VASQ insecurity mistrust</td>
<td>0.397</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VASQ proximity seeking</td>
<td>0.332</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The results revealed a relation between vulnerable attachment style to depression and lack of forgiveness. Although some researches have shown that depressed patients can forgive others less than non-depressed people, it does not seem to be simply attributed to depression symptoms such as depressed mood. If so, the inability to forgive must increase with exacerbation of depression. However, there are some findings suggesting that clinical and non-clinical depressed patients are not different in forgiveness (42); and also some other findings suggesting that even preexisting levels of depression affect individual's ability to forgive (20).

Our results showed that lack of forgiveness is even related to the vulnerable attachment to depression in the general population. On the other hand, it was previously shown that inability of people with insecure attachment to forgive in interpersonal transgressions, affects their depression symptoms (33). Meanwhile, lack of forgiveness is a relative mediating factor between anxious attachment style and depression symptoms as well as a full mediator factor between avoidant attachment style and depression symptoms (33).

Thus, lack of forgiveness may be regarded as a predisposing factor and antecedent to depression. A review of forgiveness difference in depressed patients compared with the general population prone to depression in further studies, could better clarify that whether the forgiveness is more affected by depression disorder symptoms or by the factors that make a person prone to depression.

In the evaluation of the relationship between insecure attachment and lack of forgiveness, another finding obtained in the second study showed that insecurity mistrust scale scores had a stronger relationship with interpersonal transgression motivations, while proximity seeking scale scores had only a slight correlation with avoidance motivation. The regression results also suggested that insecurity mistrust factor predicts lack of forgiveness more than proximity seeking factor.

This finding showed that mistrust is the factor contributing to the effect of insecure attachment on forgiveness. In VASQ validity research, insecurity mistrust scale was related to depression over a period of 12 months, while there was no significant relationship between proximity seeking scale and depression (38). Therefore, mistrust in interpersonal relationships and discomfort of proximity to others, in individuals with insecure attachment style, is a factor with a greater effect on vulnerability to depression and difficulty to forgiveness.

People who have become disappointed and frustrated in their early relationships with their primary caregiver and are unable to trust others or engage in an intimate relationship with others, have problems in controlling their anger and might report problems of hostile dominance (43). It was previously mentioned that difficulty in tolerating strong negative emotions is related to lack of forgiveness (36). So, some part of the observed relationship between distrust/insecure attachment component and lack of forgiveness may be related to regulating and control strong emotions, including anger and hostility.

A review of the correlation matrix (Table.3), showed a minor correlation between affective control subscales and proximity seeking, a moderate significant correlation between affective control subscales and insecurity mistrust. There was a minor significant correlation between affective control subscales and transgression related interpersonal motivations. These findings are consistent with results of the studies suggesting that people with insecure
attachment style that have problem in getting close to and trusting others, have difficulties in emotion regulation and concerns about the emotional expression outcomes (44-47).

However, none of the affective control subscales in the regression equation could significantly predict transgression motivations. One reason is that affective control scale seem more evaluates concerns about control emotions, rather than affect control and emotion tolerance. Using different tools, measuring emotional control and management, different results may be achieved. However, the relationship between attachment, emotional control and forgiveness still requires further investigation.

Conclusions
The findings of the study add to our understanding of relationship between lack of forgiveness and depression. The results demonstrated that this association is not only because of depressed mood; and we suggested that forgiveness have some parallels with vulnerable attachment styles and may be one of predisposing factor to depression.

Limitations:
Several limitations should be considered when interpreting this results. The first one is that all participants were undergraduate university students in the Iran, and this restricted the generalizability of findings to other population especially psychiatric patients. The second limitation is that contribution of additional variables such as personality traits, were not measured. Third, we have conceptualized lack of forgiveness merely according to a motivational model, while there are several theoretical model in this regard.

Acknowledgment
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