

FROM ATTACHMENT TO AMENDS: UNDERSTANDING POST- TRANSGRESSION FORGIVENESS IN EMERGING ADULTS

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ABSTRACT: “To err is human, to forgive divine.” All humans at some points in their lives do make mistakes, however as easy it is to make mistakes, it is more difficult to forgive those who have wronged and betrayed one. This research endeavours to study the relationship between attachment style and post- transgression forgiveness. The sample size was 150 emerging adults, with equal number of male and female participants. Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivation Inventory (TRIM-18; McCullough et al., 2013) and Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) were administered to assess the motivations people hold towards their transgressors and their attachment styles respectively. Results revealed that fearful attachment style significantly positively correlate with Avoidance and Revenge motivations and Preoccupied attachment style also significantly positively correlates with Revenge and Benevolence motivations. Secure attachment style and Revenge motivation, preoccupied attachment style and Avoidance motivation, and Dismissive attachment style and Benevolence motivation, were found to have significant negative correlations. Attachment styles significantly predicted Avoidance and Revenge motivations but did not predict Benevolence motivation. This study's findings imply that attachment styles significantly influence post-transgression forgiveness. Secure attachment promotes healthier responses, while insecure styles lead to avoidance or revenge. Understanding these dynamics can help in fostering secure attachment patterns through therapeutic strategies to improve relationship outcomes and individual well-being.

KEYWORDS- Attachment Styles, Post-Transgression Forgiveness, Emerging Adults.

1. INTRODUCTION

The interconnectedness of humans forms the very foundation of societies. A number of factors including attachment styles influences one’s relationships. These relationships also go through ups and downs, with young adulthood being an especially tumultuous time. People react to acts of transgressions by either negative or positive forgiveness. With a dearth of studies relating these two variables, this research aims at examining the same.

Forgiveness has been explained as a voluntary process which involves the release of negative feelings of resentment and vengeance. According to McCullough (2000), forgiveness refers to an increment in prosocial motivation in a way that there is (1) less desire to avoid, harm or take revenge from the transgressor, and (2) increased desire to act positively toward him/her. Therefore, the basic principle of the theory reflects changes in motivations, with the person becoming more benevolent over time. This theory covers the inter-individual forgiveness and not intra-individual. In post transgression, one engages in either positive or negative forgiveness, the negative ones being Avoidance and Revenge, the positive transgression being Benevolence. These transgressions in forgiveness can be briefly summarized as following- Avoidance: seeking distance from one’s transgressor, Revenge: seeking to harm one’s transgressor in return, Benevolence: regulating anger and hostility constructively and forgiving the transgressor.

An attachment refers to a unique and enduring affectional bond between two persons. The theory of attachment was first proposed by Bowlby (1969) which was expanded by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) stating that the model of self and others can be conceptualized into different attachment styles. Four attachment styles arise from this and can be conceptualized as:

- Secure Attachment Style - derived from the positive models of the self and of others.
- Fearful Attachment Style – individuals have negative models of self and other.
- Preoccupied Attachment Style -individuals have a negative model of self and a positive working model of others.
- Dismissive Attachment Style - individuals have a positive model of self and negative model of others.

A study conducted by McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang (2003) reported that transgression-related interpersonal motivations result from three psychological parameters which are; forbearance (maintenance of benevolence, abstinence from avoidance and revenge motivations), trend forgiveness (increases in benevolence, reductions in avoidance and revenge), and temporary forgiveness (transient increases in benevolence, transient reductions in avoidance and revenge). The importance of studying forgiveness temporally underscores from the distinctiveness of each of these parameters.

Farrell, J. (2010) in a study observed the role of attachment and mood when forgiving a platonic partner. Participants with a secure attachment style were found to be less likely to consider the offense as having a major, negative impact on their lives, as compared to individuals with fearful or preoccupied attachment.

Based on literature, it was thought worthwhile to explore the relationship between attachment style and transgressions in motivation to forgive.

2. METHODS

The present research was conducted with an objective to study the relationship between attachment styles and post-transgression forgiveness in emerging adults.

- A. Hypothesis: To study the relationship between the selected two variables null hypothesis was formulated. H0: It was hypothesised that there would be no relationship between attachment style and post-transgression forgiveness in emerging adults.
- B. Sample: The data was collected from emerging adults, both males and females, in the age group of 18-25 years (N= 150 in which 75 were males and 75 females). The sampling technique applied was purposive random sampling.
- C. Tools: Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivation Inventory developed by McCullough et al. (2013) and Relationship Scales Questionnaire developed by Griffin & Bartholomew (1994) were administered for assessing transgression motivations and attachment styles respectively.
- D. Research Design: Correlational Research design was used to examine any correlation between the four dimensions of Attachment styles [secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive] and the three different kinds of Post-Transgression forgiveness motivations [avoidance, revenge, and benevolence].
- E. Procedure: The participants were identified and their consent for undergoing this research was obtained. The Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18) and Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ) were administered. Statistical analyses as per the requirement were applied on the obtained data.

3. RESULTS

The following table shows mean and standard deviation on transgressions in forgiveness and attachment styles.

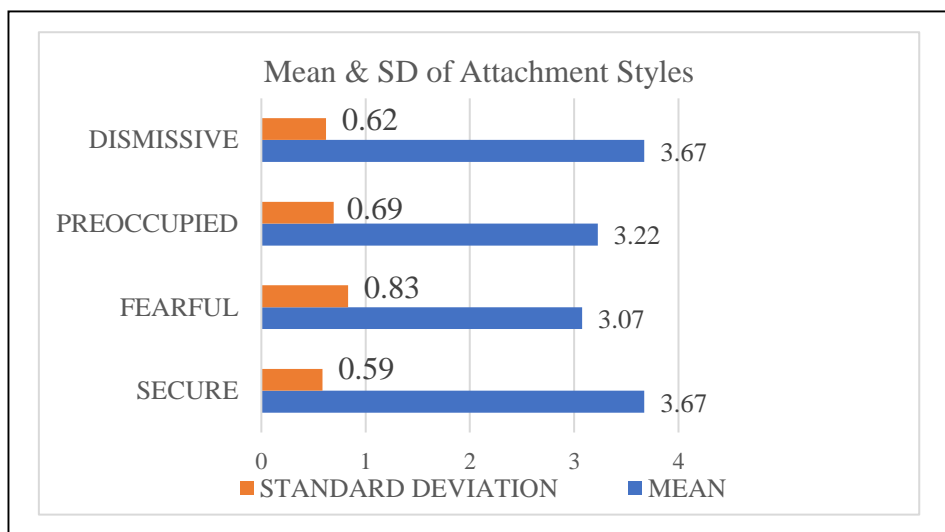


Fig. 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Attachment Styles

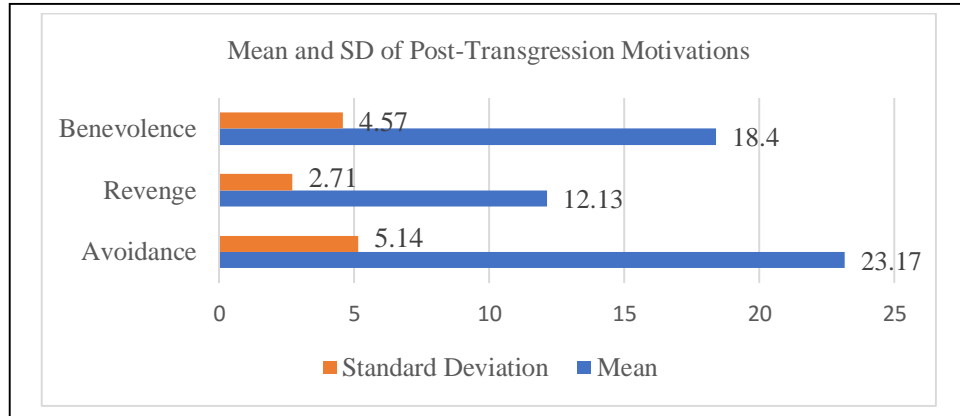


Fig. 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Post-Transgression Motivations

Figure 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of scores of the participants, in different attachment styles. The highest mean was obtained by participants characteristic of Dismissive Attachment Style. This shows that a large number of the participants rated themselves to be higher on this style as compared to the other three.

Figure 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the scores of post-transgression motivations. The highest mean in this aspect was of Avoidance Motivations, signifying that several participants intended and actual behavior surrounds the acts of escape and avoidance.

Table 1: Correlation between Attachment Styles and TRIM (N=150)

Variables	Avoidance	Revenge	Benevolence
Secure	-.092	-.195*	-.032
Fearful	.205*	.229**	-.102
Preoccupied	-.187*	.162*	.196*
Dismissive	.126	.154	-.160*

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. (2-tailed)

Table 2: Regression Coefficient with Attachment Styles as Predictors and Avoidance as the Criterion Variable

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	13.871	4.572		3.034	.003
	SECURE	-.130	.742	-.015	-.175	.861
	FEARFUL	.870	.558	.141	1.559	.121
	PREOCCUPIED	1.178	.624	.159	1.886	.061
	DISMISSIVE	.893	.725	.108	1.231	.220

Dependent Variable: AVOIDANCE

Note: Fit for the model $R^2 = 0.70$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.44$, $F = 2.723$, $p = .032$

The results suggest that none of the individual predictors significantly influence avoidance motivation. However, the overall model explains 4% of the variance in the dependent variable (Avoidance Motivation), indicating that, collectively, the predictors contribute meaningfully to the explanation of avoidance motivation.

Table 3: Regression Coefficient with Attachment Styles as Predictors and Revenge as the Criterion Variable

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	8.108	2.363		3.431	.001
SECURE	-.546	.383	-.118	-1.423	.157
FEARFUL	.384	.289	.118	1.330	.186
PREOCCUPIED	.725	.323	.186	2.248	.026
DISMISSIVE	.619	.375	.142	1.651	.101

Dependent variable: REVENGE

Note: Fit for the model $R^2 = 0.108$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.084$, $F = 4.41$, $p = .002$

The results indicate that the overall model explains 8% of the variance in the dependent variable (Revenge motivation), indicating that, collectively, the predictors contribute meaningfully to the explanation of avoidance motivation. Among the predictors only Preoccupied Attachment style is a significant positive predictor of Revenge motivation post transgression.

Table 4: Regression Coefficient with Attachment Styles as Predictors and Benevolence as the Criterion Variable

Dependent variable: BENEVOLENCE

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	26.858	4.140		6.488	.000
SECURE	-.566	.672	-.073	-.843	.401
FEARFUL	-.345	.506	-.063	-.682	.497
PREOCCUPIED	-.430	.565	-.065	-.761	.448
DISMISSIVE	-1.154	.656	-.157	-1.757	.081

Note: Fit for the model $R^2 = 0.036$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.009$, $F = 1.357$, $p = 0.252$

From the results it can be inferred that neither the Attachment styles overall nor the individual predictors significantly predict Benevolence motivation.

4. DISCUSSION

Since eons, forgiveness has been an integral part of religion, philosophy, and theology. However, more recently it has established itself as a significant part of psychology. Its importance has been propounded by all, ranging from its central nature in achieving nirvana or moksha according to religious texts, to its significant role in a person's happiness and well-being. Studies on forgiveness have shown that a number of factors like gender, age, empathy, spirituality, etc. all influence it at various levels.

It was hypothesized that there would be no relationship between the attachment style and the post transgression forgiveness. This hypothesis has however been rejected in 7 out of the 12 correlations, as illustrated in Table 1. Furthermore, regression analysis provided a more comprehensive understanding of how attachment styles predict post transgression motivations towards forgiveness motivations.

In the first scenario of Avoidance motivation and Attachment styles, insignificant correlations were found for Secure (-0.92) and Dismissive (0.126) attachment styles (Table 1). Thus, in these cases, the null hypotheses were accepted. Individuals having these attachment styles tend to distance themselves from others simply due to circumstances or other factors. As individuals characterizing with secure attachment style are well adjusted and are comfortable in their own individuality, their attachment

style does not play a significant influence on deliberate avoidance of the transgressors. People with dismissive style are so self-sufficient that they find it unworthy to invest their energy in being angry and deliberately avoiding the transgressor. These results were, however, not supported in many of the major studies done in this area.

A significant positive correlation was found between Avoidance motivation and Fearful attachment style at 0.205 ($p < 0.05$) (Table 1). This connotes that, individuals with a fearful attachment style are high on avoidant motivations and behaviors after an act of betrayal. Fearful attachment involves longing intimacy yet fearing hurt, leading to dependence without trust. This inner conflict makes transgressions feel like validation of their fears, prompting avoidance and severed ties as a protective response. Several studies have supported these findings. Farrell (2010) examined 164 emerging adults and the results provided evidence that persons with fearful attachment style were less likely to forgive their romantic partners and viewed the act of betrayal as a negative impact on their life. Another study by Guzmán-González (2022) examined response to partner transgressions in same-sex couples. Results suggested that fearful attachment, characterized by both anxiety and avoidance, were associated with increased avoidance motivation.

It was found that the correlation between Preoccupied attachment style and Avoidance motivation was -0.187 ($p < 0.05$), i.e., negative significant correlation (Table 1). Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style struggle to avoid transgressors due to obsessive preoccupation regarding fear of rejection. Prioritizing relationship protection, they resist avoidance, fearing it may harm the bond. However, research supporting this pattern is limited.

Regression analysis further suggested that there was a significant variance (around 4%) in Avoidance motivation explained by Attachment styles overall ($R^2 = 0.70$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.44$, $F = 2.723$, $p < 0.05$) (Table 2). The results suggest that attachment styles meaningfully influence how individuals regulate emotions and approach interpersonal conflicts including forgiveness. Past research has explored the relationship between attachment styles and avoidance goals. For instance, in a study by Schumann et al. (2017), findings indicated that individuals with avoidant attachment, which aligns with dismissive style, struggle with vulnerability, give less sincere apologies, and prefer distancing over emotional repair, reinforcing avoidance post-transgression motivation.

With reference to the relationship between Revenge motivation and Attachment styles, only Dismissive attachment style did not have a significant correlation ($r = 0.154$) (Table 1). This attachment style has a weak inclination towards holding grudges and seeking revenge from the transgressor. It is possible that other characteristics like self-sufficiency, not expecting anything from others, etc. might be more impactful over the motivation to seek revenge.

Secure attachment style was found to be significantly and negatively related to revenge motivation with a correlation of -0.195 ($p < 0.05$) (Table 1). It means that a person high on secure attachment style will be lower on revenge motive as this attachment style is characterized with a positive view of the self, others, and the relationships one has with them. There is lack of studies supporting similar findings. However, several studies have supported that secure attachment style is characterized with people who are more forgiving.

The correlation between Revenge motivation and Fearful Attachment style was 0.229 ($p < 0.01$), i.e., significant positive relation (Table 1). This means that those individuals characterized with a fearful attachment style, following an act of transgression tend to develop revenge motivations and behaviors. These individuals often hold a negative view about themselves and others along with high dependence on the people in their lives, both platonic and non-platonic ones. As a result, they tend to form negative motivations and attitudes, including grudges and feelings of resentment following any act of transgression by others. Researches have shown that anxious attachment was positively associated with revenge motivation and high amount of personal distress when imagining their partner's infidelity (Beltrán-Morillas et al., 2023). This is consistent with fearful attachment style, where a desire for closeness and distrust reinforces insecurity, which in turn fosters revenge motivation and hope for the transgressor getting what he/she deserves.

It was found that there was a significant positive correlation of 0.162 ($p < 0.05$) between Revenge motivation and Preoccupied attachment style (Table 1). Additionally, regression analysis suggested that Preoccupied attachment significantly predicts Revenge motivation ($\beta = 0.186$, $p < 0.05$) (Table 3). People with this attachment style constantly seek other's approval and have a positive view of others which make them likely to hold grudges and seek revenge from the transgressor as their emotions are negatively affected and lead to a negative cyclic thinking that others do not value them. A recent study revealed that anxious ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment style may exhibit heightened tendencies towards rumination and revenge seeking motivations (Brazil, 2025). Overall, Attachment styles as independent variable significantly predicted 8% of variance in Revenge motivation ($R^2 = 0.108$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.084$, $F = 4.41$, $p = .002$) (Table 3). It can be inferred that attachment styles considerably account for individual's tendency to seek revenge post transgression.

Results from regression analysis indicated that Benevolence motivation was not significantly predicted by Attachment styles. This indicates that tendency to forgive transgressors might be due to other factors like personality traits or cultural and societal influences, more than attachment patterns. This can be supported by a study on Somali population in Ohio, which found forgiveness tied to group and family harmony than to attachment tendencies (Idoko, 2023).

A significant positive correlation of 0.196 ($p < 0.05$) was found between Benevolence motivation and Preoccupied attachment style which means that out of fear of abandonment and because they hold a positive perception of others, they tend to forgive the transgressor. Benevolence motivation helps people to maintain their relationship as they are always needy and seek approval of others all the time. Research supports that individual with this attachment style tend to have a strong desire for closeness which drive them to forgive more (Körner, 2022).

The correlation between Benevolent motivation and Secure attachment style of -0.032 (Table 1) was not found to be significant. This shows that people characteristic of this style, while forgiving others or being benevolent towards others might be influenced by several factors like the kind of relationship one is in, the situation, empathy among others. It is also possible that such individuals release their negative feelings towards others but at the same time do not wish to continue with their relationship.

The relationship of Benevolence motivation with Dismissive attachment style was found to be negative and significant ($r = -0.160$, $p < 0.05$) (Table 1). People with dismissive attachment style find it difficult to forgive others as they are much motivated to seek revenge and avoid the transgressor. They refrain to forgive others as it might hamper their strong positive view of themselves of being competent to live without any close relationships. Karadoğan et.al (2022), researched on the predictive role of attachment styles in forgiveness with regards to married individuals and found that there was a negative relationship between benevolence tendencies styles and avoidant (dismissive) attachment patterns.

The results revealed a non- significant correlation of 0.102 between Benevolence and Fearful attachment style (Table 1). Benevolent motivations are indicative of goodwill towards the perpetrator. Benevolent tendencies in fearful attachment emerge from various factors, with attachment playing a minor role.

5. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded with confidence that the attachment styles and forgiveness motivations are related to some extent. The individual's attachment style and his perception of self and others help in determining the motivations behind forgiving others.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH

(IJMSSR)

ISSN 2455-1422 (Online)

www.aarmssjournals.com

Volume: 11, Issue: 02 | 2025

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