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## FAMILY STRUCTURE AND FORGIVINGNESS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF INSECURE ATTACHMENT

**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the structure of the family of origin and tendency to forgive by investigating attachment as a potential mediating variable. Polish version of the FACES-IV (Olson & Gorall, 2003; Margasiński, 2015); the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005; Kaleta, Mróz, & Guzewicz, 2016), the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Collins, & Read, 1990; Collins, 1995/2008; Adamczyk, 2012) were used. The sample consisted of 91 individuals aged 19–26 (58.25% females). The results showed that maladapt-

ive family of origin structures are associated with a lower level of dispositional forgiveness. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between adaptive family of origin structures and dispositional forgiveness. Furthermore, the results indicate that insecure attachment is a mediator in the relationship between the maladaptive family of origin structure and dispositional forgiveness.

**Keywords:** family-of-origin structure, forgivingness, insecure attachment

### INTRODUCTION

People often have to face unfair, hurtful, or even offensive treatment. They have no choice but to cope with it, yet their coping strategies differ considerably. Possible reactions to these difficult situations include seeking revenge, avoiding the offender, denying the hurt, exculpating the offender, or accepting the transgression (Wade & Worthington, 2003). There are also more positive responses to experiencing injustice, such as seeking justice, fair restitution, and accepting an apology. However, it appears that forgiveness is the most positive and constructive way of coping with transgressions. Researchers have defined forgiveness as the process of transforming negative emotions, behaviours, and thoughts towards offenders into neutral or even positive responses (Enright, 1996; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Rye & Pargament, 2002). However, people differ in terms of their propensity to forgive, which is dependent on many well-examined personality and situational factors (Riek & Mania,

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2012). At the same time, little has been known about family determinants of the ability to forgive across different situations and, consequently, of the benefits associated with forgiveness for interpersonal relationships, well-being, and mental and physical health, among others (Lawler-Row, Younger, Piferi, & Jones, 2006).

Studies have shown the link between family relationships and forgiveness (Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2003; Christensen, Padilla-Walker, Busby, Hardy, & Day, 2011). This association might be well explained by the concept of attachment, which refers to fundamental affectional bonds between children and parents, which work throughout the life cycle and are manifested also between adults (Goodwin, 2003). A number of researchers indicated that attachment is a strong predictor of forgiveness due to the correspondence between the two concepts (Burnette, Taylor, Worthington, & Forsyth, 2007; Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004). On the other hand, attachment is connected with family structure (Baptist, Thompson, Norton, Hardy, & Link, 2012; Crespo, 2013). Thus, attachment theory may help explain the association between the structure of the family of origin and forgiveness. The current study investigated whether family structure characteristics are related to forgiveness and demonstrated that this link is mediated by attachment.

## FORGIVENESS

In their definitions of forgiveness, researchers emphasize that it is a prosocial change in thoughts, emotions, motivations, or behaviors. However, Worthington and Wade (2019) highlight that “forgiveness is experienced intrapersonally even though it occurs in an interpersonal context” (p. 345). Thus, forgiveness occurs as a result of an internal shift of emotions, thoughts, and motivations, yet it is related to an already experienced interpersonal situation where one’s personal boundaries were violated or any other transgression was committed. Forgiveness has been conceptualized as an offense-specific response related to episodic forgiveness and focused on a particular offender or/and transgression (McCullough et al., 1997). On the other hand, the tendency to forgive is the general willingness to forgive across time, relationships, and situations (called *forgivingness*, Berry et al., 2005). Researchers have explored both forgiveness for intrapersonal and interpersonal transgressions.

Explorations of the interpersonal context of forgiveness have focused on its associations with maintaining fulfilling and meaningful relationships of different types: between family members (Lee & Enright, 2008; Maio, Thomas, Fincham, & Carnelley, 2008; Paleari et al., 2003), spouses (Fincham, & May 2017) and co-workers (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012). Additionally, they have focused on many advantages of tendency to forgive in relationships. One such advantage is the quality of the relationship, which is manifested in higher relationship satisfaction (Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2010), cohesion (Maio et al., 2008; Scherer et al., 2012), better communication (Fincham & Beach, 2002), and continuation of the relationship despite one side being hurt. Another advantage is a more effective conflict resolution (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2007) and less frequent disputes (Maio et al., 2008; Paleari et al., 2003). Third, forgiveness is conducive to building intimacy and closeness (Maio et al., 2008), better commitment in a relationship (Johnson, Wernli, & Lavoie, 2013), and reduced loneliness (Day & Maltby, 2005).

Forgiveness is also associated with various personality traits. For example, it is positively correlated with empathy (Burnette, Davis, Green, Worthington, & Bradfield,

2009), optimism, hope, gratitude (Hill & Allemand, 2010; Rye et al., 2001; Szcześniak & Soares, 2011; Toussaint & Friedman, 2009; Wohl, DeShea, & Wahkinney, 2008), and physical and mental health (Lawler-Row et al., 2006; Maltby, Day, & Barber, 2004).

To summarize, empirical evidence suggests that forgiveness is linked with personality traits and may contribute to better relationships. However, little is known about the impact of relationships, especially the family environment, on promoting forgiveness. Only few studies have confirmed this connection. For example, Passmore et al. (2009) showed that parental bonding is partially associated with forgiveness. Both maternal and paternal care are positively correlated with the tendency to forgive oneself and others, but paternal protection was negatively correlated with forgiveness. On the other hand, Christensen et al. (2011) indicated that forgiveness in adolescents depends on some aspects of the family relationship, such as warmth and connection. It appears that whole-family dynamics are linked to the tendency to forgive their participants, children in particular.

### FAMILY STRUCTURE CHARACTERISTICS

The family systems theory explains the interactions between family members and explicitly describes a family as a group entity. According to the structural theory, families are described by their structure, subsystems, boundaries, rules, and mutual expectations among family members. One helpful model for describing the family structure is the circumplex model of marital and family systems (Olson & Gorall, 2003). Three dimensions of the family structure are proposed two basic dimensions of cohesion and flexibility, and one auxiliary dimension of communication.

Cohesion puts emphasis on the emotional bond between family members. Indicators of cohesion include psychological boundaries, which may be too open or too closed, coalitions and cooperation between family members, as well as the time spent together. Furthermore, the extent to which other family members are consulted in a decision-making process is significant for cohesion (Olson, 2011). Balanced cohesion is conducive to better coping with daily stressors and emotional tension. However, families can manage intense emotions improperly. For example, too much closeness between family members leads to enmeshment: they become highly interdependent and reactive to each other. The energy of the individuals is mainly concentrated within the family. On the other hand, unreasonable separation prompts disengagement in families in which members lack mutual support, live separate lives, and are uninvolved with each other. For example, Baptist et al. (2012) have shown that emerging adults who perceive their families of origin as disengaged are less likely to deal with conflict in constructive ways. Also, studies have shown that family warmth and connection (Christensen et al., 2011) and parental bonding (Passmore et al., 2009) are associated with forgiveness.

Flexibility measures the amount of change in a family (with regard to leadership, roles and rules, Olson, 2011). Excessive flexibility leads to chaos in the relationships. However, insufficient flexibility prompts rigidity. Rigidity facilitates strong leadership, a highly differentiated family hierarchy, and strict rules. In contrast to rigidity, chaos in a relationship leads to absence of leadership, rules, and clearly determined tasks. Both chaos and rigidity, are identified as indicators of maladaptive family functioning.

Empirical findings concerning the relationship between family functioning and forgiveness generally support the conclusion that these constructs are positively associated (Passmore et al., 2009; Maio et al., 2008). However, it appears that the mecha-

nisms accounting for this relationship are not fully understood. One possible explanation can involve the specific types of bonds between parents and children, such as attachment, especially insecure attachment. Previous studies have indicated that anxious and avoidant attachment can hinder the transformation of negative emotions, behaviours and thoughts into neutral or positive ones (Burnette et al., 2007; Finkel, Burnette, & Scissors, 2007).

### ADULT ATTACHMENT AS A MEDIATOR

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/2007; Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) explains development of attachment between infants and parents, who are their primary caregivers. Despite applying attachment theory to parent-child relationships, research on attachment conducted in the 1980s focused primarily on adult relationships. Patterns of close emotional relationships in childhood lead to the development of internal working models of attachment in adulthood. A model explaining adult attachment as a framework for understanding adult romantic relationships was proposed by Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1990). Adult attachment is often measured using two patterns of attachment insecurity: anxious and avoidant attachment styles (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The hyperactivation of emotion regulation strategies is connected with anxious attachment. On the other hand, anxiously attached people are concerned with rejection and abandonment in a relationship and simultaneously activate exaggerated strategies connected with attempts to attain greater closeness, such as control over their partners (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). Due to an overpowering fear of abandonment, individuals exhibiting high levels of anxious attachment could presumably be more forgiving. However, their lack of effective anger control strategies and their tendency to ruminate on anger may reduce their forgiveness. For example, Liao and Wei (2015) showed a negative correlation between anxious attachment and forgiveness of both self and others. Similarly, other researchers indicated that higher level of anxious attachment is negatively correlated with the tendency to forgive (Burnette et al., 2009; Webb et al., 2006).

Unlike anxious attachment, avoidant attachment involves deactivation of strategies (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Deactivation leads to avoidance of closeness and dependence in close relationships, and to striving for self-reliance and independence. For example, Garrison et al. (2014) indicated that individuals with the avoidant attachment style were less likely to share others' distress, which is related to their lack of empathy. These findings are compatible with avoidant individuals' assumed failure to acknowledge negative emotions, denial of basic fears (Mikulincer et al., 2003), and using suppression as an emotion regulation strategy (Caldwell & Shaver, 2012). During hurtful situations, avoidantly attached individuals may use emotion regulation mechanisms based on extinguishing the emotion, whereby avoiding contact with the offender or denial of harm can both hinder forgiveness.

Secure attachment (i.e., low anxiety and low avoidance) involves a greater ability to cope with relationship distress in constructive ways. Individuals with secure attachment have more positive internalized models of others, and they perceive other people as dependable and trustworthy. This makes them view a given transgression as less hurtful and less severe, and believe that such behaviour is not typical for the offending person. Thus, individuals who exhibit greater secure attachment should be more forgiving. This

is confirmed by research indicating that a higher tendency to forgive is correlated with secure rather than insecure attachment (Burnette et al., 2007; Lawler-Row et al., 2006).

Research exploring the relationship between attachment and forgiveness used different models, which suggests multiple interpretations of the obtained results. Burnette et al. (2009) indicated that the relationship between insecure attachment and unforgiveness may be promoted through angry rumination. Wang (2008) observed that dependence (the opposite of avoidance) was positively correlated with state forgiveness but not related to trait forgiveness, whereas other attachment styles were significantly related to both types of forgiveness, though in opposite ways: anxious attachment was negatively related, whereas closeness was positively related. On the other hand, Chung (2014) showed that forgiveness was a mediator between attachment and marital satisfaction. Indeed, marital satisfaction can be increased through forgiveness even when there is insecure attachment.

Additionally, Crespo (2012) indicated that attachment and family structure are likely to be linked in a transactional way throughout development. This link should be considered as two-pronged – attachment as a starting point (or as the predictor construct) or attachment experiences as likely to stem from family processes. Additionally, attachment style facilitates more effective emotion regulation in a family, as a both an intrapersonal and an interpersonal process (Collins & Feeney, 2004).

Although many studies have shown associations between family structure and attachment (e.g., Baptist et al., 2012), as well as between attachment styles and forgiveness (e.g., Burnette et al., 2007), none have examined the link between the family of origin structure and forgiveness via attachment style. Thus, by integrating the research on the family system theory and attachment theory with theoretical frameworks of forgiveness, we propose more specifically that insecure attachment styles mediate the effect of the family structure characteristics on forgiveness. We examined a hypothesis that differences in family structure would predict forgiveness. Also, we investigated the link between family structure and forgiveness and tested the mediating role of attachment.

- H1: Higher level of adaptive structures in the family of origin is associated with a higher level of dispositional forgiveness. Higher level of maladaptive structures in the family of origin is associated with a lower level of forgiveness.
- H2: Anxious and avoidant attachment mediate the relationship between the perceived family of origin structure and forgiveness (see Figure 1).

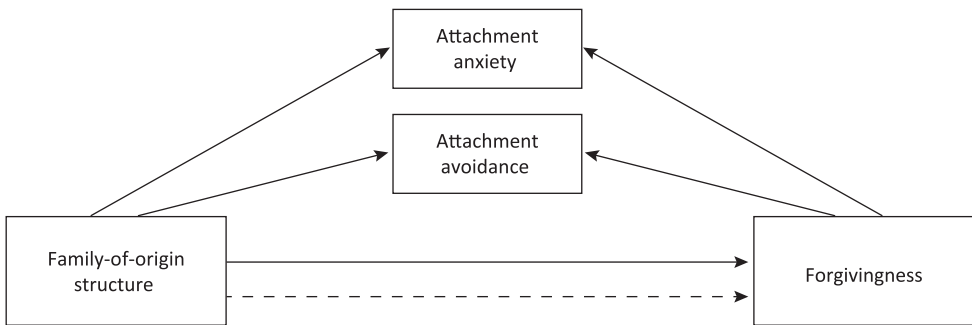


FIGURE 1. The proposed model of relationships between variables with family of origin structure as a predictor, attachment as a mediator, and forgiveness as an outcome variable. Continuous lines illustrate direct links, the dotted line represents indirect effect.

## METHODS

### Participants

Data were collected from 103 Polish adults (58.25% females) aged 19 to 46 ( $M = 24.97$ ;  $SD = 9.56$ ). The participants received no remuneration. They completed paper-and-pencil questionnaires in private, and returned the completed questionnaires to the researchers. The participants completed the Polish versions of the measures as anonymous self-report questionnaires. Their participation was voluntary. The final analysis involved 91 completed sets of questionnaires.

### Analysis

The relationships between all the variables (family structure, forgivingness, and attachment) were examined using Pearson's  $r$  correlation analysis. We conducted the mediation analysis using the hierarchical (multiple) regression strategy proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). Sex was not included in the regression analysis as preliminary analyses revealed no significant sex differences in the experiments with full factorial design.

### Measurements

#### *Family structure*

In order to diagnose the relationships between family structure and the other variables, the FACES IV-SOR inventory was used, which is an adaptation of the revised instrument developed by Margasiński (2015), based on Olson's circumplex model (Olson & Gorall, 2003). Respondents are asked to evaluate relationships in their families, which enables the analysis of current relationships between family and work systems. As in FACES IV, the questionnaire consists of 62 items (rated on a 5-point scale) divided into eight scales. Results referring to the basic dimensions of family relationships, that is, (a) balanced cohesion, (b) balanced flexibility and their extremes: (c) disengaged, (d) enmeshed, (e) rigid, and (f) chaotic were considered first. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for the FACES IV-SOR were insignificantly lower than for the American sample (Olson, 2011), but they were satisfactory (between .70 and .93).

#### *Forgivingness*

Disposition to forgive was measured with the Polish adaptation (Kaleta, Mróz, & Guzewicz, 2016) of the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS, Thompson et al., 2005). The HFS is a multi-dimensional tool assessing dispositional forgiveness of self, others, and of situations beyond anyone's control. Participants rate their responses to 18 items on a 7-point scale. The original version consists of three subscales (forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of situations). The current study used only the general score. The total HFS score indicates how forgiving a person tends to be. Sample items include "Although I feel badly at first when I mess up, over time I can give myself some slack" and "If others mistreat me, I continue to think badly of them". The measure's reliability and validity were satisfactory (Kaleta et al., 2016), with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (internal consistency) for total HFS score being .76.

*Attachment*

Insecure attachment was measured with the Polish version (Adamczyk, 2012) of the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Collins & Read, 1990; Collins, 1995/2008). The RAAS is an 18-item self-report scale used by participants to rate statements about how they function and feel in a relationship with a partner, someone close, and people in general (5-point Likert scale; 1 – *not at all characteristic*, 5 – *very characteristic*). Sample items include “*I find it difficult to trust others completely*”, “*I often worry that other people won’t want to stay with me*”, and “*People often want me to be emotionally closer than I feel comfortable being*”. The scale is two-dimensional. Items on closeness and dependency are merged into one dimension – the inversely avoidant attachment dimension (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .73$ ), and an anxious attachment dimension (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .73$ ; Collins, 1995/2008). The current study used the avoidant and anxious attachment dimensions.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and a correlation matrix for the family of origin structure characteristics, dispositional forgiveness, and attachment. As shown, levels of adaptability and cohesion, such as disengaged, enmeshed, rigid and chaotic, exhibited a significant, negative correlation with forgiveness. We also found a negative relationship between anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, and forgiveness. Furthermore, both types of insecure attachment were positively related to disengaged, enmeshed, and chaotic family structure characteristics.

*TABLE 1*  
*Means, SDs and correlations between the family-of-origin structure, forgiveness and attachment*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Balanced cohesion	24.36	5.01								
2 Balanced flexibility	22.80	5.02	.69*							
3 Disengaged	19.44	5.85	-.42*	-.36*						
4 Enmeshed	18.90	5.74	-.03	.14	.49*					
5 Rigid	20.96	4.08	.27*	.40*	.21*	.62*				
6 Chaotic	21.17	4.57	-.16	-.11	.57*	.48*	.18			
7 Forgivingness	75.52	10.20	.02	.01	-.23*	-.30*	-.22*	-.26*		
8 Attachment anxiety	17.22	4.06	.08	-.04	.32*	.26*	.12	.30*	-.45*	
9 Attachment avoidance	33.66	4.72	-.11	-.03	.35*	.36*	.13	.37*	-.46*	.35*

\* $p < .05$

Using hierarchical regression, we tested the hypothesized mediating role of attachment on the relationship between family system characteristics and forgiveness. Subsequently, a series of regression analyses was performed. We followed the recom-

recommendations for mediation testing outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). The mediating effect was tested using the Sobel test. We tested only those relationships that met the requirements set out in the recommendations by Baron and Kenny (1986). For each relationship, we selected three regression equations: the mediator regressed on the independent variable (a), the dependent variable regressed on the independent variable (c), and the dependent variable regressed on both the independent variable (c') and the mediator (b).

First, attachment was regressed on family system characteristics. Anxious attachment was correlated with chaotic ( $R^2 = .092$ ;  $F[89, 1] = 9.04$ ,  $p < .003$ ), disengaged ( $R^2 = .107$ ;  $F[89, 1] = 10.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ), enmeshed ( $R^2 = .069$ ;  $F[89, 1] = 6.59$ ,  $p < .011$ ) extremes; avoidant attachment was correlated with chaotic ( $R^2 = .14$ ;  $F[89, 1] = 14.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ), disengaged ( $R^2 = .124$ ;  $F[89, 1] = 11.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and enmeshed ( $R^2 = .13$ ;  $F[89, 1] = 12.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ) extremes.

Second, family system characteristics were regressed on forgiveness. In this step, chaotic ( $R^2 = .067$ ;  $F[88, 1] = 6.40$ ,  $p < .013$ ), rigid ( $R^2 = .048$ ;  $F[88, 1] = 4.45$ ,  $p < .037$ ), disengaged ( $R^2 = .053$ ;  $F[88, 1] = 4.99$ ,  $p < .028$ ), and enmeshed ( $R^2 = .088$ ;  $F[88, 1] = 8.48$ ,  $p < .004$ ) extremes were significantly correlated with tendency to forgive.

Third, attachment and family system characteristics were simultaneously regressed on dispositional forgiveness. Forgiveness was regressed on the family characteristic (Step 1),  $B$  representing the relationship between chaotic and tendency to forgive was reduced (from  $B = -.58$  to  $B = -.30$ ; from  $\beta = -.26$  to  $\beta = -.14$ ) when anxious attachment ( $B = -1.03$ ,  $\beta = -.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was entered into the regression equation ( $\Delta R^2 = .20$ ,  $F[87, 2] = 12.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The Sobel test revealed a significant indirect effect of full mediation ( $z = -3.259$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Similarly, the relationship between chaotic and disposition to forgive was decreased (from  $B = -.58$  to  $B = -.24$ ; from  $\beta = -.26$  to  $\beta = -.10$ ) when avoidant attachment ( $B = -.90$ ,  $\beta = -.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was entered into the regression equation ( $R^2 = .22$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .20$ ). The Sobel test revealed a significant indirect effect of full mediation ( $z = -3.822$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (see Figure 2).

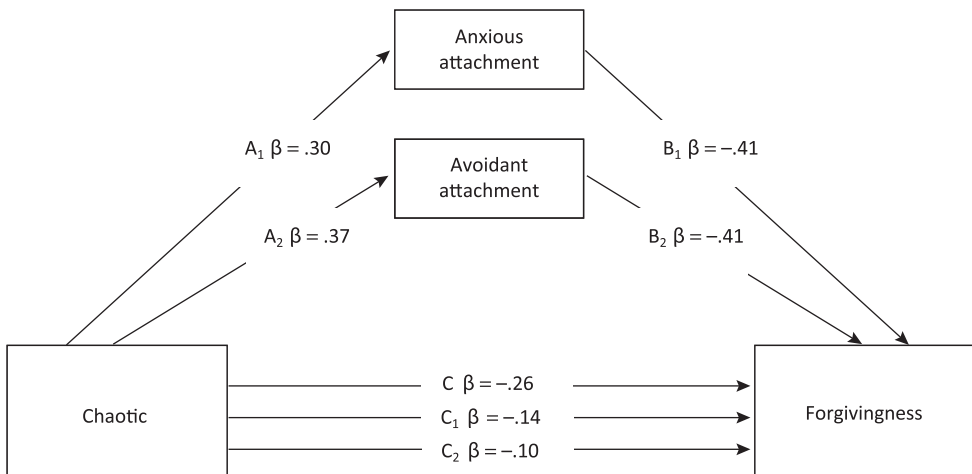


FIGURE 2. The model of relationships between the chaotic family structure as a predictor, anxious and avoidant attachment as mediators, and forgiveness as an outcome variable.



For the relationship between disengaged and forgivingness,  $B$  was reduced (from  $B = -.40$  to  $B = -.16$ ; from  $\beta = -.23$  to  $\beta = -.09$ ) when anxious attachment ( $B = -1.05$ ,  $\beta = -.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was inserted into the regression equation ( $\Delta R^2 = .19$ ). The Sobel test revealed a significant indirect effect of full mediation ( $z = -4.296$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Likewise, the relationship between disengaged and forgivingness was decreased (from  $B = -.40$  to  $B = -.14$ ; from  $\beta = -.23$  to  $\beta = -.08$ ) when avoidant attachment ( $B = -.92$ ,  $\beta = -.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was inserted into the regression equation ( $R^2 = .21$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .20$ ). The Sobel test revealed a significant indirect effect of full mediation ( $z = -2.947$ ,  $p < .003$ ) (see Figure 3).

Finally,  $B$  representing the relationship between enmeshed and forgivingness was reduced (from  $B = -.53$  to  $B = -.34$ ; from  $\beta = -.30$  to  $\beta = -.19$ ) when anxious at-

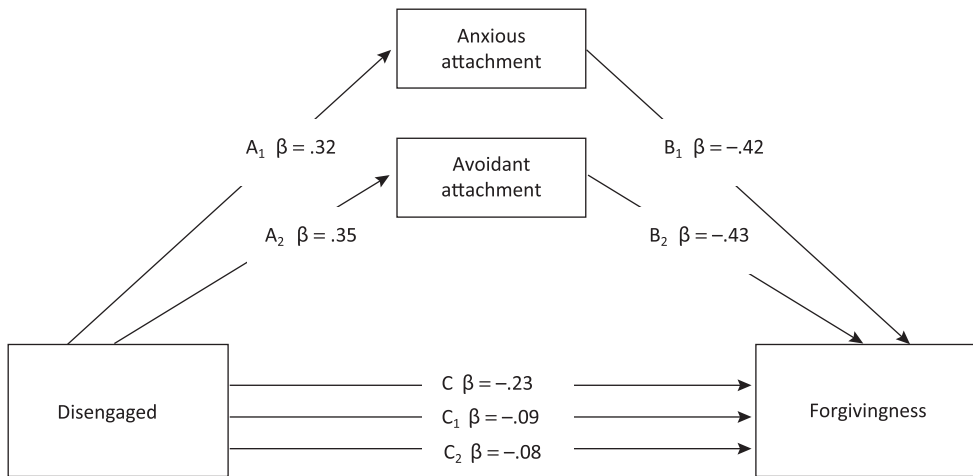


FIGURE 3. The model of relationships between the disengaged family structure as a predictor, anxious and avoidant attachment as mediators, and forgivingness as an outcome variable.

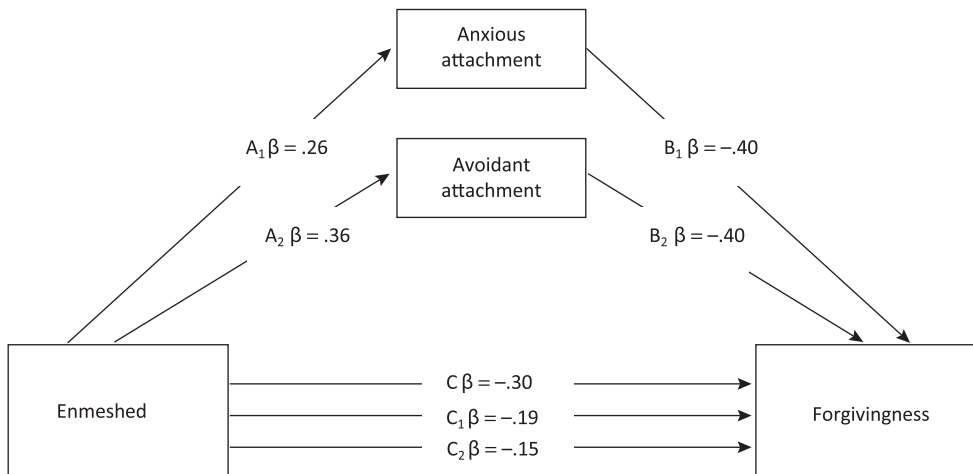


FIGURE 4. The model of relationships between the enmeshed family structure as a predictor, anxious and avoidant attachment as mediators, and forgivingness as an outcome variable.

tachment ( $B = -1.01$ ,  $\beta = -.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was inserted into the regression equation ( $\Delta R^2 = .22$ ). ( $z = -4.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Similarly, the relationship between enmeshed and forgivingness was reduced (from  $B = -.53$  to  $B = -.27$ ; from  $\beta = -.30$  to  $\beta = -.15$ ) when avoidant attachment ( $B = -.87$ ,  $\beta = -.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was inserted into the regression equation ( $\Delta R^2 = .21$ ). The Sobel test revealed a significant indirect effect of full mediation ( $z = -3.021$ ,  $p < .003$ ) (see Figure 4).

## DISCUSSION

The current study primarily sought to understand the role of family of origin structure in determining forgivingness through the working models of attachment. The findings partially supported the hypothesis.

First, we expected maladaptive family of origin structures to be negatively related to dispositional forgiveness, unlike adaptive structures, which we expected to be positively correlated with forgiveness. Our hypothesis was partially supported. We found that only maladaptive family of origin structures were linked to a lower tendency to forgive. When individuals describe their family boundaries using such expressions as “too much closeness” or “unreasonable separation,” they are less forgiving. This result is consistent with previous findings in which less forgiveness appears in relationships within a maladaptive family in which one member abuses alcohol (Scherer et al., 2012). Additionally, Hargrave and Sells (1997) indicated that it is often impossible to heal family relationships, as this could be too painful. Also, the offender is perceived as untrustworthy or unavailable, and forgiveness is not easy. Moreover, young adults (emerging adults, according to Arnett, 2000) are likely to perceive their families in a more critical way than after they get older. Thus, they can separate from their family of origin. However, absence of a significant correlation between adaptive family characteristics and forgiveness is quite surprising. This is not completely consistent with the previous research, which revealed that families with permissive mothers were more cohesive (Maio et al., 2008). Additionally, perhaps there are some natural processes of developing forgiveness between individuals (in a family) and only family-specific maladaptive factors may disturb this process.

Second, we explored the mediating role of insecure attachment (both anxious and avoidant) in the relationship between family of origin structure and forgivingness. More specifically, we found that both types of insecure attachment fully mediated the association between maladaptive family of origin structures (chaotic, disengaged, and enmeshed) and forgivingness. In the current study, individuals who perceived their families as more maladaptive were prone to describe their attachment as insecure, which may lower their tendency to forgive. This is consistent with previous research on associations between family experiences and attachment (Banford, Brown, Ketring, & Mansfield, 2015; Muller, Thornback, & Bedi, 2012), and a negative relationship between insecure attachment and forgiveness (e.g., Burnette et al., 2007; Liao & Wei, 2015; Kimmes & Durtschi, 2016). The relationship between maladaptive family of origin structures and forgivingness is facilitated by insecure attachment. Individuals who observe lack of engagement and support in their families of origin, in addition to chaotic and enmeshed boundaries, may not develop secure attachment. Therefore, when individuals describe some dysfunctions in their family of origin, they are less forgiving and they experience attachment insecurity.

ty. The methodology did not provide data to adjudicate between competing causal explanations for these associations. As regards anxiously attached individuals, one possible explanation is that their dysfunctional emotion regulation strategies lead to a lack of control over their behaviour and difficulties in reducing negative emotions or to replacing them with positive emotions. Control over one's behaviours and related transformation of negative emotions is important for forgivingness (Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007). Therefore, we observed a negative relationship between maladaptive family characteristics, anxious attachment, and the tendency to forgive. Similarly, Finkel, Burnette, and Scissors, (2007) observed that exhibiting anxious attachment leads to the development of a relationship between stronger destiny belief (the belief that potential partners are either perfectly matched or not at all) and being less forgiving of their partner's transgressions. Individuals with stronger destiny belief and simultaneously elevated anxious attachment levels are less likely to anticipate unpleasant insecurity in a relationship with a romantic partner. Additionally, Kimmes and Durtschi (2016) showed that forgiveness is more difficult when anxious attachment is high, because partners focus on specific information which confirms their attachment-related fears.

On the other hand, as regards avoidantly attached people, reduced forgivingness results from oppression, lack of empathy, denial of harm, and so forth. According to attachment theorists, forgiveness requires an empathic rather than a self-protective response to internal representations of others. However, avoidantly attached individuals strive for a sense of self-protection, and they attempt to avoid the grief associated with a disappointing relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). These specific reactions are associated with maladaptive characteristics of the family of origin. Also, dysfunctional families create negative self-views. This, in turn, may lead to difficulties with engaging positive cognitive reframing which simplifies forgiveness (Liao & Wei, 2015). An alternative explanation for this finding is that others are perceived as unsupportive and untrustworthy, and therefore, unwilling to remit the harm. Additionally, avoidant individuals find intimacy cumbersome (Fraleigh, Davis, & Shaver, 1998) and, consequently, they want less intimacy and need not seek reconciliation. For their own comfort, they leave relationship problems unresolved.

Despite numerous studies confirming strong associations between attachment and forgivingness, Barnes et al. (2010) pointed to insignificance of attachment dimensions for the relationship between the need to belong and forgiveness. They showed that individuals having a strong need to belong are more inclined to hold grudges than to forgive their wrongdoers. The maladaptive function of the family system and associated types of insecure attachment become activated while sustaining a loss, or experiencing a wrongdoing in particular. The prevailing reactions lead to shifts in attention or to minimizing the significance of the harm. In such situations, no forgiveness, compensation, and reconciliation is exercised.

Absence of any relationships between positive/adaptive family structures, insecure attachment, and forgiveness should also be explored and accounted for in greater detail. Perceiving one's own family as supportive is likely to attenuate negative views of oneself and others, or to enhance the control of one's behaviour. Since individuals feel less disappointed when they experience harm or feel less anxious about being rejected, this is conducive to the development of the tendency to forgive (e.g., Liao & Wei, 2015).

## LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As regards the limitations of this study, the first was that the participants were relatively young. Accordingly, this does not allow for generalizations of the findings to older adults. Therefore, the mediation model examined in this study needs to be tested in different age groups. The second limitation was that we failed to consider specific types of family structures: nuclear, single parent (due to divorce), lone parenthood, number of siblings. Thus, future studies could consider differences in the status of the family of origin. Third, similar to the majority of personality psychology research, we based our study on self-report measures only, whereby data are subject to response bias. Our research used neither behavioral observations nor experimental manipulations, which would give more objective outcomes.

In conclusion, despite its limitations, the results provide interesting suggestions for future research. Identification of mediators between the family structure and the forgiveness among family members appears to be particularly interesting.

### Practical implications

The findings may also be used as implications for therapeutic work, primarily in interventions related to the family of origin. They show that negative patterns established through family relationships are linked to other negative personality traits, relational skills, and so forth. This brings about a snowball effect, entailing other adverse outcomes. Therefore, interventions should first reduce any potential negative family patterns and prevent their emergence. Only then should they promote and reinforce positive and constructive family patterns.

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