



The Mediating Role of Forgiveness in the Relationship between Vengeance and Tranquility

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to examine the mediating role of forgiveness in the relationship between vengeance and tranquility. 297 university students participated in this research. Scales of revenge, forgiveness and tranquility were used to collect data. The results indicated that forgiveness played a full mediator role in the relationship between vengeance and tranquility. In other words, in this model, as vengeance increases, tranquility and forgiveness decrease, and forgiveness plays a mediating role in that relationship. Individuals with high levels of vengeance are unlikely to have high levels of tranquility and forgiveness. If individuals feel more vengeance, they may have low forgiveness and exhibit less tendency to feelings of tranquility.

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Forgiveness, tranquility, vengeance

1. Introduction

Tranquility is a frequently used word in daily life, but it is difficult to make an operational definition of tranquility. There are discourses about tranquility in several disciplines such as philosophy and etymology. When talking about peace, people use several expressions like true tranquility, spiritual tranquility and become tranquil. It is also heard that people wish each other a "tranquil home" and the world "a tranquil life in which wars end". The concept of peace, which is also grounded in philosophy and religious science, is used together with different concepts such as happiness in positive psychology. The sensitivity theory of Reiss (2000, p. 288) addresses revenge and tranquility among 16 main structures that affect human religious behavior. Tranquility is defined in TDK's Turkish dictionary (2019) as resilience, head vigor, peace a vigor of mind, comfort, peace and rest. In positive psychology, tranquility can be thought about the completion of one's internal processes. Bacanlı (2016) discussed the concept of tranquility through the concept of self. He has mentioned a model that states that individuals may be tranquil with the overlap of their real self, ideal self, and ought self and that their level of tranquility may increase. According to Nelson (2014) tranquility reflects a tendency for self-acceptance, self-compassion, a relatively permanent congruence between aspects of self, and nonviolence toward self and a tendency for emotional states that supports interpersonal peacefulness of individuals and/or is associated with living harmony.

Walker (2015) remarked that the idea of tranquility is complex and is related to faithfulness, emotional pleasure, anxiety relief, moral behavior and maintenance of a person's own well-being. Berenbaum, Chow, Schoenleber and Flores (2016) have defined tranquility as being at peace with one's current status, regardless of the situation. Lyubomirsky, King and Diener (2005) indicated that inner peace has a positive impact on human health and well-being. Sheldon and Kasser (1995) demonstrated that various elements of tranquility, such as coherence and congruence affect positively psychological well-being. Inner peace and self-acceptance of individuals were also found positively correlated with happiness, life satisfaction and

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purposes in life (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). When the measurement tools that measure tranquility are examined, it is seen that the 14-item questionnaire of Luma (2004) assesses the ability to cope with stress, regulate emotions, and maintain a positive perspective on life. This scale was characterized as a measure of inner peace. Roberts and Aspy (1993) defined serenity as sustained inner peace and developed a 40-item Serenity Scale which generates scores for an inner haven, acceptance, belonging, trust, perspective, contentment, present centeredness, benevolence, and cognitive restructuring/self-responsibility. The Self Perception Scale developed by Nelson (2014) includes items such as "I am self-accepting of my weaknesses and failures" and "I punish myself for my mistakes and failures" (reverse scored).

Nelson (2014) specified that anger interferes with inner peace and that inclines people to respond in an aggressive way to conflict in all domains, thus people with an ability to control anger are likely to be relatively more tranquil. Fredrickson (1998) states that the concepts of contentment, tranquillity, and serenity are used interchangeably. Based on this information, Berenbaum, Huang and Flores (2019) conducted a study that aimed to explore the differences between contentment and tranquility. They have found that both of these constructs have positive associations with basic need reproductive activities, and were negatively associated with entertainment activities. Mastery activities were positively correlated with contentment, they have negatively correlated with tranquility. Besides, tranquility has a strong positive relation with spiritual activities but it has a negative relationship with social activities. While contentment was positively associated with intellectual activities, tranquility was not related to intellectual activities. Moreover, while a relation was found between tranquility and process focus, no relation was found between tranquility and outcome focus. In conclusion, it is recommended that acceptance of one's current status and low level of neuroticism are important in order to an individual to feel tranquility (Berenbaum et al., 2016).

It can be thought that the perspective acceptance of one's current status regardless of the conditions, which is a part of the definition of tranquility, may be related to forgiveness which involves letting go of justifiable feelings of hate or anger toward a wrongdoer and desire for vengeance. The concept of forgiveness which is rooted in religious traditions and philosophy is also an important part of positive psychology. However, positive psychology argues that forgiveness is a more important construct for emotional and mental well-being than addressed in religious traditions and philosophy (Enright, 2001; Luskin, 2003). Forgiveness means giving up anger and resentment or justifiable reaction and letting go of revenge (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Forgiveness occurs in two ways: self-forgiveness and other forgiveness. According to Hall and Fincham (2005), self-forgiveness is as a motivational change that helps an individual to decrease his/her motivation to avoid stimuli related with the violation and to decrease the motivation to punish himself/herself and to take revenge against himself/herself and then to increase the motivation to act benevolently toward the self. Interpersonal forgiveness, on the other hand, has been defined as a conscious act of an unjustly hurt person to release the desire of revenge against a person who has hurt him/her and to foster undeserved beneficence, compassion and even love towards the offender (Enright & Group, 1991; North, 1987). Forgiveness is a positive response to interpersonal harm and involves letting go of anger and thought of revenge (Bono & McCullough, 2006; McCullough, 2000). The first articles published on forgiveness describe therapeutic techniques based on forgiveness to help people get rid of the effects of traumatic experiences and revengeful emotions on their psychological and relational functioning (Hope, 1987). Anger is not completely resolved until a conscious decision is made to release the desire for revenge or to forgive (Fitzgibbons, 1986).

Vengeance that is another variable of the present study, is defined on a continuum from harmless and painless actions and thoughts on one end of the continuum to destruction or death (Gabriel & Monaco, 1994). Feelings of anger and harm (Socarides, 1966) and perceived personal attacks cause revenge feelings (Cota-Mckinley, Woody & Bell, 2001). While Stuckless and Goranson (1992, p. 25) defined vengeance as "the imposition of punishment or injury in exchange for perceived error"; Aquino, Tripp and Bies (2001, p. 53) have defined it as an action in return to some anticipated damage or impairment by another group that is intended to inflict injury, loss, punishment or discomfort on the group judged responsible. Vengeance is often shown as a motivating factor in human aggression (Stuckles & Goranson, 1992).

Barclay (2008) emphasizes that there is probably an optimal level of vengeance and forgiveness for every situation. Too little revenge is an inadequate deterrent, but too much revenge invites more retaliation. Axelrod (1984) also stated that too little forgiveness prevents compensation of a relationship, but too much

forgiveness invites future exploitation. So the optimal level of revenge and forgiveness is healthy. According to Barclay (2008), in order to develop feelings of revenge and forgiveness, the human brain makes a cost-benefit analysis according to the characteristics of the individual. Naturally, while making this evaluation, an error occurs in one of these analyses. If these errors can be balanced, the optimal level arises, but if when they do not, revenge and forgiveness are produced.

When the previous studies on tranquility in Turkish literature are examined, two studies can be seen: The tranquility model presented by Bacanlı (2016) and a study conducted by Demirci (2017) which investigated a peaceful and happy life in the context of values and character strengths. In the foreign literature, there are several studies examining the relationship between tranquility and religious beliefs (Idler, 1987; Ellison, Burdette & Hill, 2009; Berenbaum et al., 2019) and focusing to explain contentment and tranquility (Berenbaum et al., 2016; Berenbaum et al., 2019). However, there are limited studies. The concept of forgiveness attracted a more deal of interest in the previous literature. Previous studies examined the relationships between forgiveness and several constructs such as psychological resilience (Abid & Sultan, 2015; Çapan & Arıcıoğlu, 2014), perfectionism (Kaya & Peker, 2016), vengeance (Satici, 2016), anger (Topbaşoğlu, 2016), happiness and empathy (Kaya & Orçan, 2019). In addition to descriptive studies focused on vengeance (Goldner, Lev-Wiesel, & Simon, 2019; Jackson, Choi, & Gelfand, 2019), the association between vengeance and forgiveness has been also examined (Zhang, Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, & Zhang, 2019). Based on the previous literature, in the current research, it is aimed to examine the mediating role of forgiveness in the relationship between vengeance and tranquility. Therefore, the hypotheses are as follows:

- i. Vengeance is negatively related to forgiveness.
- ii. Vengeance is negatively related to tranquility.
- iii. Forgiveness is positively related to tranquility.
- iv. Forgiveness plays a mediating role in the relationship between vengeance and tranquility.

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

This research, which aimed to examine the mediating role of forgiveness on the association between vengeance and tranquility, is designed according to the correlational research design (Karasar, 1994). The dependent variable of the current study is tranquility, the independent variable is vengeance and the mediating variable is forgiveness.

2.2. Study Group

This study is conducted with 297 university students who are enrolled in the Faculty of Education in Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation University and Sakarya University. Of the participants, 255 were female (75.8%) and 72 were male (24.2%). Among the participants, there were 29 (9.8%) first grade, 89 (30.1 %) second-grade, 64 (21.5%) third-grade and 114 (38.4%) fourth-grade students. 217 (73.1%) of the participants were from the medium socio-economic background. Besides, 54.5% (162) of the participants lived in a metropolis and 23.9% (71) lived in the city center. The mean age of the study group was 21.69.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form: A personal information form was developed and used by the researcher to collect data on demographic variables including age, gender, where he/she lived most, parental attitude and income level.

The Tranquility Scale: The Tranquility Scale (TS) was developed by Demirci (2017) and Demirci and Ekşi (2018), consists of 8 items and has one dimension. Items are rated 5-Likert type scale. The results of the exploratory factor analysis which were conducted to constructs validity of TS it was found that the scale has 8 items and a unidimensional structure with a score of 3,23 eigenvalues, and explaining 40,338% of the total variance. The factor loadings of the items range from .55 to .71. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency of the TS was found as .91 by Demirci (2017). The test-retest reliability coefficient was calculated as .83. The

scores range from 8 to 40, with higher scores indicating a higher level of tranquility (Demirci, 2017). In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the TS was .82.

The Forgiveness Scale: The Forgiveness Scale (FS) was developed by Ersanlı and Vural-Batik (2015) to determine the forgiveness level of university students. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the FS that consists of 2 subscales and these two subscales explains 46,09 % of total variance and two-dimensional model is within acceptable fit limits ($\chi^2/sd = 1.95$, $RMSEA = .07$, $GFI = .91$, $AGFI = .87$, $SRMR = .06$, $NNFI = .89$, $CFI = .91$, $p < .000$). The first subscale which is called "Forgiveness of Other" contains 10 items and the second subscale which is called "Forgiveness of Self" contains 3 items. A positive correlation which calculated for convergent validity was found as .56 between the FG and The Tolerance Scale (Ersanlı, 2014). The internal consistency of the FC was good with a Cronbach's Alpha of .74. The split-half reliability coefficient was found as .71 for the first half, and .77 for the second half. The FS is a 7-point Likert-type scale and scores range from 13 to 91 with higher scores indicating higher levels of forgiveness (Ersanlı & Vural-Batik, 2015). In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the TS was .80.

The Vengeance Scale: The Vengeance Scale (VS) was developed by Stuckless and Goranson (1992) and adapted to Turkish by Satici, Can and Akin (2012). As a result of the exploratory factor analysis, it was found that the Turkish version of the VS explained 37% of the total variance and that it had a one-dimensional structure as in the original scale. The results confirmatory factor analysis confirmed that the unidimensional model fit well ($\chi^2 = 341$, $\chi^2/sd = 2.23$, $NFI = .95$, $CFI = .97$, $IFI = .97$, $RFI = .94$, $GFI = .91$, $RMSEA = .061$ and $SRMR = .05$). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the VS was calculated as 0.91, while the test-retest correlation coefficient was .87. The VS consists of 20 items and the total score of scale ranging within 20-140. Higher scores indicate higher levels of vengeance (Can & Akin, 2012) . In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the VS was .90.

2.4. Data Collection

Ethical permission for the research had been obtained from the Ethical Committee of the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation University. All the participants were informed about the aim of the study by the researcher and they were voluntarily completed the questionnaire packet. It took approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

2.5. Data Analysis

Firstly, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The result of the analysis reported that data has a normal distribution. The skewness and kurtosis coefficients were calculated as -.42 and -.01, respectively, for tranquility scale, -.08 and -.18, respectively, for forgiveness scale and .47 and .52, respectively, for vengeance scale. All the values are within the ± 1.50 , meeting the criteria suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). Path analysis was used to test the mediating effects of forgiveness on the association between vengeance and tranquility. The analysis was done using SPSS 23 and AMOS software programs. Significance was tested at a probability level of .05.

3. Findings

Research findings are of the statistical analysis of the data obtained from the study presented and interpreted in this section. Path analysis was performed in the current study which aimed to examine the mediating role of forgiveness on the relationship between perceived vengeance and tranquility. Several conditions must be met to show a mediational effect: (1) independent variable must be associated with dependent variable, (2) the mediating variable must be associated with the independent variable, (3) both the mediating variable and the independent variable must predict the dependent variable together and the mediating variable must be associated with the dependent variable (Kalaycı, 2010). Results indicated that vengeance was negatively correlated with tranquility ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$), vengeance was negatively correlated with forgiveness ($r = -.54$, $p < .01$) and there was a meaningful relationship between forgiveness and peace, while forgiveness and revenge are co-ordinating regression ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$). Results show that necessary conditions have been met.

Total mean scores of participants and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The mean scores and standard deviation scores and correlations scores of the participants

	n	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Tranquility	297	29.38	5.24	1		
2. Forgiveness	297	55.11	11.62	.31**	1	
3. Vengeance	297	65.17	20.54	-.21**	-.54**	1

p < .01

When the Table 1 examined, it can be seen that the respondents exhibited a medium level of tranquility ($M=29.38$, $SD=5.24$) and forgiveness ($M=55.11$, $SD=11.62$) and low-medium level of vengeance ($M=65.17$, $SD=20.54$). Moreover, the findings indicated that there is a significant and positive relation between tranquility and forgiveness ($r = .31$, $p < .01$) but vengeance was negatively correlated with tranquility ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$) and forgiveness ($r = -.54$, $p < .01$). In other words, people with high tranquility tend to experience high forgiveness and an increase in forgiveness and tranquility may have an impact on the decrease in feelings of vengeance. “Three conditions must be met before testing the mediation effect. 1) significant relationship between independent and dependent variable significant relationship between mediator variable and independent variable, 3) A significant relationship between the mediator variable and the dependent variable, while both the mediator and the independent variable predict the dependent variable” (Kalaycı, 2010). It is seen that the conditions are met.

The results of path analysis which was conducted to explore the mediating role of forgiveness in the relationship between tranquility and vengeance were presented in Figure 1. The primary analysis indicated that the direct effect of vengeance on tranquility is negative ($\beta = -.21$; $p < .001$). When forgiveness is added to the model (Figure 1), it is seen that this effect meaningless ($\beta = -.01$, $p > .05$). In other words, it has been determined that forgiveness has a full mediating role in the relationship between tranquility and revenge. While vengeance has a negative effect on forgiveness ($\beta = -.54$, $p < .001$), forgiveness has a positive effect on tranquility ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$). In other words, the effect of vengeance on forgiveness and the effect of forgiveness on tranquility are significant. Moreover, when the fit indices of the model are examined, it is observed that the model fits well ($\chi^2/df = 1.02$, $NFI = .99$, $RFI = .98$, $CFI = 1.00$, $RMSEA = .008$). In the model, forgiveness accounted for 10% of tranquility and vengeance accounted for 29% of forgiveness.

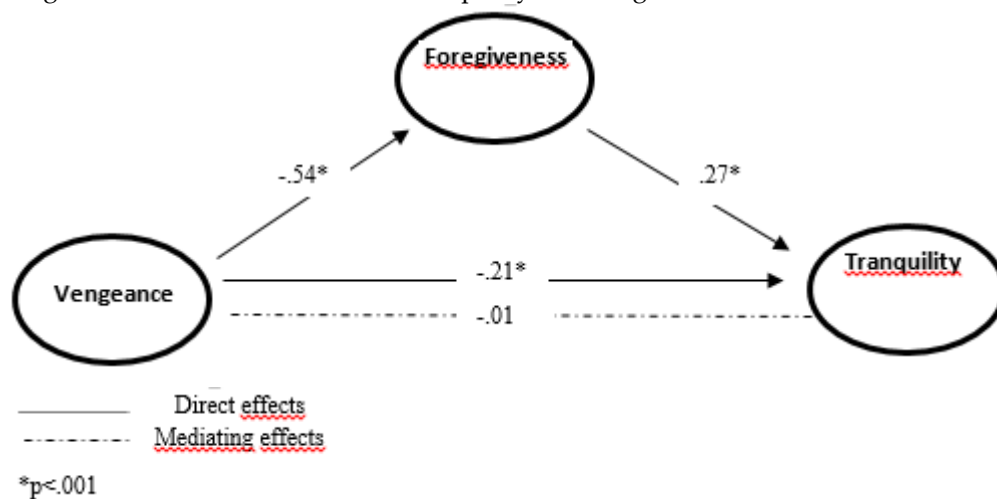


Figure 1. Standardized coefficient values for the model

4. Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions

The present study aims to examine the relationships between vengeance, forgiveness, and tranquility. As expected, the results indicated that forgiveness played a full mediator role in the relationship between vengeance and tranquility. In other words, in this model, as vengeance increases, tranquility and forgiveness meaningless, and forgiveness plays a mediating role in that relationship. Individuals with high levels of vengeance are unlikely to have high levels of tranquility and forgiveness. If individuals feel more vengeance, they may have low forgiveness and exhibit less tendency to feelings of tranquility.

The results of the current study indicated a negative association between vengeance and forgiveness. In a study which was conducted by Uysal and Satici (2014) with 298 university students, it was found that

subjective happiness mediated the negative relationship between forgiveness and vengeance. Giammarco and Vernon (2014) investigated the relationship between Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy which are often referred to as the dark triad of personality and vengeance, forgiveness and empathy. They have found that Machiavellianism and psychopathy are positively correlated with a vengeance and negatively correlated with forgiveness and empathy. Therefore it can be said that show vengeance and forgiveness negative association with each other. In their study conducted with 159 young adults, Bajwa and Khalid (2015) concluded that there was a negative correlation between vengeance and forgiveness. In another study which aimed to explore the relationship between forgiveness, revenge, social connectedness, and subjective well-being in university students, a significant negative association was found between vengeance and forgiveness (Satici, 2016). Uzun and Es (2019, p. 40) aimed to investigate the strengths of feelings of forgiveness in students and demonstrated that those who did not have a strong desire for revenge, tend to have strong feelings of forgiveness. They have also stated that as an individual's desire for vengeance decreases, self-forgiveness, the forgiveness of others and forgiveness of situations increases. These findings support the results of the current study.

The results of the current study revealed a negative correlation between vengeance and tranquility. To date, there is no direct research on the relationship between these variables. It is possible to say that the concept of tranquility is given little attention in the existing literature (Floody, 2014). However, when we look at the researches on acceptance which is a part of the definition of tranquility, it can be said that they indirectly support the negative relationship between vengeance and tranquility. For example, McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick and Johnson (2001) demonstrated that neuroticism had a positive relationship with revenge and a negative correlation with agreeableness. Likewise, Steel, Schmidt and Shultz (2008) and John and Srivastava (1999) concluded that there was a negative correlation between neuroticism and agreeableness. Pekala, Kumar, Maurer, Elliot-Carter and Moon (2009) have demonstrated that chronic alcohol and other drug-related populations and self-esteem (associated with substance abuse and relapse) are closely related to tranquility and anger-impulsivity. They have also stated that interventions designed to increase serenity can be very useful in reducing the urge to anger and in chemical addiction treatment programs.

The results of the current study also showed that there is a positive relationship between tranquility and forgiveness. In her book "Positivity" Barbara Fredrickson (2009) mentions about positive emotions as a component of tranquility. She also remarked that developing positive emotions such as gratitude, kindness hope, and mindfulness can help to build permanent personal resources (physical, intellectual, social and psychological). In this context, when the researches on the components of tranquility and positive emotions are examined, in a study conducted by Mayton (2012) it was demonstrated that self-acceptance was positively related with psychological nonviolence and Browne et al. (2010) showed that acceptance and inner peace were positively associated with psychological nonviolence.

Other findings of the current study indicated that forgiveness mediated the association between vengeance and tranquility. In other words, as forgiveness increases, vengefulness decreases but tranquility increases too. Previous literature propounded that while forgiving one's transgressors has a positive influence on well-being but to seek revenge against the transgressor reduces well-being (McCullough et al., 2001). In their research, Linley, Maltby, Wood, Osbourne and Hurling (2009) stated that self-acceptance which is a component of tranquility has a positive relation with well-being. Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) remarked that tranquility is related to well-being. The results of the previous studies which indicated the association between revenge, forgiveness, and tranquility are consistent with the results of the present study.

The current study is limited to university students. Further research targeting sample groups can contribute to the literature. The data are limited to self-report responses of the participants. In a cross-sectional study, it is difficult to make cause-effect inferences. Finally, in this study, the mediating role of forgiveness in the vengeance–tranquility relationship has been examined. Future studies may investigate different variables that may play a crucial role between these variables.

Despite these limitations, the current study has made an important contribution to psychology literature. It is observed that in the psychology literature, there are limited studies on tranquility. However, tranquility is the desired feeling for all people. Forgiveness is one of the important concepts in the field of positive psychology. The findings of the study demonstrated that forgiveness is positively related to tranquility and

negatively related to vengeance. Thus, the findings provide information about the mediating role of forgiveness in the relationship between vengeance and tranquility. Intervention programs focusing on enhancing forgiveness may help individuals in all age groups to be less vengeful and more tranquil. Therefore, mental health professionals need to design and implement programs to increase forgiveness. It is also important to carry out qualitative and quantitative studies that will contribute to the literature on the tranquility.

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