

Final Report of Grant Funded by the
Research and Creative Productions Committee

David R. Olson
October, 1991

Dependency and Vulnerability to Depressive Mood States

Problem

Several theorists (Beck, 1983; Hirschfeld, Klerman, Gough, Barrett, Korchin, & Chodoff, 1977) have suggested certain personality traits serve as vulnerability factors for depressive affective states, particularly in the context of specific negative life events. One such trait, dependency, refers to individuals with intense needs for approval and acceptance from valued others. Dependent persons are hypothesized to be especially vulnerable to depression in situations involving social loss and rejection.

Research shows dependency mediates the negative effects of stressful life events, but the specific relationship between dependency and negative social events has not been consistently found (Hammen, Marks, de Mayo, & Mayol, 1985; Robins & Block, 1988; Zuroff & Mongrain, 1987). Unfortunately these studies have not assessed or incorporated baseline mood levels into the designs. As research has found significant correlations between measures of depression and dependency (Nietzel & Harris, 1990), the differences in vulnerability to depression may be due to differing levels of pre-existing mood rather than individual differences in dependency.

This study investigates the role of dependency as a vulnerability factor for negative affective states when pre-existing mood is controlled. In addition, this study examines whether dependent individuals' vulnerability to depression is limited to interpersonal negative events or represents a generalized vulnerability to any negative event.

Method

Eighty - seven female college undergraduates, defined as dependent or non-dependent on the basis of the Interpersonal Dependency Inventory (Hirschfeld et. al., 1977) participated. Subjects listened to a mood induction procedure involving audiotaped depictions of either negative social or achievement-related events. Pre-existing levels of depression were also obtained with the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock & Erbaugh, 1961). Mood was assessed with the MAACL-R (Lubin, 1985) both before and after the mood induction procedures.

Results

A 2 x 2 (dependency level x event) analysis of covariance, with pre- induction MAACL-R scores serving as the covariate, was performed on the post-induction MAACL-R scores of anxiety, depression, and hostility. No significant effects were found on the anxiety and hostility scores. Significant main effects for dependency level ($<.05$), and for event ($<.05$), were found on the depression scores. Two planned comparisons were conducted to test the hypothesis that dependent subjects were particularly vulnerable to interpersonal negative events. Dependent subjects responded to the social rejection event with significantly higher depression ratings than non-dependent persons, ($<.02$). However, dependent subjects did not differ significantly from non-dependent subjects in reported depression when involved in the achievement failure event ($>.05$).

As BDI scores were significantly correlated with dependency scores ($<.05$), a 2 x 2 (dependency level x event) analysis of covariance with BDI scores serving as the covariate was done on

the post-induction MAACL-R scores. Significant main effects for dependency level ($< .05$), and for event ($< .05$), were found. No significant effects were found for the anxiety and hostility scores.

Interpretation

These results suggest when pre-existing differences in mood state and depression level are controlled, dependency still constitutes a vulnerability factor for depressive mood states. In addition, the study suggests rather than having a generalized vulnerability for negative events, dependent people are especially susceptible to depressive mood states when they experience negative interpersonal events.

References

- Beck, A. T. (1983). Cognitive therapy of depression: New Perspectives. In P.J. Clayton & J.E. Barrett (Eds.), Treatment of depression: Old controversies and new approaches. New York: Raven Press.
- Beck, A.T., Ward, C.H., Mendelsohn, M., Mock, J., & Erbaugh, J. (1961). An inventory for measuring depression. Archives of General Psychiatry, 4, 561-571.
- Hammen, C., Marks, T., Mayol, A., & de Mayo, R. (1985). Depressive self-schemas, life events, and vulnerability to depression. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 94, 308-319.
- Hirschfeld, R.M.A., Klerman, G.L., Gough, H.G., Barrett, J., Korchin, S.J., & Chodoff, P. (1977). A measure of interpersonal dependency. Journal of Personality Assessment, 41, 610-618.
- Nietzel, T., & Harris, M. (1990). Relationship of dependency and achievement/autonomy to depression. Clinical Psychology Review, 10, 279-297.
- Robins, C. & Block, P. (1988). Personal vulnerability, life events, and depressive symptoms: A test of a specific interactional model. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54, 847-852.

Zuckerman, M., & Lubin, B. (1985). Multiple affective adjective check list-revised. San Diego, CA: EdITS.

Zuroff, D.C., & Mongarin, M. (1987). Dependency and self-criticism: Vulnerability factors for depressive affective states. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 96, 14-22.