SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW ARCHIVES

Narcissism, Forgiveness and Relationship Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships Among Emerging Adults

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Abstract

Background: Personality traits and relational processes play a crucial role in shaping romantic relationship outcomes during emerging adulthood. Narcissistic characteristics have been associated with interpersonal difficulties, whereas forgiveness has been identified as a protective factor that enhances relationship satisfaction. However, empirical evidence regarding their interrelationships, particularly within non-Western cultural contexts, remains limited.

Objective: The present study aimed to examine the relationships among narcissistic traits, forgiveness, and general relationship satisfaction among emerging adults involved in romantic relationships. It also investigated gender differences and the mediating role of forgiveness in the association between narcissism and relationship satisfaction.

Method: A cross-sectional research design was employed, and data were collected from 204 participants (92 males, 112 females) aged 18 years and above who were currently in romantic relationships. Participants completed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16, the Bolton Forgiveness Scale, and the General Relationship Satisfaction Scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analyses, Pearson correlations, independent-samples t-tests, and mediation analyses in SPSS.

Results: The sample had a mean age of 27.50 years (SD = 5.66), with the majority belonging to nuclear-family systems and having undergraduate-level education. Narcissism was significantly negatively correlated with forgiveness ($r = -.15$, $p < .01$), while forgiveness showed a significant positive correlation with relationship satisfaction ($r = .28$, $p < .01$). Narcissism was not significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = -.09$, $p > .05$). Gender differences were significant for narcissistic traits ($t = 2.69$, $p < .05$) and forgiveness ($t = -.85$, $p < .01$), whereas no significant gender differences were observed for relationship satisfaction. Mediation analysis revealed that forgiveness did not mediate the relationship between narcissism and relationship satisfaction.

Conclusion: The study concludes that while narcissistic traits may impair forgiveness in romantic relationships, relationship satisfaction among emerging adults appears to be influenced more strongly by relational processes than by personality traits alone. These findings highlight forgiveness as a key relational factor with essential implications for relationship counseling and intervention.

Keywords: Narcissism, Forgiveness, Relationship Satisfaction, Emerging Adults, Romantic Relationships

Introduction

Whether we talk about today's times or ancient history human have always been seeking a sense of personal value by building and maintaining romantic relationships. One of the theories that can clarify the concept of gaining satisfaction in life through seeking significance in Romantic relationships is called Significance Quest Theory. However, conversely, people who lose significance might also lose confidence in their relationships and constantly seek validation and approval (Federico Contu, 2024). Personality traits, in general plays a great role in identifying the strengths of these relationships.

Tahmasby and Khorramabadi (2025) studied the relationship between marital satisfaction with the personality dimensions of neuroticism, empathy, and forgiveness in Lorestan Province, Iran. Their multiple regression analysis explained 46% of the variance of marital satisfaction with data collected from 840 married female participants and validated instruments, including the ENRICH Marital Happiness Scale (MHS), the NEO-FFI, the Marital Empathy Scale, and the Marital Forgiveness Scale. The results suggested that higher neuroticism levels were negatively related to marital satisfaction (v = -.324), while higher forgiveness (v = .349) and empathy (v = .285) were related to marital satisfaction, respectively. Since forgiveness proved to be the strongest predictor, followed by neuroticism and empathy, the authors propose that interventions focused on empathy and forgiveness enhancement and regulation of neuroticism can be useful in couples' therapy and policy to promote marital quality. Some other researches elaborate the relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction. A research conducted by Ryan, Sprechini, Beery, and Watsula (2024) explored the association between unforgiveness and grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, and also tested the mediating role of negative blame attribution of this relationship. In three independent studies, grandiose narcissism predicted greater negative blame allocation after infractions, which was linked to greater unforgiveness. Although the mediation effect of blame attribution was less strong or inconsistent, vulnerable narcissism was also correlated significantly with unforgiveness. The inflexibility of narcissistic people (and particularly grandiose narcissists) to forgive seems to be significantly influenced by the personality style of their pattern of assigning blame and responsibility. According to some researches narcissistic personality styles also focus on power seeking behavior, according to a research paper that examines the association between romantic dyadic outcomes and a number of narcissistic subscales (communal, extraverted and hostile) and tests if the need for power mediates these associations. Two studies, one dyadic involving couples and one individual-based, showed that antagonistic narcissism increases the individual's desire for power in the relationship and this in turn reliably predicted poorer relationship functioning (e.g., less commitment, investment, and satisfaction, and more perception of alternatives) (Batool et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2024; Sindhu et al., 2022; Hussain et al., 2022).

Unlike neurotic narcissism, extraverted and collective narcissism sometimes created indirect consequences through power-grabbing actions. Yet, power-seeking and hostile narcissism were important in predicting relational outcomes for both partners. The authors outline the implications for understanding power dynamics and for relationship and interpersonal therapies along with concluding that need for power is a primary mechanism through which the narcissistic tendencies have a destructive impact on romantic relationships (Hicks, Brosch, & Zeigler-Hill, 2024).

Recent studies show that people with narcissistic tendencies find it hard to forgive others and hold resentment for a long time. According to an experimental study The authors examined the relationship between the narcissistic features of the victims and the tendency to hold resentment in two non-experimental studies involving both students and a sample of community adults. Study 1 examined whether grandiose narcissism mediated the relationships between susceptible narcissism (such as emotions of entitlement or hypersensitivity) and grudge-holding traits such emotional persistence, perceived length of the grudge, and contempt for the transgressor. Study 2 expanded and replicated Study 1 by examining whether ruminating over the transgression mediated the moderating effect of grandiose narcissism on the vulnerable narcissism toward transduction of a personal grudge connection. The results showed that the good correlation between

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vulnerable narcissism and emotional persistence (both of these studies) and perceived longevity (Study 2) were strengthened by higher levels of grandiose narcissism. The moderated link in Study 2 was explained by rumination as well (i.e., victims who were high on grandiosity and high on vulnerability ruminated more and this led to more intense and long-lasting grudges). The authors theorize that victims are more prone to harboring grudges because of their narcissistic configuration when incidences of grandiose and susceptible features coincide, and that rumination is a major mechanism that causes this impact. In one of their studies, "Transgression Severity, Forgiveness, Relationship Satisfaction, and Mental Health in Romantic Partnerships: An Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model," interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) was implemented to examine how forgiveness mediated the effects of transgression severity on partners quality of relationships (satisfaction) and mental health. Fincham & Beach, 2002 Paleari, E., Fink, H., Raot, M., & Tsien, P. (2009) Forgiveness operationalized as kindness and resentment-avoidance is prosocial motivation that promotes well-being following transgressions. Measures that capture the severity of the transgressions, dimensions of forgiveness (MOFS; Haversath et al., 2017), relationship satisfaction (PFB-K; Kliem et al., 2012), and mental health (GHQ-12; Goldberg, 1972; Schmitz et al., 1999) were completed by 351 opposite gender couples (M = 48.24 years; relationship duration = 22.71 years). The findings of the Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (Ledermann et al., 2011; Muthen & Muthen, 2022) showed that the only significant mediation on the relationship satisfaction of the partner due to benevolence and the severity of transgression was found to be the indirect predictor for the relationship satisfaction and mental health of the couple due to resentment avoidance. Based on this, forgiveness is defined as a dyadic process that is related to the psychological and inter-relationship well-being of the two partners (Fincham & May, 2020; Roberts et al., 2020). This also supports the notion that benevolence and ability to overcome resentment is an important relationship maintenance strategy in long term relationships (McCullough et al., 1998; Worthington, 1998).

Narcissism effect healthy relationships and some investigations indicate that there are some certain ways to overcome aggressive tendencies in relationships. Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan's (2018) investigation came to the conclusion that narcissism has a detrimental effect on relationship satisfaction in romantic partners via means of psychological aggression. According to dyadic analysis, men and women who were more narcissistic were more likely to be psychologically aggressive to their partner, and this reduced their psychology of the quality of their relationship and the quality of that of their spouse. These results point to the fact that narcissism has interpersonal repercussions that diminish the quality of relationships between people along with its impact on the individual. In order not to harm a long-term relationship, the authors recommend that couple therapy and treatments focus on identifying narcissistic traits and addressing psychological patterns of aggression in the early stage of relationship development. In order for them to further their understanding of the interactions of personality factors with aggressiveness and pleasure over time, they also suggest that further study into these dynamics should start to be done with a variety of demographic groups and relationships.

The question here arises that How Does Humility Determine Higher Relationship Satisfaction? study, reference. considered the mediation of emerging adult women's self-and partner-forgiveness between the relationship satisfaction benefits of humility (Van Tongeren, Davis, & Hook, 2014; Farrell et al., 2015; Goddard et al., 2016). According to previous studies, prosocial behaviors such as empathy, generosity and forgiveness are associated with humility (Exline & Hill, 2012; Krause, 2015; Van Tongeren et al., 2014). According to theories of the authors, humility stimulates individual's efforts towards proper picture of themselves, towards mistakes, and towards other-oriented thought all of which help people in forgiving themselves and their partners and in owning their mistakes without guilt (Tangney, 2000; Davis et al., 2013; Exline et al., 2008; Neff, 2003). Accordingly, humility promotes the emotional circumstances necessary for self-forgiveness which in turn promotes partner-forgiveness and, ultimately, greater relationship happiness (Pelucchi, Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2015; Worthington, 1998).

Measures of humility, self-forgiveness, partner-forgiveness, and relationship satisfaction were completed by

152 samples of emerging adult women researchers in the study (Davis et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2005; Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004; Funk & Rogge, 2007). Some statistical research using serial mediation (Hayes' approach) (Hayes, 2013; Muthuen, & Muthuen, 2015) shows that humility was positively correlated with self-and partner-forgiveness, respectively, which, in turn, was positively correlated with greater relationship satisfaction. This promotes self-forgiveness which in turn promotes partner-forgiveness which improves marital happiness (Pelucchi et al., 2015; Farrell et al., 2015). In order to facilitate empathy, healing, and connection, the authors contend that self-forgiveness and humility are needed to repair relationships and require prioritization in marriage and family therapy (Worthington, 1998; Fife et al., 2013).

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On the basis of the paradigm of the Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy (IBCT), the study considered the influence of the symptom of narcissism on the satisfaction of couple relations through the mediation of conflict resolution strategies and the competence of tolerating differences (Jacobson & Christensen, 1998). Driven by unstable self images and an unlimited need for admiration (Kernberg, 1991), specifically, narcissism has been associated with manipulative, self-centered and dominating behaviors in relationships (Campbell et al., 2002; Brunell & Campbell, 2011; Foster & Brunell, 2018). Depending on the degree to which their self-worth has been recognized these persons tend to idealize or depreciate their spouses (Brunell & Campbell, 2011; Links & Stockwell, 2002). The research made a distinction between vulnerable narcissism, which was linked with poor self-esteem and hypersensitivity (Balzen et al., 2022; Melli et al., 2024; Rohmann et al., 2012), and grandiose narcissism, which was linked with dominance and entitlement (Wink, 1991; Edershile and Wright, 2021). While at one extreme narcissism can be equilibrated with erratic associations that hover between negative (Lamkin et al., 2015; Ponti et al., 2020) to neutral or even positive (Rentzsch et al., 2021; Woo et al., 2012) outcomes, there is evidence that vulnerable narcissism predicts lower relationship satisfaction and poorer sexual and emotional adjustment (Pavanello Decaro et al., 2021). The dynamic self-regulatory processing model proposes that narcissists have defense, angry and self-centered conflict reactions to maintain their grandiosity (Morf et al., 2010; Keller et al., 2014; McDaniel et al., 2017). Beyond the importance of behavior change, IBCT emphasizes the idea that behavioral acceptance is very much important to ongoing relationship happiness over the long term (Jacobson & Christensen, 1998; Christensen et al., 2006; Sevier et al., 2015). The Acceptance for Differences in Couple Relationships Scale (ADCRS) was developed to measure this construct not long ago (Lim & Lee, 2020). The results show that better relationship quality is predicted with more acceptance (Lim & Lee, 2022a, 2022b). However, due to their dominance and lack of empathy, narcissistic features could potentially make it hard to be accepted (Keller et al., 2014; Lamkin et al.,

2017; Burton et al., 2017; Grosz et al., 2015). The research examined a serial mediated model, which hypothesized that acceptance and conflict resolution techniques will moderate the effects of both of the narcissistic subtypes on relationship satisfaction using survey data from 300 persons between the ages of 18 and 65. The results point out acceptance centered therapy methods for couple with narcissistic relationship and attempt to supply avenues of focus treatment.

The current research examined the link between relationship satisfaction in short-term and long-term romantic relationships and between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. An online survey to collect demographic information as well as to assess grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, ideal relationship length and present relationship happiness was completed by 164 Texas Woman's University students. The researchers analyzed the relationship between narcissism and its subcategories and relationship satisfaction and whether this relationship differed by preferred relationship length with regression analysis and Pearson correlation. Contrary to expectations, the results were not in favor of the hypotheses: None of the expectations with relationship length were significant interaction effects with the dependent variable, and neither grandiose narcissism nor vulnerable narcissism significantly influenced relationship satisfaction, either positively or negatively. According to Smith, J. L., & Perez, K. D. (2023) these results suggest that narcissistic characteristics may not be a direct predictor of relationship satisfaction among this group and increases the need for more study with a broader range of populations and longitudinal designs, to elucidate these correlations

Conceptual Framework

Narcissism IV	→	Forgiveness **Mediator**	→	Relationship Satisfacation DV

Conceptual Framework

Methodology
Objectives
- To examine gender differences in narcissistic traits (NPI)**,** forgiveness (FR)**,** and general relationship satisfaction (GRS) among individuals in romantic relationships.

Hypothesis
H1: Narcissism is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction among emerging adults in romantic relationships.
H2: Narcissism is negatively associated with forgiveness among emerging adults in romantic relationships.
H3: Forgiveness is positively related to relationship satisfaction among emerging adults in romantic relationships.
H4: Forgiveness mediates the relationship between narcissism and relationship satisfaction among emerging adults in romantic relationships.

Study Design
This study used a cross-sectional research design.

Sample
The recruited participants were in romantic relationships, both male and female, with an age range of adults (18 years and above), as defined by WHO (2016). The total sample comprised of 204 participants taken from Islamabad.

Inclusion criteria
Potential participants were university students aged 18 or older who were in a romantic relationship. Both males and females were included.

Exclusion criteria
Individuals who were single and divorced were excluded. Individuals with any physical disability and mental illness were excluded from the study. Individuals below the age of 18 were also not considered, as they didn't meet the age criterion. Furthermore, participants who had refused to provide informed consent were also excluded.

Instruments
Demographic Sheet
This self-formulated demographic data sheet was used to assess participants' age, gender, family system, educational level, etc.

Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 (NPI-16)
The Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16(NPI-16) was developed as a short measure by Ames et al. (2006). NPI-16 has 16 items designed to measure non-clinical, subclinical narcissistic traits in general populations, assessing aspects like superiority, need for admiration, and entitlement through forced-choice questions comparing two statements about oneself. The 16 items of the scale form a reliable composite measure (Cronbach's α = .72).

Bolton Forgiveness Scale (BFS)
The Bolton Forgiveness Scale (BFS) was developed by Amanze and Carson (2019). It consists of 15 items designed to measure. The respondent's responses were scored on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Always false of me) to 6 (Always true of me). The scale demonstrates excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's α= .950).

General relationship satisfaction
The General Relationship Satisfaction was developed by Hendrick (1988). It consists of 7 items designed to measure relationship satisfaction as an individual's feelings and thoughts about their intimate relationship. The respondent's responses were scored on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Low satisfaction) to 5 (High satisfaction). Items 4 and 7 are reverse-scored. The scale demonstrates excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .80-.90).

Procedure
Participants were informed about the study and were provided with both verbal and written consent before completing the questionnaire. Through purposive sampling, the data were collected online via Google Docs, ensuring the anonymity of the responses. The data were then entered into SPSS for screening and statistical analysis.

Ethical considerations
On ethical grounds, the study was completed. The body of the departmental ethics committee of NUML University, Islamabad, reviewed the research's purpose and the tools being used. Participants were asked to sign the informed consent form before providing their responses regarding their willingness to participate in this research.

Proposed Analysis
Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic variables. Reliability of all scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between study variables. An independent samples t-test was used to compare mean differences across demographic groups. Finally, mediation analysis was used.

Result
This chapter examined the connections among NPI, BFS, and GRS. The study employed analytical methods, including Cronbach's alpha to evaluate scale reliability, correlation analysis to assess relations between variables, regression analysis, and independent-samples t-tests to identify gender-based and discipline-based differences.

Table 1
Frequencies and Percentage of Demographic characteristics of the participants (N=204)

Variables		M	SD	f	%
Age	Age	27.50	5.66		
Gender	Male			92	45.1
	Female			112	54.9
Family System	Nuclear			117	57.4
	Joint			87	42.6
Education	Bachelors			119	58.3
	Masters			64	31.4
	Higher			21	10.3
Occupation	Employed			119	58.3
	Unemployed			61	29.9
	Others			24	11.8
Socioeconomic Status	Lower			4	2.0
	Middle			105	51.5
	Upper Middle			89	43.6
	Upper			6	2.9

Note: M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; f=Frequency; %=Percentage

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the participants (N=204). The sample consisted of 45.1% males and 54.9% females. 57.4% were from nuclear family systems, and 42.6% were from joint family systems. Participants were: BS 58.3%, Master 31.4%, and higher 10.3%. Regarding employment status, 58.3% were employed, 29.9% were unemployed, and 11.8% were in other employment statuses. Furthermore, 2.0% of the sample was from the lower class, 51.5% from the middle class, 43.6% from the upper middle class, and 2.9% from the upper class.

Table 02

Psychometric characteristics of Scales (N=204)

	k	a	M	SD	Range Actual	Potential	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Std. Error
NPI-16	16	.70	4.07	2.88	0-12	0-16	.56	.17	-.26	.33
BFS	15	.85	59.59	11.23	15-90	15-90	-.5	.17	2.01	.33
GRS	7	.87	25.81	6.71	7-35	7-35	-.51	.17	-.71	.33

Table 2 illustrates the psychometric characteristics of the scales, including the reliability matrix and comprehensive descriptive statistics. Cronbach's alpha reliability was calculated for the NPI-16, BFS, and GRS scales. The reliability analysis indicates robust reliability for all scales, with Cronbach's alpha exceeding 0.7. So, the alpha values indicated that the scales are suitable for use in the current study. Additionally, the table provides the mean, Standard Deviation, and range for each scale. To assess the normality of the constructs and their items, skewness and kurtosis were evaluated within an acceptable range of -2 to +2. The values in the table indicate the normal distribution.

Table 03

Inter-scale correlation among study variables (N=204)

Variables	1	2	3
FR	-	.28**	-.15**
RS		-	-.09
NP			

*Note. * p<0.05, **p<0.01*

Table 3 revealed a significant relationship among the variables. As FR and RS showed a significant positive correlation (*r*=.28, *p* <.01). Similarly, a significant negative correlation was found between FR and NP (*r*= -.15, *p* <.01). Whereas no significant correlation was found between RS and NP.

Table 5

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-values of the gender of Participants on study variables. (N=204)

Variable	Male (92) M	SD	Female (112) M	SD	t	P	95% CI LL	UL	Cohen's d
NPI-16	4.66	2.89	3.58	2.79	2.69	.54	.28	1.86	
BFS	58.85	13.67	60.21	8.76	-.85	.00	-4.47	1.77	Just this
GRS	25.37	6.49	26.17	6.88	-.86	.69	-2.67	1.05	

Table 5 compares males and females across two variables for the NPI scale. Males scored an average of 4.66 (SD=2.89), while females had a lower mean of 3.58. However, the t-test result (t=2.69, p=.54) shows no difference between the two groups.

On BFS, males scored an average of 58.85 (SD=13.67), while females scored an average of 60.21 (SD=8.76),

which is higher than that of males. However, the t-test result (t = -.85, p <.001) shows a difference between the two groups with a small-to-moderate effect size (), indicating limited practical significance. And lastly, on GRS, no significant difference in mean scores was found between the male and female groups.

Table 6
Mediation Analysis of the Outcome Variable Through (N=204)

Variables	B	95% Cl	SE	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 01					.009	.009
Constant	26.73***	[25.13, 28.33]	.81			
NPI	-.22	[-.54, .095]	.16	-0.97		
Step 02					.083***	.074***
Constant	16.56***	[11.34, 21.78]	2.64			
NPI	-.12	[-.44, .18]	.15	-.055		
FR	.16***	[.08, .24]	.04	.27***		

Table 6 shows the mediator role of FR between NS and RS. In step R^2, the value of .09 was found to be non-significant (*p* > .05). This indicates that NPI is not a significant predictor in RS. Whereas, on step 2, FR was included in the mediation model. The R2 the value was .08, indicating an 8% change in the outcome variable, with F(2,201) = 9.12, p < .001. The findings revealed that NPI did not have a direct impact on RS at either step, despite FR having a significant impact on FR. This shows that no mediating role was found among NS and RS.

Discussion
The present study examined the interrelationships among narcissistic traits, forgiveness, and general relationship satisfaction among emerging adults in romantic relationships. The findings offer a nuanced understanding of how personality traits and relational processes interact, particularly within the socio-cultural context of young adults in Pakistan.

The first hypothesis proposed that narcissism would be negatively related to relationship satisfaction among emerging adults in romantic relationships. The findings of the present study did not support this hypothesis, as no significant relationship was found between narcissistic traits and general relationship satisfaction. Although narcissism showed a negative trend, it did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction. This finding suggests that narcissistic traits may not directly influence individuals' subjective evaluations of their romantic relationships during emerging adulthood. In support of this interpretation, Henninger et al. (2025) argued that relationship satisfaction is primarily shaped by developmental stage, emotional needs, and gendered expectations rather than stable personality traits alone. Similarly, Whisman et al. (2025) found substantial within-gender variability in relationship satisfaction, indicating that individual experiences may overshadow the influence of dispositional characteristics such as narcissism. Large-scale evidence provided by Weidmann et al. (2023) further demonstrated that narcissistic traits vary significantly across age and gender, with younger adults often exhibiting adaptive or socially reinforced narcissistic characteristics that may not immediately harm relationship satisfaction. Moreover, Dours and Eaton (2025) emphasized that relational power dynamics and contextual factors play a more prominent role in shaping relationship satisfaction than individual personality traits, suggesting that narcissism may exert its effects through indirect or conditional pathways rather than through a direct association with satisfaction.

The second hypothesis stated that narcissism would be negatively related to forgiveness among emerging adults in romantic relationships. The results supported this hypothesis, as narcissistic traits were significantly and negatively associated with forgiveness. This finding indicates that individuals with higher levels of narcissism are less likely to engage in forgiving responses within intimate relationships. This result is

consistent with Alquliyev (2024), who reported that narcissistic individuals demonstrate reduced empathy, heightened defensiveness, and a strong sense of entitlement, all of which impede forgiveness following interpersonal transgressions. Maclean and Charles (2021) similarly found that narcissism is marked by ego fragility and emotional dysregulation, making it difficult for individuals to relinquish resentment or accept responsibility during relational conflicts. Gender-comparative findings by Philip and Sharma (2021) further support this association, showing that individuals high in self-centered traits report lower levels of forgiveness in romantic relationships regardless of gender. Additionally, Perry et al. (2025) highlighted that maladaptive personality characteristics interfere with relational repair mechanisms, particularly forgiveness, by limiting emotional vulnerability and accountability. Together, these studies strongly support the present finding that narcissism undermines forgiveness in romantic relationships.

The third hypothesis proposed that forgiveness would be positively related to relationship satisfaction among emerging adults in romantic relationships. The findings confirmed this hypothesis, revealing a significant positive association between forgiveness and general relationship satisfaction. This suggests that more forgiving individuals tend to experience greater satisfaction in their romantic relationships. This finding is consistent with Kaleta and Mróz (2021), who demonstrated that forgiveness is associated with enhanced emotional well-being and relational harmony by reducing resentment and negative affect. Cabras et al. (2022) similarly found that forgiveness predicts higher levels of relationship satisfaction across diverse cultural contexts, underscoring forgiveness as a universal relational strength. Meskó et al. (2022) reported that forgiveness facilitates adaptive dyadic coping and emotional intimacy, which in turn contribute to higher relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, Yu et al. (2025) showed that forgiveness-related processes improve relationship quality by reducing emotional withdrawal and interpersonal stress, particularly in close romantic bonds. Collectively, these findings reinforce the central role of forgiveness in fostering healthy, satisfying romantic relationships.

The final hypothesis proposed that forgiveness would mediate the relationship between narcissism and relationship satisfaction. Contrary to expectations, the mediation analysis did not support this hypothesis, as narcissism did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction either directly or indirectly through forgiveness. Although narcissism was negatively related to forgiveness and forgiveness was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, the absence of a direct association between narcissism and satisfaction suggests that forgiveness alone may not account for the pathway through which narcissistic traits influence relationship outcomes. This finding implies that narcissism may affect relationship satisfaction through alternative mechanisms such as communication patterns, power imbalances, emotional regulation difficulties, or attachment-related processes, which were not examined in the present study.

Implications

The findings underscore the importance of forgiveness as a key relational process that enhances relationship satisfaction, even in the presence of narcissistic traits. The results suggest that narcissism may not directly undermine relationship satisfaction among emerging adults; however, its negative association with forgiveness highlights an interpersonal vulnerability that can affect relationship functioning over time. These findings have practical implications for relationship counseling and psychological interventions, emphasizing the need to strengthen forgiveness-related skills to promote relational well-being.

Recommendations

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine causal relationships among narcissism, forgiveness, and relationship satisfaction. Incorporating additional mediating or moderating variables, such as communication patterns, attachment styles, or emotional regulation, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of these associations. Moreover, future studies should include more diverse samples across cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds to enhance generalizability.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and reliance on self-report measures may introduce response bias. The use of purposive sampling and data collection from a single geographic location limits the generalizability of findings. Additionally, the exclusion of clinical populations and relationship duration variables may have constrained the depth of relational dynamics assessed.

Conclusion

The study highlights forgiveness as a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, while demonstrating that narcissism negatively affects forgiveness but does not directly predict relationship satisfaction. These findings suggest that relational processes play a more critical role than personality traits alone in determining relationship outcomes among emerging adults.

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