

The Role of Forgiveness as a Therapeutic Measure in Adult Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to look into how forgiveness can be used as a therapeutic strategy in romantic relationships between adults. The study used a cross-sectional mixed technique that combined quantitative and qualitative evaluations. Participants had to be in a romantic relationship or have been in one in the past, and they had to be between the ages of 20 and 30. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale and self-drafted semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants. By examining and contrasting the two research, their congruence was found. Sixty-three percent of people forgive themselves, other people, and their situations in general, according to the quantitative data set. According to subscales, 52% of respondents forgive themselves, 53% forgive others, and 64% forgive uncontrollable events. The qualitative study, on the other hand, concentrated on the biopsychosocial setting, psychological cost, concrete modalities, and link building, highlighting the significance of contextual and individual aspects with regard to the empirical evidence of a person's capacity for forgiveness.

INTRODUCTION

In romantic adult relationships, forgiveness is essential to the process of emotional healing, trust rebuilding, and connection deepening. Forgiveness in this case refers to letting go of negative and resentful sentiments toward a spouse after perceived transgressions, betrayals, or arguments. It is a complex and dynamic process that calls for awareness, empathy, and a readiness to put the relationship above one's own complaints. Forgiveness opens the door to productive problem-solving and mutual development rather than endorsing bad behavior. It frequently indicates a strong dedication to maintaining the connection in healthy couples, allowing partners to overcome obstacles and deepen their emotional intimacy. Furthermore, by reducing the psychological

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load of unsolved conflicts, forgiveness may have a substantial positive impact on both parties' mental health. The seriousness of the violation, the offender's recognition and regret, and the willingness of both parties to communicate honestly are some of the variables that might affect this complex process. In order for partners to go ahead with restored trust and understanding, it is frequently necessary to strike a delicate balance between establishing boundaries, maintaining accountability, and cultivating compassion.

It's a dynamic and intricate process that requires awareness, sensitivity, and a willingness to put the relationship above personal grievances. Instead of condoning poor conduct, forgiveness promotes mutual growth and constructive problem-solving. In healthy partnerships, it often shows a strong commitment to preserving the bond, enabling partners to overcome challenges and increase their emotional closeness. A key component of the complex and multifaceted concept of forgiveness is letting go of resentment, wrath, or other unpleasant feelings toward someone who has wronged you. It is a deliberate and purposeful decision to let go of the emotional burden and strive for acceptance, comprehension, and peace. In the context of adult romantic relationships, forgiveness is crucial to maintaining and cultivating a solid and enduring bond. Forgiveness in this context is letting go of painful feelings, including anger or resentment, which may arise from relationship mistakes, arguments, or transgressions. Couples may move on, rebuild trust, and work toward a more harmonic and happy relationship via this process. Furthermore, rather than the relationship reverting to its pre-transgression condition, forgiveness can lead to growth, better communication, and a deeper understanding between partners.

Forgiveness is an essential and transformative element in adult romantic relationships that is required to maintain emotional intimacy, trust, and overall relationship pleasure. It is inevitable for people in romantic relationships to have situations when they are hurt, misinterpreted, or deceived. If forgiveness is not offered, these unresolved issues can lead to hostility, emotional distance, and even marital disintegration. By forgiving one another, partners may move past these negative experiences and foster emotional growth and

healing. Forgiveness is not forgetting or defending bad behavior; rather, it is choosing to heal the relationship and releasing the emotional hold of past wrongs. Forgiveness may strengthen the tie in adult relationships by demonstrating empathy, understanding, and a commitment to the relationship's longevity. It creates space for open communication where both sides feel heard and supported in their shortcomings. This emotional flexibility and forgiving temperament become increasingly more crucial when unions grow and partners regularly face external limitations like job, family, or financial issues. When a couple is able to forgive, they may put their past wrongdoings aside and focus on solving difficulties in a constructive way. Additionally, forgiveness promotes human growth and emotional resilience. It makes it possible to forgive, which reduces psychological tension, anxiety, and emotional turmoil. Studies have shown that forgiveness enhances mental health by enabling people to feel happier and less furious, which enhances their general well-being. In romantic relationships, there is a substantial correlation between forgiveness and relationship satisfaction. Higher degrees of love, trust, and emotional closeness are more common in forgiving relationships, which creates a supportive and safe environment for both partners. Therefore, forgiveness is crucial for resolving conflicts as well as for strengthening emotional ties, helping couples deal with life's obstacles together, and fostering the success of long-term relationships.

Sandage *et al.* (2010) investigated the mediating effects of differentiated self on forgiveness, spiritual instability, mental health symptoms, and well-being. The current study examined the theoretical framework, which is based on Bowenian theory and Volfran theology, according to which dispositional forgiveness is linked to spiritual and mental health indices through the mediation of differentiation of self (DoS). Data were gathered from a sample (N = 213) of graduate students at a university with a Protestant affiliation, with a mean age of 34.46 years. DoS mediated the association between dispositional forgiveness and (a) spiritual instability, (b) mental health symptoms, and (c) psychological well-being, according to the results, which validated the hypotheses. Durtschi and Kimmes (2016) investigated the importance of attachment, empathy, and attributions in romantic relationships

as well as forgiveness in order to support this. The results of a longitudinal structural equation model involving a sample of young adults in romantic relationships (N = 171) revealed that the relationship between avoidant attachment and forgiveness was mediated by empathy, while the relationship between anxious attachment and forgiveness was mediated by benign attributions. Forgiveness may be facilitated clinically by focusing on the working models of attachment that support empathy and benign attributions. Kato (2016) looked at the relationship between forgiveness and the gradual disintegration of romantic relationships in another study. A full 10 months after completing the survey, participants (N = 344) revealed their relationship status in addition to responding to questions about romantic love, relationship happiness, and partner forgiveness. A multivariate logistic regression analysis indicates that forgiving between spouses is crucial to romantic relationships.

Since forgiveness aids in relationship healing and restores the beneficial impacts of relationships on meaning, it was examined as a mechanism for meaning-making in another study by Ramos *et al.* (2014). Meaning in life was positively correlated with dispositional forgiveness and the extent of forgiveness after an infraction, according to Study 1 (N = 491). Participants in Study 2 (N = 210), a 6-month longitudinal study of romantic couples, reported a greater sense of purpose in life over time if they consistently forgave their partner.

Sengupta *et al.* (2024) conducted another study with the goal of investigating interpersonal forgiveness in young adult relationships that have not been repaired. Twelve people (six men and six women) participated in a cross-sectional qualitative study that used a semi-structured interview schedule. Three themes emerged from the interviews using thematic analysis: “process of forgiveness,” “changes brought forth by forgiveness,” and “purpose of forgiveness.” The third topic highlighted the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation, whereas the previous two themes hinted at the advantages of interpersonal forgiving. By assisting clients in experiencing the psychological advantages of forgiveness without having to deal with the pressure of making amends with the perpetrator, such findings may be included into treatment. Another study by Bindu *et*

al. (2024) investigated if there were any differences in emerging adults’ attachment patterns based on their gender or relationship status. It also looked at the link between emerging adults’ attachment patterns, dispositional forgiveness, and perceived social support. The Revised Adult Attachment Scale: Close Relationship version (RAAS), Trait Forgiveness Scale (TFS), and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support Scale (MSPSS) were administered to the 201 participants (N=201) who were between the ages of 18 and 25. They were recruited online. The results indicated that there were no discernible differences in adult attachment styles by gender or relationship status.

The current study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to examine forgiveness in greater detail and to look for any similarities between the two sets of data.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Using a cross-sectional design and a mixed-methods approach, this study integrated quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The quantitative data provided statistical insights, while the qualitative methods allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences and perspectives. This combination allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the study issue from several angles.

Sample

Participants in the research were individually selected based on a set of inclusion criteria. This criterion was designed to find people who were directly familiar with the dynamics of love relationships, whether they were past or present. Participants have to be between the ages of 20 and 30 to be eligible. Because it represents a time of life when people are more likely to be actively involved in romantic relationships and commonly negotiate more serious and committed partnerships, this age range was chosen. The study’s sample size, which consisted of 100 participants, was sufficient and diverse enough to maintain statistical validity while permitting the drawing of important findings. A thorough analysis of forgiveness in

romantic relationships was made possible by the sample's representation of a range of genders and relationship statuses.

Tools

Thompson *et al.* (2002) developed the Heartland Forgiveness Scale, which was used to gauge participants' degrees of forgiveness. The scale consists of multiple items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Almost Always False of Me) to 7 (Almost Always True of Me).

Composite scores are calculated for the Total HFS and its three subscales—Forgiveness of Self, Others, and Situations. Total HFS scores range from 18 to 126, while each subscale ranges from 6 to 42. The Total HFS reflects an individual's general tendency to forgive oneself, others, and uncontrollable situations, with scores of 18-54 indicating low forgiveness, 55-89 moderate forgiveness, and 90-126 high forgiveness. Additionally, a set of self-designed interview questions was employed to gather qualitative data through semi-structured offline interviews.

Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes from qualitative data collected from 15 participants. It is a widely used qualitative method that involves systematically coding and categorizing data to identify recurring patterns and meanings. Valued for its flexibility, thematic analysis allows researchers to interpret underlying themes across various forms of qualitative data and research contexts.

Procedure

Participants who met the inclusion criteria were recruited using a combination of on-campus interactions and social media outreach in order to ensure a representative and diverse sample. On-campus recruiting efforts included distributing pamphlets, posting notices, and engaging with students at departmental events, while social media outreach used the university's official sites, student groups, and forums to reach a wider audience. In the department library, participants in the offline research phase were given all the resources they

required to complete the questionnaire in a relaxed and pleasant environment. This venue was chosen to minimize distractions and ensure that participants could focus entirely on the task at hand.

A selection of participants was selected for further in-person interviews once the quantitative data set was gathered and analyzed. The selection process was based on certain criteria, such as the completeness and relevance of their questionnaire replies, in order to gain a deeper grasp of the study subject. These participants were then contacted using the email addresses they provided in the demographic portion of the questionnaire to guarantee a methodical and expert approach to interview scheduling.

The in-person interviews were placed in a casual, private setting on campus to encourage open and honest communication. The participants were praised for their priceless contributions and their patience, time, and effort were acknowledged. At the conclusion of the study, they were given a certificate of participation or a token of gratitude to recognize their important contribution to advancing the investigation's objectives. This gesture inspired enthusiastic involvement in the study and showed the researchers' gratitude.

RESULTS

Table 1: Total Heartland Forgiveness Scale.

Scale	Percentage	Interpretation
Total HFS	63%	Likely to forgive self, others and uncontrollable situation
	31%	Usually forgiving towards self, others and uncontrollable situation
	6%	Usually unforgiving towards self, others and uncontrollable situation

Note. Total HFS percentage and interpretation

Table 2: HFS Others Subscale.

Scale	Percentage	Interpretation
Situation-Subscale	53%	Likely to forgive others

Note. Others subscale percentage and interpretation

Table 3: HFS Self Subscale.

Scale	Percentage	Interpretation
Situation-Subscale	52%	Likely to forgive themselves

Note. Self-subscale percentage and interpretation

Table 4: HFS Situation Subscale.

Scale	Percentage	Interpretation
Situation-Subscale	64%	Likely to forgive based on uncontrollable situation

Note. Situation subscale percentage and interpretation

DISCUSSION

Forgiveness across contexts was observed in 63% of participants, indicating a general tendency to forgive oneself, others, and circumstances. Scenario-specific forgiveness was reported by 31% of participants, suggesting that forgiveness varied depending on the situation. A smaller proportion, 6%, displayed intolerance and low levels of forgiveness. With respect to subscales, 52% of participants reported self-forgiveness, 53% indicated forgiveness toward others, and the highest proportion, 64%, demonstrated forgiveness in response to uncontrollable events.

This pattern of forgiveness, which reflects the participants' nuanced knowledge of when and how forgiving is appropriate, lends more credence to the notion that forgiveness is context-dependent. This perspective is supported by the thematic analysis of the qualitative data, which revealed themes such as "biopsychosocial context," "psychological cost," "concrete modalities," and "bond development" in the replies. These themes show how people consider a number of factors, such as the social and psychological environment,

while deciding whether or not to forgive. Many participants felt that forgiveness should be offered based on the specific circumstance and individual differences rather than being a one-size-fits-all solution.

Additionally, the qualitative data showed that forgiveness is seen as a two-way process rather than a one-sided decision. This is in line with the verbatim analysis, which emphasized that forgiveness requires both parties to put up effort and have mutual understanding. These findings are supported by existing research on forgiveness. For instance, a study by Celik *et al.* (2017) that looked at the relationship between forgiveness and subjective well-being found that the subdimensions of forgiveness explain 13% of the variation in subjective well-being. Another research by Masarykova *et al.* (2023) looked at forgiveness, its factors, and acts that are unacceptable in romantic relationships. According to the study, which surveyed 649 adults in Slovakia (532 dating, 117 married; 517 women, 132 males), dating people usually view forgiveness as a means of repairing their relationship, whereas married people view it as more of an emotional process.

Married couples were more inclined to attribute their ability to forgive to shared commitments, whereas dating partners placed greater value on situational context. Additionally, males were more inclined to emphasize internal factors like understanding and personal growth when stating that forgiveness was essential for the relationship. In contrast, women typically needed to be apologetic and show affection before they could forgive. Because the current study also included couples in the dating period, the results are consistent with Masarykova *et al.*'s (2023) study, which primarily focused on understanding the situational context while forgiving a spouse. This highlights how important relationship phases and individual perspectives are in influencing how forgiveness is experienced and used.

CONCLUSION

The quantitative and qualitative findings were largely consistent. Quantitative results showed overall forgiveness in 63% of participants, with subscales indicating forgiveness of uncontrollable

events (64%), self-forgiveness (52%), and forgiveness of others (53%).

Qualitative analysis emphasized the role of contextual and personal factors, including connection building, practical strategies, psychological cost, and the biopsychosocial environment. Key limitations included data collection methods, response authenticity, and social desirability bias, particularly in online settings. Despite these limitations, the study underscores the importance of therapeutic interventions in strengthening relationships and shaping perceptions of forgiveness in everyday social interactions.

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