Forgiveness in Romantic Relationships: The Roles of Attachment, Empathy, And Revenge-Seeking

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ABSTRACT

Empathy, revenge-seeking, and attachment style are psychological and emotional processes related to forgiveness in romantic relationships that the author will discuss in this paper. The study employs both the attachment theory and emotional processing in examining the predictive power of these constructs in forgiveness following wronging in a relationship. It adopted a cross-sectional quantitative research design and employed a standardized self-report measure that was examined among 249. The correlation and regression tests showed empathy was the strongest significant positive predictor of forgiveness and surprisingly revenge seeking also had a significant positive correlation with forgiveness. The research is not only adding value to the relationship psychology theory, but also providing practical recommendations towards the direction of enhancing such relationship healing in form of empathy-based and emotional regulation methods to therapists and counselors. Such limitations as self-report data and demographically limited sample have been suggested and the directions of the future investigation are longitudinal studies and mixed methods designs to help achieve a broader generalization.

Keywords *Forgiveness; Empathy; Revenge-seeking; Romantic relationships; Emotional regulation; Conflict resolution.*

INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships are among the most intimate in human life, yet not free from conflicts, betrayals, or hurt. Forgiveness, an emotional and psychological process, is crucial for repairing and maintaining them. It is a voluntary decision to release resentment, revenge, or retaliation, in favor of compassion and reconciliation. In romantic relationships, forgiveness links to higher satisfaction, psychological health, and long-term commitment (Aquino, Tripp, & Iles, 2023).

Research on forgiveness in romantic relationships highlights psychological and emotional factors affecting it. Attachment style, empathy, and revenge-seeking are key variables. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) explains that early caregiver experiences shape adult relationships. Securely attached individuals respond with understanding and forgiveness, while insecure or avoidant ones struggle to let go of trespasses. Empathy, the ability to share another's feelings, strongly facilitates forgiveness. Empathic individuals better see partner's perspective, reducing anger and encouraging forgiveness. Without

empathy, people often hold grudges or seek revenge. As a mediator, empathy lowers revenge urges and improves forgiveness, acting as a psychological buffer in conflicts (Kaya & Odacı, 2024).

Revenge-seeking is a retaliatory response to wrongdoing, rooted in unhealed suffering, insecurity, or betrayal. It damages relationships by creating cycles of retaliation and disconnection. Revenge-seeking is inversely related to forgiveness, showing the importance of understanding its link with empathy (Roberts & Stt, 2021). Forgiveness is central to relationship maintenance, especially during conflict or betrayal. Failure to forgive leads to misery, low satisfaction, or relationship dissolution. People may feel resentful, seek revenge, or disengage emotionally, making forgiveness difficult. Research has studied forgiveness generally, but specific predictors like attachment style, empathy, and revenge-seeking remain uncertain. Without addressing these, forgiveness and healing may remain superficial (Carhnith, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2020).

This study examines how attachment, empathy, and revenge-seeking interact in willingness to forgive after transgressions. It also explores whether empathy mediates between forgiveness and revenge, offering insight into emotion regulation and healing. Using a systematic model and data, the study aims to clarify how these factors fit into forgiveness outcomes. Findings will benefit therapists, counselors, and individuals in conflict resolution and healing.

The study explores the significance of attachment, empathy, and revenge-seeking in forgiveness. It suggests empathy may mediate between revenge and forgiveness, turning hurt into healing. Understanding these variables expands academic knowledge and helps develop counseling interventions. Given rising dissatisfaction, divorce, and trauma, forgiveness is crucial for relational healing. The study provides insights for professionals and individuals navigating romantic intimacy.

This study is significant as it highlights mechanisms shaping forgiveness, especially attachment patterns, empathy, and vengeance. Romantic relationships are vital but prone to injury and conflict, causing long-term damage if unresolved. How people cope with hurt and forgive impacts relationship quality. By examining empathy's mediation between revenge and forgiveness, the study deepens understanding of emotional processes in transgressions. Findings will benefit individuals and couples seeking emotional health and satisfaction, showing how attachment and revenge affect forgiveness and relationship management. Conflict more compassionately may reduce emotional upset, improve communication, and aid healing after conflict (Fatima & Malik, 2022).

However, this research has limitations. First, it examines only a few variables—attachment style, empathy, and revenge-seeking—while forgiveness is influenced by many factors like personality, communication style, culture, emotional intelligence, and past relationships. Limiting to three variables may not capture forgiveness fully. Second, using a quantitative, self-report approach allows statistical analysis and generalizability but may not reflect the full complexity of participants' feelings. Self-report measures can also be affected by social desirability and inaccurate self-perception, impacting validity.

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

The theoretical basis of this report is underpinned by the main Attachment Theory, as established by John Bowlby and expanded by Mary Ainsworth. With Attachment Theory, early relationships with early caregivers shape the internal working models that emerge and get transported right through to adulthood to be utilized in the formation of expectations and behavior in close relationships. These patterns of attachment, traditionally classified as secure, anxious, and avoidant, substantively influence how individuals connect with their intimate partners, navigate emotional intimacy, and handle conflict. Attachment Theory is here utilized to explain variation among individuals in terms of the readiness and capacity to forgive a transgressive partner. The theory of why some individuals may be prone to forgiveness more naturally than others, and why other individuals will struggle due to underlying abandonment, mistrust, or fear of emotional avoidance is explained by the theory (Fatima & Malik, 2022).

The value of using Attachment Theory in this study is the explanatory power for one of the primary variables: attachment style. Securely attached individuals are better at managing their emotions and are more forgiving and trusting when it comes to their partner. Anxious ones are in greater likelihood to seek closeness but with very intense emotional responses, inclining to hold a grudge. Avoidant individuals will pull away or suppress emotions and therefore deny a need for forgiveness or simply avoid emotional reconciliation. These traits directly influence the way forgiveness is practiced in romantic relationships. By applying Attachment Theory, the research can investigate whether and how these attachment patterns predict empathy, revenge-seeking, and ultimately, forgiveness individually.

Revenge-Seeking and Empathy

Revenge-seeking and empathy are two psychological constructs that feature very prominently in the dynamics of romantic relationships, particularly transgression and forgiveness. Revenge-seeking refers to the motivation to pay back hurt inflicted by a partner, whereas empathy is the capacity to share the feelings of another and know them. These constructions tend to be at variance with each other; greater empathy tends to reduce revenge-seeking motivations, resulting in forgiveness and reconciliation.

Empirical research has indicated a negative relationship between revenge-seeking and empathy. In one study by McCullough et al. (1998), findings indicated that those who score higher on empathy are less likely to seek revenge-seeking behaviors after being offended within interpersonal contexts. The reverse correlation can be explained as empathy can serve as a buffer against the vicious revenge cycle of retaliation in romantic relationships. Besides this, Worthington et al. (2007) examined the place of empathy in the process of forgiveness. The authors found that empathy not only suppressed the desire for revenge but also facilitated forgiveness through increased understanding and sympathy toward the offending partner. This implies that empathy can transform negative responses to transgressions into more positive outcomes. Of most significance in the context of romantic relationships is the interplay between empathy and revenge. Romantic partners are likely to have strong emotional bonds between them, and injustice evokes agonizing feelings of betrayal. But with empathy present, there is the potential to be an umbrella against such negative emotions. For instance, McCullough et al. (1997) conducted a study in which they found that individuals who could perspective-take and sympathize with their partner's situation were less inclined to retaliate and more inclined to forgive.

Furthermore, attachment styles have been found to moderate between revenge-seeking and empathy. Mikulincer and Shaver (2001) found that individuals who have secure attachment styles scored higher in empathy and lower in revenge-seeking traits. Individuals with insecure attachment styles, such as anxious or avoidant, tended to have revenge-seeking behaviors and were less likely to empathize with their partner.

Empathy and Forgiveness

Empathy and forgiveness are central concepts in the preservation and promotion of romantic relationships. Empathy, or the ability to share and understand the emotions of another, allows for emotional harmony between couples. Forgiveness, the act of letting go of resentment and thoughts of retaliation, is essential in the resolution of conflicts and maintenance of relational harmony. The dynamics between the two concepts have been the focus of recent empirical research that has revealed their interdependence and combined effect on relationship satisfaction.

Empathy has been highlighted in recent research to mediate the forgiveness process. For example, Wang et al. (2020) assessed 445 Chinese teenagers and found that empathy partially mediated between transgression-related motivations and forgiveness tendencies. In specific terms, greater empathy was linked with higher benevolent motivations and lower avoidance and revenge motivations and hence more forgiveness.

Theoretical frameworks also underpin empathy-forgiveness connections. Attachment theory hypothesizes that securely attached individuals, who are best able to empathize, are more likely to forgive. Insecurely attached individuals, on the other hand, will be unable to empathize, thus inhibiting processes of forgiveness. The theoretical framework is consistent with empirical research, and interventions focusing on attachment issues should improve empathy and, by extension, forgiveness in romantic relationships.

Revenge Seeking and Forgiveness

The interplay of revenge and forgiveness in romance is multifaceted and complex and is most often dictated by psychological traits, culture, and the nature of transgression. Forgiveness is often associated with healthy relational outcomes, yet the desire for revenge can impede the process of forgiveness and prolonging conflict.

Experimental research has examined this interplay. For instance, a Karachi, Pakistan, survey of teens explored the relationship between revenge, forgiveness, and psychological well-being. The study revealed that forgiveness helps individuals overcome their revenge desire and improve mental health, yet there was also a surprising positive association between revenge and well-being under certain circumstances. This means that revenge-seeking may, in some cases, leave an individual with a sense of empowerment or justice, but at the cost of harmony within relationships (Kaya & Odacı, 2024).
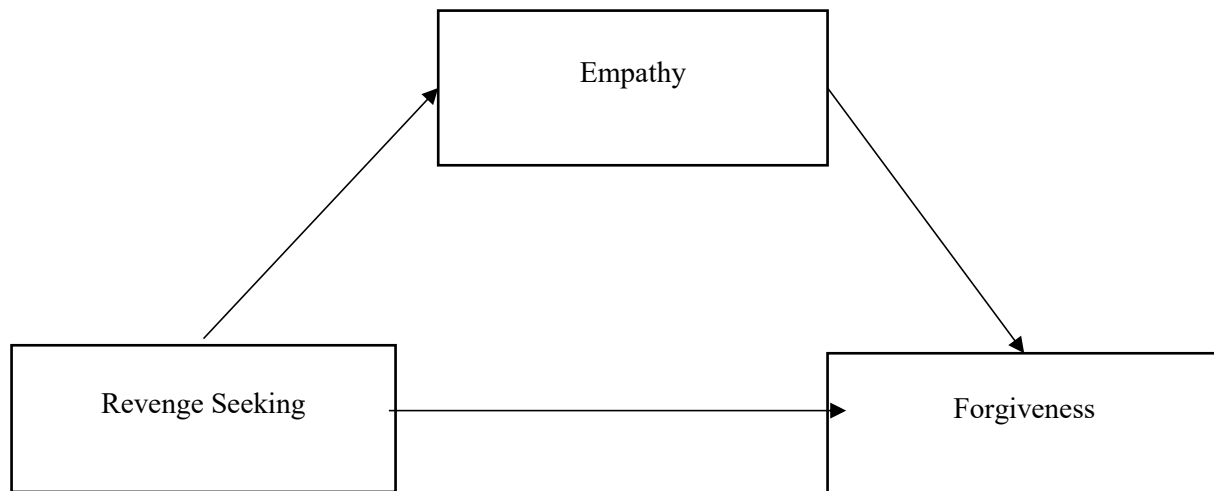
Forgiveness or revenge in romantic relationships can significantly impact relational quality and longevity. Forgiveness has been associated with increased relationship satisfaction, while revenge-seeking is potentially likely to increase further conflict and relational deterioration. Efforts to increase forgiveness,

such as empathy training and anger management, can potentially be beneficial in promoting better-quality relationships and resilience.

H1: Revenge-seeking has a significant impact on Empathy

H2: Empathy Has a Significant Impact on Forgiveness

H3: Revenge Seeking has a significant impact on Forgiveness

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            ┌──────────────┐
            │   Empathy    │
            └──────────────┘
           ↗                ↘
┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│ Revenge Seeking  │ ───→ │   Forgiveness    │
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METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the relationships among forgiveness, attachment styles, empathy, and revenge-seeking in romantic relationships. Standardized self-report questionnaires assessed all four constructs. Correlational analysis measured the strength and direction of associations and identified major predictors of forgiveness.

Sampling

Convenience sampling was used to recruit 250 participants aged 18–30 in Pakistan who had experienced at least one romantic relationship. Data were collected via online questionnaires shared on social media and university email lists. Both genders and diverse backgrounds were included. Participants needed to understand English to complete the questionnaires.

Measures

All constructs were measured with five-item, 5-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Empathy (Empathy Scale, Kim, 2022, 7 items): Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Forgiveness (Forgiveness in Romantic Relationships Scale, Kim, 2022, 5 items): Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Revenge-Seeking (Revenge Motivation Scale, Kim, 2022, 5 items): Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Procedure & Analysis

Data were collected online through voluntary participation with assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. Ethical approval was obtained. Data were coded and analyzed in SPSS, and regression analysis was used to examine relationships between attachment style, empathy, revenge-seeking, and forgiveness

Ethical Conduct

The study followed the ethical standards of the APA and was supervised by the Iqra University Ethics Review Committee. Prior consent was obtained from participants, who were informed they could withdraw at any time without consequences. There was no risk of physical, emotional, or psychological harm. Participants were informed about possible sensitive content related to romantic relationships. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, no personal identifiers were collected, and data were stored securely for academic use only.

Descriptive Statistics

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the participants and the descriptive statistics for the key study variables: forgiveness, revenge-seeking, and empathy.

Table 01

Frequency Distribution and percentage of Demographic Variables (N=249)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	109	43.8%
	Female	140	56.2%
Age	18–24	31	12.4%
	25–30	99	39.8%
	31–35	94	37.8%
	36 and above	25	10.0%

Relationship Status	Committed	47	18.9%
	Non-Committed	195	78.3%
	Not Specified/Others	7	2.8%

Note: FG= Forgiveness, E= Emphathy, RS= Revenge Seeking

The table below summarizes the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of the items measuring forgiveness, revenge-seeking, and empathy. Each variable was measured using five Likert-type items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Table 02

Descriptive table of Forgiveness, Revenge- Seeking and Empathy (N = 249)

Variable	Item Code	Mean	Std. Deviation
Forgiveness	FG1	3.97	0.920
	FG2	3.93	1.031
	FG3	4.07	0.952
	FG4	4.03	0.897
	FG5	4.14	0.889
Revenge-Seeking	RS1	4.10	0.853
	RS2	4.17	0.840
	RS3	4.16	0.854
	RS4	4.14	0.854
	RS5	4.10	0.863
Empathy	E1	4.06	0.869
	E2	4.12	0.824
	E3	4.18	0.833
	E4	4.14	0.826
	E5	4.11	0.859

To ensure the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement instruments, Cronbach's alpha was computed for each of the three scales used: Forgiveness, Revenge-Seeking, and Empathy. All scales demonstrated strong internal reliability, with alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70.

Table 03

Reliability analysis of Questionnaires (N=249)

Variables	Means	Standard Deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Forgiveness	20.14	3.456	0.788
Empathy	20.60	3.153	0.804
Revenge Seeking	20.67	3.153	0.793

As shown in Table 4.2, the Forgiveness Scale produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.788, indicating good internal consistency. Similarly, the Revenge-Seeking Scale yielded an alpha value of 0.793, which is also within an acceptable range. The Empathy Scale demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.804, suggesting strong consistency among the items.

These results confirm that all three scales were reliable and suitable for further analysis in this study.

Table 04

Correlation analysis of variables (N=249)

		FG	RS	E
FG	Pearson Correlation	1	.369**	.507**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	249	249	249
RS	Pearson Correlation	.369**	1	.525**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	249	249	249
E	Pearson Correlation	.507**	.525**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	249	249	249

Note: FG= Forgiveness, E= Empathy, RS= Revenge Seeking

The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between forgiveness and revenge-seeking ($r = 0.369$, $p < 0.01$). This result suggests that participants who report higher levels of revenge-seeking tendencies also report higher levels of forgiveness. Although unexpected, this may reflect the presence of emotional ambivalence in romantic relationships, where individuals can experience conflicting motivations such as the desire to retaliate and the simultaneous inclination to repair the relationship.

A strong and statistically significant positive correlation was found between forgiveness and empathy ($r = 0.507$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that participants with greater empathic capacity are more likely to forgive their romantic partners. This finding supports the theoretical expectation that empathy enhances the ability to understand a partner's perspective, thereby promoting emotional healing and reducing the desire for retribution.

Revenge-seeking was also found to have a significant positive correlation with empathy ($r = 0.525$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that individuals with high levels of empathy may still experience strong revenge-related emotions. This counterintuitive result may indicate that empathy does not necessarily neutralize all negative responses; instead, it may increase emotional sensitivity, including perceived betrayal or injustice in close relationships.

Table 05

Regression analysis of Empathy Predicting Revenge-Seeking (N=249)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.525	0.276	0.273	0.727

Note. R = multiple correlation coefficient; R² = coefficient of determination; Std. Error = standard error of the estimate. Predictor: Empathy; Dependent variable: Revenge-Seeking Behavior.

Empathy accounts for 27.6% of the variance in revenge-seeking behavior.

Table 06

Regression Coefficients for Empathy Predicting Revenge-Seeking (N=249)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	2.01	0.22	—	9.11	< .001
Empathy	0.52	0.05	0.53	9.71	< .001**

Note. Dependent variable: Revenge-Seeking

Revenge-Seeking significantly and positively predicts Empathy ($\beta = 0.525$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that individuals with high emotional sensitivity may also have heightened reactivity to relational harm, leading to increased revenge motivation.

Table 07

Regression analysis of Revenge-Seeking Predicting Forgiveness (N=249)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.369	0.136	0.133	0.856

Note. R = multiple correlation coefficient; R² = coefficient of determination; Std. Error = standard error of the estimate. Predictor: Revenge-Seeking Behavior; Dependent variable: Forgiveness.

Revenge-seeking explains 13.6% of the variance in forgiveness.

Table 08

Regression Analysis Summary for Revenge-Seeking Predicting Forgiveness (N=249)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	2.34	0.27	—	8.75	< .001
Revenge-Seeking	0.40	0.06	0.37	6.24	< .001**

*Note. Dependent variable: Forgiveness (FGQsum). p < .01**.*

Revenge-seeking significantly and positively predicts forgiveness ($\beta = 0.369$, $p < 0.001$). This finding, while counterintuitive, may reflect a process in which those who recognize vengeful feelings eventually pursue emotional resolution through forgiveness.

Table 09

Model Summary for Empathy Predicting Forgiveness (N=249)

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error of the Estimate

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.51	0.26	0.25	0.79

Note. Predictor: Empathy. Dependent variable: Forgiveness

Empathy explains 25.7% of the variance in forgiveness.

Table 10

Regression Coefficients for Empathy Predicting Forgiveness (N=249)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	1.79	0.24	—	7.44	< .001
Empathy	0.54	0.06	0.51	9.24	< .001**

Note. Dependent variable: Forgiveness

Empathy is a strong and significant positive predictor of forgiveness ($\beta = 0.507$, $p < 0.001$). This supports theoretical models which posit that understanding others' emotional perspectives plays a central role in the capacity to forgive romantic transgressions.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The current research explored empathy and revenge-seeking roles in predicting romantic relationship forgiveness. According to the conceptual model proposed, the following three regression models were examined:

- Empathy was a significant and positive predictor of forgiveness ($\beta = 0.507$, $p < .001$) and explained 25.7% of the variance.
- Revenge-seeking also emerged as a significant and positive predictor of forgiveness ($\beta = 0.369$, $p < .001$), explaining 13.6% of the variance.
- Empathy made a large and significant positive contribution to predicting revenge-seeking ($\beta = 0.525$, $p < .001$), accounting for 27.6% of the variance.

These results were also supported by Pearson correlation coefficients, which indicated significant positive correlations between all three variables:

- Forgiveness correlated positively with empathy ($r = .507$, $p < .01$) and revenge-seeking ($r = .369$, $p < .01$).
- Empathy was positively correlated with revenge-seeking ($r = .525$, $p < .01$).

All regression models were highly significant at $p < .001$ and exhibited good levels of explained variance (R^2 values between 0.136 and 0.276). Reliability analysis confirmed that all three scales (revenge-seeking, empathy, forgiveness) showed excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.78$).

The present research surveyed psychological processes underlying forgiveness in romantic relationships, focusing on empathy and revenge-seeking. Regression analyses and correlation tests identified major findings that advance knowledge of emotional processes in resolving romantic conflict.

Empathy was the most significant predictor of forgiveness ($\beta = 0.507$, $p < .001$), accounting for 25.7% of variance. This confirms literature situating empathy at the core of emotional repair and relational restoration. Individuals who better empathize with their partner's emotional state are likely to let go of resentment and forgive transgressions (Karremans & Van Lange, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Revenge-seeking also had a positive and significant relationship with forgiveness ($\beta = 0.369$, $p < .001$), explaining 13.6% of variance, suggesting that processing anger may facilitate closure through forgiveness (Stzelan & van Pmoun, 2022). Empathy significantly predicted revenge-seeking behavior ($\beta = 0.525$, $p < .001$), with 27.6% of variance explained, indicating that highly empathetic individuals are more emotionally sensitized and reactive to betrayal, having access to broader emotional ranges, including compassion and anger (Decety & Cowell, 2020).

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The study's findings provide rigorous insight into the affective processes involved in forgiveness in romantic relationships. All the relations examined below are explored within extant theory and literature.

Empathy was the best predictor of forgiveness in the study ($\beta = 0.507$, $p < .001$) and is consistent with theoretical predictions and earlier empirical work. Empathy heightens an individual's ability to consider things from their partner's perspective, better positively interpret their intentions, and lower hostility hence increases the likelihood of forgiving. These findings are in line with earlier studies carried out by Karremans & Van Lange (2020) and Wang et al. (2020), who identified empathy's mediating and motivational roles in encouraging forgiveness in romantic relationships. The finding of a large effect size also lends support to the argument that increasing empathy may be a critical therapeutic objective toward the resolution of relational conflict. Revenge-Seeking as a Predictor of Forgiveness

Revenge-seeking surprisingly was a positive and significant predictor of forgiveness ($\beta = 0.369$, $p < .001$). While other studies generally establish a negative relationship between revenge motivation and forgiveness (e.g., McCullough & Witvliet, 2021; Exline & Baumeister, 2021), the current result suggests that more vengeful or emotionally reactive individuals may be more emotionally engaged in the relationship. This emotional engagement, which is reactive in nature, may facilitate emotional resolution and potential transformation into forgiveness in the long term. In such a manner, revenge-seeking can perhaps not inhibit forgiveness but co-exist with an interest in relational closure or justice. This finding acts as a rebuttal to the historical binary of forgiveness and revenge and resonates with such more nuanced perspectives as those given by Strelan & van Prooijen (2022), who argue that vengeance and forgiveness may be simultaneous and not opposed forces, both born from moral outrage or emotional provocation in the face of transgression.

Empathy also strongly predicted revenge-seeking behavior ($\beta = 0.525$, $p < .001$), a result that might seem at first blush to be counterintuitive in the face of the generally negative correlation identified in the literature. It can be accounted for, however, in terms of the richness of the emotions felt in romantic

relationships. High empathic capacity does not eliminate the sense of betrayal or hurt. Instead, individuals with more empathy would be more emotionally aware and sensitive and hence have stronger emotional reactions perhaps even anger or a sense of outrage. These experiences would make them more vulnerable to revenge urges, especially if empathy fails to lead to understanding or resolution. Neuroscience research supports this view. Decety & Cowell (2020) stated that highly empathic individuals may still access emotional centers of the brain that respond to threat or social injustice. Hence, empathy can build both loving and retaliatory responses, depending on the relational context.

Implication of the Study

The implications of this research hold important theoretical, practical, and clinical significance for the understanding and facilitation of forgiveness in romantic relationships. These implications are discussed within three general areas: academic scholarship, psychological practice, and relationship education.

This study contributes to the growing literature on relational and emotional processes by validating and building upon existing theories namely attachment theory and emotional processing theories. The confirmation that empathy strongly predicts revenge-seeking and forgiveness provides a less subtle understanding of empathy as a double-function emotional device that is simultaneously able to heighten emotional suffering and facilitate reconciliation. The results confirm and add to Mikulincer & Shaver's (2021) integrative models, demonstrating that emotional regulation strategies, rather than emotional tendencies, are what can be the determining factor for relationship outcomes. Furthermore, the counterintuitive positive relationship between revenge-seeking and forgiveness challenges traditional dualisms and opens up the chance to reconceptualize the functions of emotional ambivalence and reactivity in forgiveness. Clinically, the study offers invaluable information to therapists, counselors, and psychologists who work with patients or couples who have experienced emotional injury in romantic relationships. The strong effect of empathy on forgiving suggests that interventions to increase empathic ability e.g., mindfulness training, cognitive reframe, or skills training in empathic communication will have a direct effect on enhancing clients' willingness to forgive and reducing hostility. Finding that empathy can coexist with revenge motivations further suggests the utility of helping clients navigate complex emotional responses rather than hiding them. Therapy approaches like Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) or Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) might be very useful in resolving the emotional dilemma that results from romantic infidelity.

CONCLUSION

This research investigated the psychological and emotional processes of forgiving in romantic relationships and more specifically the roles of empathy, revenge motivation, and attachment style. Based on attachment theory and influenced by emotional processing models, the research explored the combined role of these predictors in influencing individuals' capacity for forgiveness of a romantic partner after relational transgressions. The findings from the study set out several important findings. Empathy was the highest predictor of forgiveness, consistent with the theoretical prediction that empathy or the capacity to see things from a partner's perspective and feel in the same way as them allows for emotional closure and relational redemption. Revenge-seeking, against common assumptions, was also positively correlated with forgiveness. This apparently counterintuitive finding suggests that individuals who experience and

process emotion in relation to revenge are not diminishing their capacity to forgive but are perhaps emotionally engaged enough to pursue reconciliation. Empathy was also a significant predictor of seeking revenge, consistent with the argument that heightened empathic sensitivity may both enhance emotional reactivity to betrayal. These results challenge the crude duality of forgiveness and revenge and coalesce on a more advanced emotional framework in which empathy is an ambivalent dual-purpose force—amplifying both reconciliation motive and hurt of indignation. This ambivalence reflects the emotional uncertainty that typically characterizes romantic relationships and underscores the necessity of emotional regulation strategies for managing such dynamics.

Methodologically, the study was undertaken on the basis of a cross-sectional quantitative design utilizing valid self-report measures completed by a sample of 249 Pakistani adults with a history of romantic relationship experience. Despite statistical findings being strong and significant, the study does acknowledge limitations such as its reliance upon self-report data, application of a demographically limited sample, and absence of other relevant psychological variables. These constraints also offer avenues for potential future research, including longitudinal and qualitative research, more representative demographic inclusion, and measurement of other constructs like emotional intelligence or communication style.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Future researchers should use a wider theoretical framework by including other variables to offer a more complete explanation of what enables or impedes forgiveness in romantic relationships.
- The employment of self-report quantitative measures, though valuable for generalizability and statistical analysis, might not be able to capture the emotional nuance of forgiveness.
- Subsequent researchers are invited to utilize mixed methods or qualitative methods (eg., in-depth interviews, narrative analysis) to examine participants lived processes of hurt, empathy, and forgiveness. This would yield richer, more nuanced information about emotional dynamics.
- The sample for the present study was selected mostly from young Pakistani individuals, of whom many were university students. This limits the generalizability of findings to broader populations. Future studies should seek to include participants from a range of age groups, educational levels, and cultural backgrounds to ask whether forgiveness processes differ across life stages, gender roles, or across cultural norms for expressing emotions and behaving in relationships.

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