Empathy and Humility as Predictors of Forgiveness towards One's Partner and Relationship Satisfaction in Young Adults

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The study examines whether empathy and humility (both as individual characteristics and partner's perceived characteristics) are predictors of forgiveness towards one's partner and relationship satisfaction in young adults. The sample consisted of 226 young adults (M = 23.3; SD = 2.38). Participants completed the following battery: Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking Scale from the IRI, subscales Global Humility and Superiority from the RHS, the TRIM-18, Required Conditions for Forgiveness, and the RAS. The open-ended question concerned the conditions under which participants forgive their partner. Hierarchical regression analysis showed that conditions for forgiveness explained 7.6% of the variance in forgiveness toward one's partner, while empathy and humility explained an additional 13.8% of that variance. The individual's perspective-taking and their partner's perceived empathy positively predicted forgiveness towards one's partner, and perceived partner's superiority predicted negatively. The multiple regression analysis showed that empathy, humility, and forgiveness towards one's partner explain 43.4% of the variance in relationship satisfaction, (F(9, 216) = 20.13, p < .001). The strongest negative predictor of relationship satisfaction was partner's superiority and the strongest positive predictor was forgiveness towards one's partner. Forgiveness towards one's partner and partner's perceived empathy and humility seem to play an important role in relationship satisfaction.

Key words: empathy, humility, forgiveness, romantic relationships

Introduction

Romantic relationships in young adulthood often include situations where partners hurt one another, even unintentionally. Forgiveness is an essential way to heal such interpersonal hurts (Fincham et al., 2002) as it involves transforming negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors towards the offender into more positive ones (Enright, 2001). Interpersonal forgiveness is seen as a prosocial change in

the harmed partner's interpersonal motivation toward the offender. This means that when a partner forgives, he or she becomes less motivated to avoid or revenge their offending partner and more motivated to act benevolently toward them (McCullough et al., 2006). There is considerable evidence that various types of conflicts in a relationship may presuppose the break-up of romantic partners (Welsh & Shulman, 2008). Forgiveness, on the other hand, is associated with resolving betrayal or conflict (Fincham et al., 2004) and with maintaining rather than ending the relationship (Morse & Metts, 2011). Also, forgiveness can improve the quality of the interpersonal relationship between the forgiver and the offender (Tsang et al., 2006) and enhance relationship satisfaction (Braithwaite et al., 2011).

Individuals usually have various reasons why they forgive their partners: to feel better, for the good of the relationship, for altruistic reasons, to avoid the social impact of a possible break-up, to prove moral superiority over the offender, or for religious reasons (Belicki et al., 2020). Also, previous research has indicated that individuals are more prone to forgive if the offender offers an apology or expresses remorse for the offense (Gold & Weiner, 2000). Overall, it seems that in many cases certain *conditions* must be fulfilled for the partners to forgive each other. Exline et al. (2004) examined the conditions for forgiveness in connection with narcissism. These conditions are the offender taking responsibility for the offense, offering a sincere apology, repairing the damage caused to the partner, and bearing the negative consequences for the offense. The authors found that narcissism was positively related to a higher number of conditions being required for forgiveness.

Previous research has indicated that it is not only the offender's behavior that is important in forgiving, but the forgiver's *personality* as well. Worthington (1998) understands forgiveness as a process that requires the partner to feel empathy for the culprit and humility in the sense that they see themselves as an erroneous and imperfect human being just like the offender. A comprehensive definition of empathy could be one's ability to understand others' emotions and to share emotions with others (Cohen & Strayer, 1996). In the interpersonal context, when partners actively try to understand and share their feelings with one another, they may feel understood and important or approved of in the relationship. On the other hand, a lack of empathy can lead partners to feel misunderstood and possibly unimportant or rejected. Such perceptions can damage the relationship over time and eventually lead to its disintegration (Waldinger et al., 2004).

Empathy has been the focus of much of the research on forgiveness following transgressions in romantic relationships. The results suggest that the victim's empathy for the perpetrator is closely related to their capacity to forgive them (Fincham et al., 2002; Macaskill et al., 2002). Moreover, empathy mediates the relationship between apologizing and forgiveness (Brown et al., 2008). Thus, the empathic model of forgiveness suggests that empathy is the primary mechanism of the motivation to forgive the partner upon receipt of an apology (McCullough et al., 1997). In a study by Péloquin and Lafontaine (2010), individuals who generally showed emotional empathy for their partner or who were able to see their partner's perspective reported being more satisfied with their relationship and therefore more forgiving. These findings provide support for the role that general and dyadic empathy can play in maintaining or improving romantic relationships.

Humility is defined as the ability to accurately assess one's skills and achievements

and to admit mistakes and limitations, as being open to new ideas and advice but also conflicting information, as having a lower self-focus and developing gratitude for things in life (Tangney, 2000). Humble individuals have a precise but moderate view of themselves, which is neither too positive nor too negative, as it includes an awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses (Davis et al., 2011). In the interpersonal dimension, humility involves focusing on the other rather than oneself. Focusing on the other is characterized by the ability to limit self-centered emotions (e.g., pride) and the importance of behaving in a socially acceptable manner (Davis et al., 2010). Several authors have argued that there is a positive relationship between humility and forgiveness (e.g., Powers et al., 2007). This association makes sense since people who are more humble also accept their own limitations more easily, and therefore perceive the limitations and transgressions of others in a more compassionate and tolerant way (Tangney, 2000), and are more motivated to forgive them after they have transgressed (Dwiwardani et al., 2014). Humble people also value others more rather than feeling superior and are more oriented towards others than toward themselves (Davis et al., 2010). Moreover, in the relational context, it seems that both the individual's humility is important as well as the partner's perceived humility. Previous research suggested that individuals are more likely to forgive if they consider their partner to be humble (Goddart et al., 2016; Van Tongeren et al., 2014). Humility is also positively related to happiness and satisfaction in relationships (Peters et al., 2011).

There is considerable evidence that the individual's empathy (e.g., Fincham et al., 2002) and humility (e.g., Powers et al., 2007) and the partner's perceived humility (e.g., Goddart et al., 2016) are important factors associated with the likelihood to forgive one's partner. *In our study, we aim to measure the relationship between the individual's empathy and humility and the partner's perceived empathy and humility, with forgiveness (Q-1).* As mentioned above, if certain conditions are met (e.g., the partner apologizes, shows remorse, and behaves in a conciliatory fashion), the hurt partner is more motivated to forgive. In our study, we explore whether *empathy and humility (both as individual characteristics and the perceived characteristics of the partner) predict forgiveness toward one's partner over and above the conditions required for forgiveness (Q-2).* In the qualitative part of the research, we investigate *Q-3: What conditions do individuals require in order to forgive their partners in romantic relationships?* The secondary research aim is to examine whether empathy and humility – both as individual characteristics and the partner's perceived characteristics – as well as forgiveness toward the partner are predictors of relationship satisfaction. We formulated the fourth research question as: *Q-4: Do empathy, humility, and forgiveness toward the partner predict relationship satisfaction in dating individuals?*

Method

Participants

The selection criteria for participation in the study were being aged 20 to 30 years – young adulthood – and being in a romantic relationship lasting at least two years. The questionnaire was completed by 300 participants. Some of them did not meet the selection criteria and some did not pass the two attention checks in the questionnaire. Therefore, we had to exclude 74 participants.

The final research sample consisted of 226 young adults ranging from 20 to 30 years old ($M = 23.3$; $SD = 2.38$); 196 were women

(86.7%) and 30 were men (13.3%). All participants were Slovaks. Length of the romantic relationship was from 24 months to 150 months (M = 51.4; SD = 27.8). The majority of participants had a high-school degree (123; 54.4%). Just over a quarter had a Bachelor's degree (60; 26.6%) and 39 (17.3%) participants had a Master's degree. Some participants had completed high-school without a high school diploma (3; 1.3%), and one participant (0.4%) had a doctoral degree.

A post hoc power analysis using the program *G*Power* revealed that on the basis of the mean correlation coefficient observed in the present study (r = .20), with α = .05, an n of 226 was sufficient to obtain statistical power of .92 level. Also, a post hoc power analysis revealed that on the basis of the effect size f^2 observed in the present study (f^2 = .85), with α = .05, an n of 226 was sufficient to obtain statistical power of >.99 level.

Procedure

An online test battery was distributed through e-mail and social networking services.

The snowball sampling technique was used. Participants were informed about the research and conditions before giving their informed consent at the beginning of the questionnaire. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. An e-mail address was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire so respondents could contact the author of the study if they had any questions.

Measures

At the beginning of the questionnaire, there were demographic questions (sex, age, highest education level) and a question about the length of their romantic relationship.

Empathy. To measure empathy, we used the Empathy Concern Scale and Perspective Taking subscales from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples (IRI; Péloquin & Lafontaine, 2010). The Empathy Concern Scale subscale assesses "other-oriented" feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others and the Perspective Taking subscale examines the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others. Items were rated on a 4-point scale (0 = does not describe me well, 4 = describes me very well). The items were about their thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations, such as: *"I often have tender, concerned feelings for my partner when he/she is less fortunate than me."* In the next step, participants were asked to indicate how well the items described their romantic partner, e.g., *"My partner often has tender, concerned feelings for me when I am less fortunate than him/her."* The internal consistency of the individual's Empathy Concern Scale was α = .56, partner's perceived Empathy Concern was α = .69; individual's Perspective Taking was α = .71 and partner's perceived Perspective Taking α = .85.

Humility. To measure humility, we used the Global Humility and Superiority subscales from the Relational Humility Scale (RHS, Davis et al., 2011). The Global Humility subscale measures the degree of general humility in an individual. The participants were asked first to rate the statements describing them and then to rate the statements describing their romantic partner, e.g., *"I have a humble character"* or *"He/she has a humble character."* Cronbach's alpha for individual Global Humility was α = .89 and partner's Perceived Humility was α = .95. The Superiority subscale examines the degree of perceived moral superiority. The participants were first asked to rate the statements describing them and then to rate the statements describing their romantic partner; *"I have a big ego"* or *"He/she has a big ego."* The items of both subscales were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly dis-

agree, 5 = strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha for the individual's moral Superiority was α = .74 and partner's perceived Superiority was α = .85.

Forgiveness toward one's partner. The Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory – 18 item version (TRIM–18) (McCullough et al., 2006) was used to assess forgiveness towards one's partner and interpersonal motivation in a situation where people perceive that another person has harmed them in a way that they consider both painful and morally wrong. The scale consists of three subscales: Avoidance Motivations, Revenge Motivations, Benevolence Motivations, and the overall Forgiveness Score. To obtain the overall forgiveness score, the score for the benevolence items is added to the reversed scores for the avoidance items and revenge items. For the purpose of our study, we were interested in the analysis with the overall forgiveness score. Participants were asked to indicate their current thoughts and feelings about the person who hurt them, in this case their romantic partner. Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The internal consistency for the overall Forgiveness Score was high α = .83. For the purpose of this study, the TRIM-18 was back and forth translated by the authors of this study.

Conditions required for forgiveness. After reading the instruction, *"In order for me to completely forgive my partner..."*, participants were asked to rate the following responses: *"s/he would have to accept responsibility for the offense," "s/he would have to offer a sincere apology," "s/he would have to undo the damage done to me,"* (Exline et al., 2004). Items were rated on a 10-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 10 = strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha for the conditions required for forgiveness was α = .66.

Relationship satisfaction. To measure the individual's satisfaction with their relation-ship we used the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1998). The participants were asked to rate 7 items, e.g., *"How well does your partner meet your needs?"* on a 5-point scale (A = poorly, E = extremely well) or *"How many problems are there in your relationship?"* on a 5-point scale (A = very few, E = very many). The internal consistency for the RAS in our study was α = .70. For the purpose of this study, the RAS was back and forth translated by the authors of this study.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked an o*pen-ended question: "Under which condition do you usually forgive your partner?"*

We have reported all measures, conditions, and data exclusions for this study.

Data Analyses

The quantitative data was analyzed using Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression analysis. Answers to the open-ended question were analyzed using Consensual Qualitative Research-Modified (CQR-m; Spangler et al., 2012). The primary characteristic of the CQR-m method is that it uses a bottom-up approach, in which the analysis is conducted by a research team – in our case the team consisted of the first author, the second author, and a psychology student – that individually analyzed the data in categories and subcategories. The data was divided into two halves and after analyzing each half the team members discussed the analysis until a consensus and data saturation were reached.

Results

In Table 1, we report the descriptive analysis for all the variables.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the associations with empathy, humility, forgiveness toward the partner, condi-

Table 1 *Descriptive analysis of all variables*

Variables	Mean	SD	Range	Median	Coefficient of Skewness	Coefficient of Kurtosis
empathy concern – individual	20.6	3.23	17	21.00	-1.38 (.16)	2.09 (.32)
perspective taking – individual	15.2	3.86	22	15.00	-.20 (.16)	.06 (.32)
empathy concern – partner	18.7	4.30	21	19.00	-.91 (.16)	.61 (.32)
perspective taking – partner	12.6	5.40	24	13.00	-.16 (.16)	-.47 (.32)
global humility – individual	17.5	4.11	20	18.00	-5.05 (.16)	.41 (.32)
superiority – individual	12.2	4.25	22	11.00	1.17 (.16)	1.65 (.32)
global humility – partner	17.6	5.40	20	18.00	-.47 (.16)	-.52 (.32)
superiority – partner	13.4	5.84	28	12.00	1.05 (.16)	1.00 (.32)
forgiveness toward partner	73.6	9.27	58	76.00	-1.48 (.16)	3.15 (.32)
conditions required for forgiveness	27.4	6.73	35	28.00	-.27 (.16)	.17 (.32)
relationship satisfaction	28.18	3.71	24	29.00	-1.83 (.16)	4.37 (.32)

Table 2 *Correlation analysis of all variables*

N = 226	EC - I	PT - I	EC - P	PT - P	GH - I	S - I	GH - P	S - P	F	CRF
EC - I	-									
PT - I	.17**									
EC - P	.15*	.07								
PT - P	.07	.21**	.50**							
GH - I	.13	.15*	-.01	-.01						
S - I	-.21**	-.16*	.07	.08	-.32**					
GH - P	.02	-.03	.29**	.29**	.17*	.05				
S - P	-.05	.04	-.34**	-.44**	.07	.23**	-.51**			
B	.06	.22**	.17*	.15*	.09	-.02	.12	-.12		
A	-.05	-.15*	-.26**	-.21**	.00	.02	-.23**	.29**		
R	-.21**	-.21**	-.18**	-.20**	-.06	.24**	-.13	.29**		
F	.12	.23**	.26**	-.22**	.06	-.09	.21**	-.29**		
CRF	.04	-.02	-.11	-.16*	.02	.05	-.19*	.21**	-.27**	
RS	.11	.08	.43**	.47**	.09	-.05	.29**	-.51**	.46**	-.05

Note. EC - I – empathy concern - individual, PT - I – perspective taking - individual, EC - P – empathy concern - partner, PT - P – perspective taking - partner, GH - I – global humility - individual, S - I – superiority - individual, GH - P – global humility - partner, S - P – superiority - partner, F – forgiveness toward partner, CRF – conditions for forgiveness, RS – relationship satisfaction
** p ≤ .01; * p ≤ .05

tions for forgiveness, and relationship satisfaction in dating individuals. As can be seen from Table 2, forgiveness toward one's partner is weakly and positively associated with the individual's perspective-taking and partner's empathy concern and global humility, whereas it was weakly and negatively associated with partner's superiority (*Q-1*). Also, there is a medium positive association between forgiveness tendency toward one's partner and relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is also medium positively related to partner's empathy concern and partner's perspective taking, and weakly positively related to part-

ner's global humility, whereas it is strongly negatively related to partner's superiority. The conditions for forgiving one's partner are negatively related to forgiveness, partner's perspective taking, and positively related to partner's superiority.

Q-2: Does empathy and humility predict forgiveness toward one's partner over and above the level of required conditions for forgiveness?

To examine whether empathy and humility (both individual characteristics and partner's perceived characteristics) explain unique variance in predicting forgiveness toward one's partner (Q-1), we conducted a two hierarchical regression analysis. In the first regression analysis the overall score for forgiveness to-

ward one's partner was the dependent variable. Conditions for forgiveness toward one's partner was entered in Step 1, while empathy and humility (both individual characteristics and partner's perceived characteristics) were entered in Step 2. The results of the regression analysis for dating individuals are presented in Table 3.

As can be seen in Table 3, the first model explained 7.6% of the variance for forgiveness, and conditions required for forgiveness significantly and negatively predicted forgiveness toward one's partner. Adding empathy and humility to the predictors increased the variance explained by the model by 13.8% and this change was statistically significant.

In Step 2, conditions required for forgiveness still significantly and negatively predict-

Table 3 *Hierarchical regression analysis of conditions required for forgiveness (Step 1), individual's and partner's perceived empathy and humility (Step 2) on forgiveness tendency*

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	95% CI	R	R^2	R^2 change	F	F change	Sig. of F change
Step 1						.276	.076	.076	18.49	18.49	< .001
conditions required for forgiveness	-.38	.09	**-.28**	-4.30	[-.55, -.21]						
Step 2						.463	.214	.138	6.54	4.73	< .001
conditions required for forgiveness	-.30	.09	**-.22**	-3.47	[-.47, -.13]						
empathy concern – individual	.16	.18	.06	.89	[-.20, .52]						
perspective taking – individual	.53	.16	**.22**	3.43	[.23, .84]						
empathy concern – partner	.32	.16	**.15***	2.08	[.02, .63]						
perspective taking – partner	-.06	.13	-.04	-.44	[-.32, .21]						
global humility – individual	.076	.16	.03	.49	[-.23, .38]						
superiority - individual	.03	.16	.01	.16	[-.29, .34]						
global humility – partner	.05	.13	.03	.35	[-.21, .30]						
superiority - partner	-.32	.14	**-.20***	-2.38	[-.55, -.05]						

*Note. ** p ≤ .01; * p≤ .05*

ed forgiveness toward one's partner. The individual's perspective taking significantly and positively predicted forgiveness toward one's partner (β = .22), as well as partner's perceived empathy concern (β = .15). Partner's perceived superiority significantly and negatively predicted forgiveness toward one's partner (β = -.20).

Q-3: What conditions do individuals require in order to forgive their partners in romantic relationships?

Based on the results of the CQR-m analysis, the most represented category is *apology* (50%; e.g., P42, Male: *"When she apologizes sincerely"*). It seems that in our sample of young adults the first step to forgiving a partner was the partner's willingness to apologize for the act they had committed.

The second most numerous category is *admitting their mistake* (25%; e.g., P107, Male: *"Admitting a mistake"*). It is therefore important for the individuals who have been harmed in the relationship that the offender not only apologizes, but also admits and realizes their mistake. It is equally important for the partner to *sincerely regret* what they have done (21%; e.g., P16, Female: *"I have to see that he is really sorry"*). Another important condition for forgiving the partner seems to be *communication (*21%; e.g., P118, Male: *"When I see that there is interest in solving the problem and reaching a reconciliation through mutual conversation"*). Participants stressed the need to communicate with their partner about the transgression, to understand why it happened, and what led their partner to hurt them.

In order for some participants to be able to continue in their relationship, they needed their partner to *repair the damage*. This category consists of 15% of statements (e.g., P9, Female: *"I have to see that he is interested in keeping the relationship going and putting en-*

ergy into making amends") and indicates that the partner who was hurt in the relationship needs some kind of compensation from the offender who committed the offense. Most often this was a visible change in their attitude, keeping a promise, or greater interest in the partner.

The category *not repeating the hurt* consisted of 14% of statements (e.g., P76, Female: *"Do not repeat the same mistake"*). These participants stated that in order to be able to forgive their partner, they required their partner not to repeat the offense, so that they knew that their partner had learned from it.

Some participants said it *depended on the particular hurt* (6%; P69, Female: *"I can forgive when it is nothing serious"*) and stated that some transgressions were forgivable, while others were not. It was not just the severity of the hurt that was an issue, the *time since the hurt* mattered as well (3%; P195, Female: *"Sometimes it will take some time for me to deal with it and settle things in my head"*).

Some participants needed *nonverbal proof of love*, such as a hug, a smile from their partner, or sex after the conflict (4%; P60, Female: *"Good sex"*), while some others needed a *gift* (3%; P45; Female: *"To buy me a gift"*).

A few others needed the offender to show *empathy* (6 statements, 3%; P162, Female: *"When he realizes what he did wrong and why I am angry with him"*). These participants stated that it was important for them to know that their partners understood their hurt feelings and thoughts. Only a few participants stated that they would unconditionally forgive their partner (3%; P119, Female: *"He does not have to do anything. I will forgive him immediately"*).

Q-4: Do empathy, humility, and forgiveness toward the partner predict relationship satisfaction in dating individuals?

A multiple regression analysis, ENTER method, was performed to examine how empathy,

Table 4 *Regression analysis of empathy, humility, and forgiveness towards one's partner as predictors of relationship satisfaction*

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI
empathy concern - individual	.04	.06	.03	.63	.527	[-.08, .16]
perspective taking - individual	-.05	.05	-.05	-.86	.392	[-.15, .06]
global humility - individual	.13	.05	**.14**	2.44	.016	[.02, .23]
superiority - individual	.08	.05	.09	1.39	.167	[-.03, .18]
empathy concern - partner	.13	.05	**.15**	2.39	.018	[.02, .23]
perspective taking - partner	.13	.05	**.19**	3.00	.003	[.05, .22]
global humility - partner	-.05	.04	-.07	-1.15	.250	[-.14, .04]
superiority - partner	-.22	.05	**-.35**	-4.78	< .001	[-.31, -.13]
forgiveness toward partner	.121	.02	**.30**	5.51	< .001	[.08, .17]
R^2		.43				
F		20.13				

humility (both as individual characteristics and partner's perceived characteristics), and forgiveness toward the partner predict relationship satisfaction in dating couples. As can be seen in Table 4, the results show that these variables significantly and positively predicted relationship satisfaction in dating couples ($F(9, 216) = 20.13$, $p < .001$). These variables explain 43.4% of the variance in relationship satisfaction in dating couples.

Partner's perceived empathic concern ($β = .15$), partner's perspective taking ($β = .19$), and the individual's global humility ($β = .14$) were found to be significant positive predictors of relationship satisfaction. The strongest negative predictor of relationship satisfaction was partner's superiority ($β = -.35$) and the strongest positive predictor was forgiveness toward one's partner ($β = .30$).

Discussion

The results of the correlational analysis show that individuals' ability to take their partner's perspective into account is positively linked to them forgiving their partner. This is in line with the previous finding of Péloquin and Lafontaine (2010) that those who are able to take their partner's perspective into account are both more likely to forgive the person and are more satisfied with their relationship. Being able to see things from the partner's point of view may be useful in transgression in order to understand their motives, thoughts, and feelings. Surprisingly, empathy concern is not significantly related to forgiving one's partner. This contrasts with previous research findings showing a positive association be-

tween emotional empathy and forgiveness (Fincham et al., 2002; Macaskill et al., 2002). It is possible that our results differ owing to the lower internal consistency of the individual empathy concern subscale in our sample, and the result of translation nuances in the subscale.

In addition to previous studies, we found that not only did the individual's ability to take their partner's perspective into account prove important to forgiveness (Fincham et al., 2002), but so did partner's perceived empathy. The latter has also been linked to higher relationship satisfaction. It seems that if the person feels that their partner understands, for example, why they are angry or sad after the transgression, they are more likely to forgive the transgressor and to feel more satisfied in the relationship.

In our study, one of the research questions was whether empathy and humility can be considered an independent predictor of forgiveness or whether the conditions required for forgiveness play a role. The results of the hierarchical regression analysis are important. First, the conditions required for forgiveness significantly negatively predicted forgiveness toward the partner. This means that individuals who need their partner to accept responsibility for the offense, offer a sincere apology, and undo the damage done are less likely to forgive. This is in line with the work of Exline et al. (2004), who found that conditional forgiveness is related to higher narcissistic tendencies and lower forgiveness. Additionally, in our study, empathy and humility add 13.8% of the explained additional variance. These findings support the theoretical conception of forgiveness in Worthington (1998), who states that in order to forgive one needs both to feel empathy for the perpetrator and to be humble. Being humble may help us see ourselves as imperfect human beings and that way we can more easily accept other people's

imperfections and mistakes (Tangney, 2000; Worthington, 1998).

Interestingly, in our study, it was not individual humility but partner's perceived humility that proved to be a significant predictor of whether they were forgiven. Specifically, perceiving one's partner as superior negatively predicts forgiveness. Therefore, it seems it is easier for us to compassionately respond to our partner's flaws and mistakes if they are more humble. This is similar to the previous finding that partner's perceived humility is linked to higher forgiveness (Goddart et al., 2016; Van Tongeren et al., 2014). Another explanation for this finding may be that our participants found it easier to assess their partner's humility than their own, and that may have influenced the results. It is also possible that a superior partner is less likely to apologize and that provides less motivation for the hurt partner to forgive them.

Apologizing has been shown to be the most important condition for forgiveness. This finding is consistent with previous findings showing that apologizing facilitates forgiveness (Kaleta & Mróz, 2021; Younger et al., 2004). It was not just the apology itself that was important for our participants but also the way the person explained and communicated the hurt. The importance of forgiving communication for relationship satisfaction has also been proved in previous studies (e.g., Sheldon & Antony, 2018). Participants also appreciated the person admitting and regretting the mistake, as well as repairing the damage and trying not to repeat it.

The fourth research question was about whether empathy, humility, and forgiveness predict relationship satisfaction. Of all the variables, forgiveness towards one's partner was the most significant positive predictor of relationship satisfaction and partner's perceived superiority was the most significant negative predictor. This finding is in line with

previous findings showing that forgiving one's partner is essential to relationship satisfaction (e.g., Braithwaite et al., 2011) as it helps to heal interpersonal hurts (Fincham et al., 2002), improve the quality of the interpersonal relationship between the forgiver and the offender (Tsang et al., 2006), and helps partners to resolve conflicts (Fincham et al., 2004). Moreover, it is understandable that feeling inferior to one's partner and that one's partner has a big ego and thinks too highly of themselves is related to lower relationship satisfaction. This, again, may be related to the reduced likelihood of a less humble partner apologizing, but this hypothesis needs testing in future studies.

The results of our study need to be interpreted with caution owing to some limitations. Firstly, the size of our research sample does not allow us to generalize the results to the total young adult population. Secondly, the lower reliability of the individual's empathy concern scale may have influenced the results. Thirdly, the sample size of men was very low in our study. Therefore, future research may replicate this study with a larger sample of men and look to see if there are any gender differences in the pattern of results. Moreover, participants' assessments of their partner's empathy and humility may not be a realistic reflection of their partner's true characteristics. On the other hand, the participants' assessments of their own empathy and humility may have been affected by social desirability. Future studies may therefore benefit from the inclusion of a social desirability measure, and from assessments of both partners in tandem with a measure of actor-partner effects. Also, further research could examine whether humility is more important in explaining the relationship with forgiving oneself rather than forgiving another person, i.e., one's partner. It could be interesting to extend the research to married individuals to see if they require simi-

lar conditions before forgiving their husband/wife. Based on the results of our study, it is clear that forgiveness is an important factor in interpersonal relationships, and could be facilitated through the capacity to take the partner's perspective into account and if the individual perceives their partner to be humble. Future interpersonal forgiveness intervention studies may therefore benefit from facilitating empathy and humility of individuals and their partners.

Acknowledgement

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