

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Predicting romantic relationship satisfaction in young adults: The roles of self-compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness<sup>1</sup>

Mehmet Emin Baki<sup>2</sup>  and Ayşe Sibel Biçer<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>2</sup>Specialist Psychological Counselor; Master's Graduate, Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Antalya, Türkiye.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Psychological Counselling and Guidance, Faculty of Education, Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Antalya, Türkiye.

## Abstract

Romantic relationships significantly influence the well-being of young adults; however, the psychological dimensions underlying relationship satisfaction remain a central topic of scholarly exploration. This study aimed to examine whether self-compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness—as core positive psychological traits—are associated with and predictive of satisfaction in romantic partnerships. The study utilized data from 333 young adults in Turkey (aged 20–40) who completed validated measures of romantic satisfaction, self-compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness. Data analyses included Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression analyses. The findings revealed that while all three traits were positively associated with romantic relationship satisfaction, their individual predictive power was limited. Notably, only forgiveness emerged as a significant predictor in the final regression model. These results highlight the potential relational value of these psychological traits, particularly forgiveness, while also emphasizing the influence of broader psychological and contextual factors. Implications for therapeutic practice and relationship enhancement interventions are discussed.

**Keywords:** Romantic relationship satisfaction, self-compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, positive psychological traits, young adults.

## Introduction

Numerous studies have demonstrated that satisfaction in romantic relationships plays a vital role in promoting psychological well-being, being linked to enhanced life satisfaction and reduced emotional distress (Dush & Amato, 2005; Fincham & Beach, 2013; Whisman, 2007). While many factors influence satisfaction, recent research highlights the role of individual traits. In particular, self-compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness have been identified as key positive psychological

<sup>1</sup>This article is derived from the master's thesis entitled “Examining Romantic Relationship Satisfaction in Young Adults in Terms of Self-Compassion, Gratitude, and Forgiveness Variables” conducted by Mehmet Emin Baki under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ayşe Sibel Biçer. Ethical approval was obtained from Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University Scientific Research Ethics Committee in Social and Human Sciences (Meeting No: 10, Decision No: 12, Decision Date: 11.12.2023; Document Date and Number: 18.12.2023 – 158264).

\*Corresponding Author: [sibel.bicer@alanya.edu.tr](mailto:sibel.bicer@alanya.edu.tr)

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strengths that support healthier, more fulfilling relationships (Emmons & Stern, 2013; Fincham, 2000; Neff & Beretvas, 2013).

Self-compassion, which involves treating oneself with understanding rather than harsh self-judgment during times of difficulty (Neff, 2003a), has been associated with improved emotional balance and healthier relational dynamics. Gratitude enhances intimacy by acknowledging the supportive behaviours of one's partner (Algoe, 2012; Emmons & McCullough, 2003), whereas forgiveness plays a critical role in restoring emotional harmony following interpersonal conflicts (McCullough et al., 1998; Kachadourian et al., 2004). While the individual impact of these traits has been documented, limited research has examined their joint predictive contribution, particularly in cultural settings outside the Western world. Further research is needed to understand how they jointly influence relationship satisfaction across cultures.

### **Self-compassion and romantic relationship satisfaction**

According to Neff (2003a), self-compassion encompasses three core elements: self-kindness, recognition of shared human experience, and mindful awareness. Together, these dimensions contribute to better emotional regulation, decreased emotional reactivity, and more effective coping strategies (Germer & Neff, 2013). An expanding body of research has demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of self-compassion tend to report more positive relational outcomes, including greater intimacy, more secure attachment patterns, and improved conflict resolution skills (Neff & Beretvas, 2013; Jacobson et al., 2018). In dyadic relationships, self-compassion has been associated with both individual and partner satisfaction. Recent findings highlight that both general and relationship-specific self-compassion are positively associated with various dimensions of relationship satisfaction. These effects may extend to one's partner—especially among men—underscoring the importance of dyadic perspectives in understanding relational outcomes (Körner et al., 2024).

Recent research emphasizes the role of self-compassion as a psychological buffer against relational stressors such as conflict, disappointment, and self-perceived inadequacy (Dupasquier et al., 2020; Germer & Neff, 2013; Zessin et al., 2015). Self-compassion fosters personal growth from regretful experiences by promoting greater acceptance and forgiveness (Zhang & Chen, 2016). A growing body of research, including findings from both international and Turkish samples, highlights a consistent positive link between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction (Çoban, 2021; Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Self-compassion also benefits relationships, especially for women; for men, its effect depends on their motivation to improve, such as conscientiousness (Baker & McNulty, 2011). Self-compassion promotes compromise over self-subordination in conflicts, leading to greater authenticity, less emotional turmoil, and higher relational well-being (Yarnell & Neff, 2013).

### **Gratitude and romantic relationship satisfaction**

Gratitude, a key construct in positive psychology, involves recognizing and appreciating others' positive actions (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Gratitude is associated with well-being, prosocial behaviour, and stronger social bonds, functioning as a relational emotion that fosters connection through appreciation and reciprocity (Algoe, 2012; McCullough et al., 2001). It also helps individuals cultivate a sense of meaning and harmony in life, supporting personal growth and the elevation of others (Bono & Sender, 2018).

In romantic relationships, gratitude has been associated with increased emotional closeness, commitment, and partner responsiveness (Gordon et al., 2012; Lambert & Fincham, 2011). According to Algor's "Find-Remind-and-Bind" theory (2012), gratitude enhances relational quality by strengthening emotional ties and promoting mutual recognition. Empirical studies show that expressions of gratitude support relationship maintenance behaviours and foster reciprocal appreciation (Kubacka et al., 2011). Gratitude has the potential to be a powerful healing tool in therapy, promoting mental well-being and relational growth when intentionally cultivated through structured practices (Emmons & Stern, 2013). In Demirtaş's (2019) study, gratitude emerged as a significant mediator between secure attachment and mental well-being, alongside hope and ego-resiliency, explaining a substantial portion of psychological well-being among undergraduates. Overall, gratitude fosters mutual investment, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping, thereby enhancing satisfaction and relationship longevity (Algor et al., 2010).

### **Forgiveness and romantic relationship satisfaction**

Forgiveness is defined as a process in which the victim undergoes a prosocial motivational change following a transgression—reducing the desire for avoidance or revenge and increasing benevolent motivations toward the transgressor or the relationship. Unlike pardon, excusing, or reconciliation, forgiveness is conceptualized not as a behaviour but as a shift in internal motivation (McCullough et al., 2001). Forgiveness is not only a deliberate choice but also shaped by unconscious processes, and even minor variations in forgiveness can significantly influence individual well-being and relational dynamics (Karremans & Van Lange, 2008).

Forgiveness is positively associated with cognitive interdependence, reflected in greater self-partner overlap and increased use of "we" language in relationship narratives, even beyond the effects of commitment and mood (Karremans & Van Lange, 2007). In romantic relationships, forgiveness is closely linked to relational commitment, as individuals who are more committed are more likely to adopt prorelationship motivations that facilitate forgiveness following transgressions (Finkel et al., 2002). Forgiveness enhances relationship satisfaction by increasing relational effort and reducing negative conflict, suggesting that its effects operate through both motivational engagement and conflict regulation processes (Braithwaite et al., 2011). In a study conducted by Kachadourian, Fincham, and Davila (2004), the tendency to forgive was found to partially mediate the relationship between attachment models and romantic relationship satisfaction in both dating and married couples. Moreover, recent dyadic research highlights that self-forgiveness not only enhances offenders' own relationship satisfaction but also plays a critical role in the partner's satisfaction, particularly through the reduction of self-directed negative emotions—emphasizing its mutual relational impact (Pelucchi et al., 2013).

### **Purpose of the research**

Emerging adulthood represents a distinct developmental period marked by identity exploration, shifting life goals, and evolving approaches to romantic relationships. Traditional models of intimacy and commitment often fall short in explaining the fluid and complex nature of romantic experiences during this stage (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Many young adults delay formal commitments and instead engage in more flexible relationship patterns while simultaneously navigating career and personal development. In this transitional context, understanding the psychological resources that support relationship satisfaction becomes increasingly relevant. By examining self-compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness—three positive psychological traits—this

study contributes to a deeper understanding of how emerging adults sustain emotional connection and relational well-being, even in the absence of long-term commitment.

## Method

This section outlines the research design, characteristics of the study group, procedures for data collection, and methods of data analysis.

### Design

In this study, a correlational research design—classified under quantitative research methods—was employed, as the primary aim was to examine the relationships among the variables of interest (Fraenkel et al., 1993). Romantic relationship satisfaction was designated as the outcome variable, whereas self-compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness were identified as the predictor variables.

### Participants

The participants consisted of 333 young adults aged between 20 and 40 who reported being in a romantic relationship and participated voluntarily. Of the participants, 59.5% were women and 40.5% were men. The participants' mean age was 26.42 years ( $SD = 5.12$ ), representing the early to mid-stages of young adulthood. Regarding relationship type, 67% were dating, 6.9% were engaged, and 26.1% were married. In terms of relationship duration, 31.8% reported being in a relationship for less than one year, 38.2 % between one and three years, and 30% for more than three years. With respect to educational background, 79.9% of the participants held a bachelor's degree, 16.5% had completed a postgraduate program, and 7.8 % had a high school diploma.

**Table 1** Participants' profiles and demographic characteristics

|                        | Category                | f   | %    |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-----|------|
| Age                    | 20-24 years             | 159 | 47,7 |
|                        | 25-29 years             | 94  | 28,2 |
|                        | 30-34 years             | 47  | 14,1 |
|                        | 35-40 years             | 33  | 9,9  |
| Gender                 | Female                  | 198 | 59,5 |
|                        | Male                    | 135 | 40,5 |
| Educational Background | High school             | 12  | 7,8  |
|                        | Undergraduate           | 266 | 79,9 |
|                        | Graduate / Postgraduate | 55  | 16,5 |
| Relationship Type      | Dating / Flirtation     | 223 | 67,0 |
|                        | Engagement              | 23  | 6,9  |
|                        | Married                 | 87  | 26,1 |
| Relationship Duration  | Less than 1 year        | 106 | 31,8 |
|                        | 1-3 years               | 127 | 38,2 |
|                        | More than 3 years       | 100 | 30,0 |

### Procedure

Data were collected via an online questionnaire prepared using Google Forms, which included demographic items and the study instruments. Participants aged 20 to 40 were recruited through convenience sampling and were informed about the study's purpose and confidentiality assurances.

### Measures

Demographic Information Form. The researchers developed the form to collect data on

participants' background characteristics. The form included items regarding gender, age, educational attainment, relationship status (e.g., dating, engaged, married), and relationship duration (e.g., less than one year, one to three years, more than three years).

**The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS).** The scale was developed by Hendrick (1988) to assess individuals' satisfaction in romantic relationships. It consists of 7 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction. Hendrick (1988) performed principal component analysis and found a unidimensional structure, with one factor explaining 46% of the variance. Item-total correlations ranged from .57 to .76. The scale also demonstrated good convergent validity with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), with correlations ranging from .80 to .84. The internal consistency reliability was reported as .86. The Turkish adaptation was conducted by Curun (2001), confirming the unidimensional structure and yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .86. In the current study, the scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

**Self-Compassion Scale.** The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) was initially developed by Neff (2003) to assess individuals' levels of self-kindness, mindfulness, and shared humanity. The original version comprises 26 items grouped under six subscales and is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Almost Never) to 5 (Almost Always). The internal consistency of the original scale was high ( $\alpha = .92$ ), with subscale alphas ranging between .78 and .81. Test-retest reliability was reported as .83 (Neff, 2003b). In the Turkish adaptation by Deniz et al. (2008), exploratory factor analysis revealed a five-factor structure, explaining 54.5% of the total variance ( $KMO = .916$ ; Bartlett's  $\chi^2 = 3321.568$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Confirmatory factor analysis indicated poor model fit (e.g.,  $RMSEA = .123$ ;  $GFI = .692$ ). After removing two items with low item-total correlations ( $< .30$ ), a 24-item version was retained. In the present study, the internal consistency of the scale was excellent (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ).

**The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6).** The scale developed by McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) assesses the intensity, frequency, and depth of gratitude as a dispositional trait. The Turkish adaptation by Göcen (2012) includes six items rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Exploratory factor analysis revealed a two-factor structure—Internal Gratitude (items 1, 2, 3) and External Gratitude (items 4, 5, 6)—explaining 63.38% of the total variance. Factor loadings ranged from .588 to .875, and subscale-total correlations ranged from .83 to .85. In the present study, the internal consistency of the scale was acceptable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .672$ ).

**Heartland Forgiveness Scale.** The scale was developed by Berry et al. (2005) to assess individuals' dispositional tendencies to forgive. The Turkish adaptation, including reliability and validity analyses, was conducted by Sarıçam and Akin (2013). The scale consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher total scores indicate a greater tendency to forgive, with possible scores ranging from 10 to 50. Psychometric evaluation of the Turkish version indicated acceptable construct validity and internal consistency. Exploratory factor analysis revealed factor loadings between .52 and .77. The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was reported as .67. Criterion-related validity analyses demonstrated a strong positive correlation with the Heartland Forgiveness Scale ( $r = .84$ ) and a moderate positive correlation with the Humility Scale ( $r = .52$ ). Test-retest reliability was reported as .88, and item-total correlation coefficients ranged from .37 to .48 (Sarıçam & Akin, 2013). In the current study, the scale showed acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .71.

## Data analysis

After reverse-coded items were adjusted, outliers ( $\pm 3$  z-scores) were removed, yielding a final sample of 333 participants. Descriptive statistics indicated normal distribution, with skewness and kurtosis values within  $\pm 1$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Pearson correlations examined associations among variables, while simple and multiple regression analyses tested the predictive roles of self-compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University (Approval Date: 22.12.2023; No: 159349).

## Findings

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the central tendencies and bivariate associations among the variables (Table 2).

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables

| Variables                    | M     | SD    | Kurt. | Skew. | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4   |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-----|
| 1. Relationship Satisfaction | 40.72 | 6.04  | -0.15 | -0.80 | ---    |        |        |     |
| 2. Self-Compassion           | 77.09 | 15.84 | -0.42 | -0.26 | .146** | ---    |        |     |
| 3. Gratitude                 | 32.70 | 5.15  | -0.33 | -0.46 | .128** | .331** | ---    |     |
| 4. Forgiveness               | 29.18 | 5.99  | -0.33 | -0.11 | .151** | .189** | .288** | --- |

Note. N = 333. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Skew = Skewness; Kurt = Kurtosis; \*\*p < .01.

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the associations among the main study variables. As presented in Table 2, romantic relationship satisfaction was positively but weakly correlated with self-compassion ( $r = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ), gratitude ( $r = .13$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and forgiveness ( $r = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Additionally, self-compassion was moderately associated with gratitude ( $r = .33$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and weakly with forgiveness ( $r = .19$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In contrast, gratitude and forgiveness were moderately correlated ( $r = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These results indicate modest yet statistically significant associations among all variables.

**Table 3** Simple linear regression analysis predicting relationship satisfaction from self-compassion

| Predictor       | B      | SE    | $\beta$ | t     | R <sup>2</sup> | F     | p    |
|-----------------|--------|-------|---------|-------|----------------|-------|------|
| Self-Compassion | 36.445 | 1.631 | .146    | 2.677 | .021           | 7.168 | .008 |

Note. N = 333. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient; R<sup>2</sup> = explained variance. \*p < .01

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether self-compassion predicted romantic relationship satisfaction. The results indicated that self-compassion was a significant predictor,  $F(1, 331) = 7.17$ ,  $p = .008$ . The model accounted for 2.1% of the variance in relationship satisfaction ( $R^2 = .021$ ). The standardized beta coefficient was  $\beta = .146$ , indicating a weak but statistically significant positive effect.

**Table 4** Simple linear regression analysis predicting romantic relationship satisfaction from gratitude

| Predictor | B      | SE    | $\beta$ | t     | R <sup>2</sup> | F     | p    |
|-----------|--------|-------|---------|-------|----------------|-------|------|
| Gratitude | 35.819 | 2.115 | .128    | 2.347 | 0.16           | 5.510 | .019 |

Note. N = 333. B = unstandardized coefficient;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient; R<sup>2</sup> = explained variance. \*\*p < .01.

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether gratitude predicted romantic relationship satisfaction. The results showed that gratitude significantly predicted relationship satisfaction,  $F(1, 331) = 5.51$ ,  $p = .019$ . The model explained 1.6% of the variance in

relationship satisfaction ( $R^2 = .016$ ). The standardized beta coefficient was  $\beta = .128$ , indicating a weak but statistically significant positive association.

**Table 5** Simple linear regression analysis predicting romantic relationship satisfaction from forgiveness

| Predictor   | B      | SE    | $\beta$ | t     | R <sup>2</sup> | F     | p    |
|-------------|--------|-------|---------|-------|----------------|-------|------|
| Forgiveness | 36.288 | 1.632 | .151    | 2.775 | .023           | 7.702 | .006 |

Note. N = 333. B = unstandardized coefficient;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient;  $R^2$  = explained variance. \*\*p < .01.

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether forgiveness predicted romantic relationship satisfaction. The results indicated that forgiveness significantly predicted relationship satisfaction,  $F(1, 331) = 7.70$ ,  $p = .006$ . The model explained 2.3% of the variance in relationship satisfaction ( $R^2 = .023$ ). The standardized beta coefficient was  $\beta = .151$ , indicating a weak but statistically significant positive association.

**Table 6** Multiple regression analysis of self-compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness as predictors of romantic relationship satisfaction

| Model                        | Predictors      | B     | SE    | $\beta$ | t     | R <sup>2</sup> | p    |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------|---------|-------|----------------|------|
| 1. Relationship Satisfaction | Gratitude       | 0.150 | 0.064 | .128    | 2.347 | .016           | 0.19 |
| 2. Relationship Satisfaction | Gratitude       | 0.105 | 0.067 | .090    | 1.558 | .028           | .120 |
|                              | Self-Compassion | 0.044 | 0.022 | .116    | 2.016 |                | .045 |
| 3. Relationship Satisfaction | Gratitude       | 0.071 | 0.069 | .061    | 1.030 | .040           | .304 |
|                              | Self-Compassion | 0.040 | 0.022 | .104    | 1.806 |                | .072 |
|                              | Forgiveness     | 0.114 | 0.057 | .114    | 2.003 |                | .046 |

Note. N = 333. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient;  $R^2$  = explained variance;  $\Delta R^2$  = change in explained variance. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01. Model 1 Summary:  $R = .128$ ,  $R^2 = .016$ ,  $F = 5.510$ ,  $p = .019$ ; Model 2 Summary:  $R = .168$ ,  $R^2 = .028$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .012$ ,  $F = 4.813$ ,  $p = .009$ ; Model 3 Summary:  $R = .200$ ,  $R^2 = .040$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .012$ ,  $F = 4.575$ ,  $p = .004$ .

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive roles of gratitude, self-compassion, and forgiveness on romantic relationship satisfaction among young adults. In Model 1, gratitude alone significantly predicted relationship satisfaction,  $F(1, 331) = 5.510$ ,  $p = .019$ , accounting for 1.6% of the variance ( $R^2 = .016$ ). In Model 2, self-compassion was added to the model, leading to a significant increase in explained variance,  $\Delta R^2 = .012$ ,  $F(2, 330) = 4.813$ ,  $p = .009$ . In this step, self-compassion significantly predicted relationship satisfaction ( $\beta = .116$ ,  $p = .045$ ), while gratitude was no longer a significant predictor ( $\beta = .090$ ,  $p = .120$ ). In the final model (Model 3), forgiveness was included alongside gratitude and self-compassion. The model remained statistically significant,  $F(3, 329) = 4.575$ ,  $p = .004$ , explaining 4.0% of the total variance ( $R^2 = .040$ ). Among the three predictors, only forgiveness significantly predicted romantic relationship satisfaction ( $\beta = .114$ ,  $p = .046$ ). Self-compassion ( $\beta = .104$ ,  $p = .072$ ) and gratitude ( $\beta = .061$ ,  $p = .304$ ) did not significantly contribute to the final model. These results suggest that, while each variable shows some association individually, forgiveness emerges as the most consistent and unique predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction when all variables are considered together.

## Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between self-compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, and romantic relationship satisfaction among young adults. Consistent with previous research, all three traits were significantly and positively associated with relationship satisfaction at the bivariate level (Algoe, 2012; Fincham et al., 2006; Neff & Beretvas, 2013). However, when examined together in a multiple regression model, only forgiveness emerged as a unique predictor, highlighting its potential role as a core relational strength during young adulthood.

Findings confirmed that self-compassion was positively associated with romantic relationship satisfaction. Consistent with previous findings, self-compassion appears to promote emotional regulation by reducing self-criticism and increasing emotional balance, enhancing emotional resilience and relational satisfaction (Germer & Neff, 2019), and supporting intimacy and secure attachment (Pepping et al., 2015).

Gratitude was positively associated with romantic relationship satisfaction; however, its predictive power appeared relatively modest. Nevertheless, this finding is supported by dyadic research indicating that gratitude benefits not only the expresser but also strengthens the relational bond from the recipient's perspective. Specifically, feeling seen and understood during a gratitude exchange has been shown to predict long-term relational growth (Algoe et al., 2013).

In this study, forgiveness emerged as the sole significant predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction, highlighting its distinct role among the variables examined. This finding supports the view of forgiveness as a prosocial motivational shift that reduces avoidance and hostility while promoting relational repair (McCullough et al., 2001). Beyond emotional regulation, forgiveness is associated with stronger cognitive interdependence and a greater use of "we-language" in couple narratives (Karremans & Van Lange, 2007). It is also closely linked to relational commitment, which facilitates forgiveness in the aftermath of transgressions (Finkel et al., 2002). By enhancing relational effort and minimizing conflict, forgiveness contributes to greater satisfaction (Braithwaite et al., 2011). Furthermore, its mediating role between attachment models and satisfaction (Kachadourian et al., 2004), and its reciprocal effects on both partners' well-being (Pelucchi et al., 2013), reinforce its central importance in maintaining relational quality.

Importantly, forgiveness retained its predictive power even when self-compassion and gratitude were accounted for. This suggests that while the latter two support general relational well-being, forgiveness may uniquely target conflict resolution and dyadic repair. The unique predictive power of forgiveness in the present study may also reflect its broader role in emotional well-being, as previous research has shown that forgiveness significantly contributes to lower negative affect beyond traditional happiness orientations (Chan, 2013). This suggests that forgiveness not only facilitates relational satisfaction but also promotes emotional balance, particularly in interpersonal contexts.

The positive associations between self-compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness with romantic relationship satisfaction observed in this study, align with the growing body of literature emphasizing the role of intrapersonal strengths in relational well-being. Self-compassion supports emotional regulation and reduces self-critical tendencies, enabling individuals to approach relational challenges with greater empathy and resilience (Neff, 2003). Gratitude fosters mutual appreciation and recognition within romantic partnerships, which in turn enhances emotional closeness and satisfaction (Algoe, 2012). Forgiveness, as a prosocial motivational shift, facilitates relational repair and continuity by reducing avoidance and retaliation following interpersonal transgressions (Finkel et al., 2002; McCullough et al., 1997). In sum, these findings suggest that positive psychological traits not only contribute to individual well-being but also serve as key protective and promotive factors in maintaining satisfying romantic relationships.

## Limitations and future directions

Several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference. Second, the reliance on self-report data may introduce potential bias, as individual differences in attachment style and overall relationship quality can shape subjective evaluations of relational interactions (Collins & Feeney, 2000). Third, the reliability coefficients of some scales used in the study, while within the acceptable range reported in the literature, were below the threshold of 0.70. This may be due to measurement errors or characteristics of the sample and should therefore be considered a limitation of the present study. Future studies may benefit from incorporating behavioural observations or dyadic data to capture interaction dynamics more objectively. For example, Baker and McNulty (2011) showed that the relational benefits of self-compassion depend on individual differences in conscientiousness and gender, suggesting that personality may moderate these associations. Young adulthood, characterized by developmental flux and shifting commitments (Arnett, 2000), may also dilute the impact of stable intrapersonal traits on relationship outcomes. Finally, the findings should be interpreted within the cultural context in which the study was conducted. Cultural values may shape how self-compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness are expressed in romantic relationships, and future studies should investigate these associations across different cultural settings.

Future research should adopt longitudinal and dyadic designs to examine how these traits interact over time within couples. Exploring mediators such as emotional intimacy or partner responsiveness, and moderators such as attachment styles or cultural values, may further clarify how positive psychological traits contribute to long-term relational well-being. Taken together, these limitations highlight the need for more nuanced and methodologically diverse approaches, which may guide future research toward a deeper understanding of relational dynamics.

## Conclusion

The findings offer valuable implications for research and practice. Interventions aiming to enhance relationship quality in young adults may benefit from prioritizing forgiveness-based approaches that foster emotional awareness and self-regulation skills. Enhancing self-compassion and gratitude may indirectly improve relational functioning by promoting conflict de-escalation.

## Statement of researchers

### Researchers' contribution rate statement

This article is derived from the master's thesis entitled "Examining Romantic Relationship Satisfaction in Young Adults in Terms of Self-Compassion, Gratitude, and Forgiveness Variables" conducted by Mehmet Emin Baki under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ayşe Sibel Biçer. Ethical approval was obtained from Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University Scientific Research Ethics Committee in Social and Human Sciences (Meeting No: 10, Decision No: 12, Decision Date: 11.12.2023; Document Date and Number: 18.12.2023 – 158264). The study was reviewed in accordance with intellectual property, legal, and methodological standards and deemed ethically appropriate for implementation.

### Conflict statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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