

# Exploring the Dynamics of Relationship Forgiveness: The Roles of Jealousy and Metacognitive Beliefs

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the roles of relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs in predicting relationship forgiveness among individuals in romantic relationships. A cross-sectional design was employed, involving 278 participants recruited through convenience sampling. Participants completed self-report measures including the Relationship Forgiveness Scale, the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale, and the Metacognitions Questionnaire-30. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationships between the dependent variable (relationship forgiveness) and the independent variables (relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs). A linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of jealousy and metacognitive beliefs on forgiveness. Descriptive statistics revealed mean scores of 3.52 (SD = 0.84) for relationship forgiveness, 2.78 (SD = 0.93) for relationship jealousy, and 3.14 (SD = 0.76) for metacognitive beliefs. Correlation analysis showed a significant negative relationship between relationship forgiveness and jealousy ( $r = -0.42, p < .001$ ) and a significant positive relationship between forgiveness and metacognitive beliefs ( $r = 0.36, p < .001$ ). The regression model indicated that jealousy and metacognitive beliefs significantly predicted relationship forgiveness, accounting for 27% of the variance ( $F(2, 275) = 50.64, p < .001$ ). The study concludes that higher levels of relationship jealousy are associated with lower levels of forgiveness, while adaptive metacognitive beliefs are linked to greater forgiveness. These findings highlight the importance of addressing both emotional and cognitive factors in promoting forgiveness and enhancing relationship satisfaction. Future research should explore these relationships longitudinally and consider cultural influences. Interventions targeting jealousy reduction and cognitive restructuring may be beneficial in fostering forgiveness in romantic relationships.

**Keywords:** Relationship forgiveness, relationship jealousy, metacognitive beliefs, romantic relationships, emotional regulation, cognitive processes.

## 1. Introduction

Forgiveness is a multifaceted construct that involves a conscious decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge towards someone who has caused harm (Rijavec et al., 2013). It is considered essential for restoring relational harmony and promoting emotional well-being. Previous studies have demonstrated that forgiveness in intimate relationships is associated with various positive outcomes, including improved mental health, greater relationship satisfaction, and enhanced overall well-being (Liao & Wei, 2015; Sandage & Jankowski, 2010). However, the process of forgiveness is not without its challenges. Factors such as the severity of the transgression, the perceived remorse of the offender, and the presence of forgiveness-related beliefs can influence an individual's willingness to forgive (Friesen et al., 2005).

Forgiveness is also influenced by cultural and contextual factors. For instance, Paleari, Regalia, and Fincham (2011) found that inequity in forgiveness—where one partner forgives more readily than the other—can lead to negative outcomes such as decreased personal and relational well-being (Paleari et al., 2011). Moreover, Sharma and Prasad (2022) highlighted the role of forgiveness in workplace settings, emphasizing its potential to mitigate the adverse effects of psychological contract violations on organizational well-being (Sharma & Prasad, 2022).

Relationship jealousy is another significant factor that can impact forgiveness in romantic relationships. Jealousy, defined as a complex emotional response to a perceived threat to a valued relationship, often involves feelings of insecurity, fear, and anger (Attridge, 2013). The intensity and frequency of jealousy can vary, and it can have both adaptive and maladaptive effects on relationships. While mild jealousy might enhance relationship closeness and commitment, excessive jealousy can lead to conflict, distrust, and decreased relationship satisfaction (Wieselquist, 2009).

Attridge (2013) explored the relationship between jealousy and relationship closeness, finding that higher levels of jealousy were associated with lower levels of perceived closeness and trust (Attridge, 2013). Fisher et al. (2008) examined sex differences in jealousy and guilt arising from infidelity, highlighting that women tend to experience more guilt and are more likely to forgive emotional infidelity, while men are more likely to forgive sexual infidelity. These findings suggest that jealousy can significantly impact the forgiveness process, influencing

both the likelihood and the manner in which individuals forgive their partners (Fisher et al., 2008).

Metacognitive beliefs, which refer to beliefs about one's own thinking processes, have gained attention in recent psychological research due to their significant impact on emotional regulation and mental health (Capobianco et al., 2020). These beliefs can be positive or negative; positive metacognitive beliefs involve the perception that worrying or ruminating is useful, while negative metacognitive beliefs involve concerns about the uncontrollability and danger of thoughts (Huntley & Fisher, 2016).

Research has shown that metacognitive beliefs are closely linked to various psychological disorders, including anxiety and depression (Debbané et al., 2012; Dodd et al., 2021). For instance, Aadahl et al. (2021) conducted an experience sampling study and found that maladaptive metacognitive beliefs were significantly associated with suicidal ideation (Aadahl et al., 2021). Similarly, Luo et al. (2022) demonstrated that negative metacognitive beliefs mediated the relationship between alexithymia and internet addiction among college students (Luo et al., 2022).

Metacognitive beliefs also play a crucial role in how individuals process and respond to relational conflicts. According to Capobianco et al. (2020), individuals with maladaptive metacognitive beliefs are more likely to engage in negative thought patterns and less likely to employ adaptive coping strategies, which can hinder their ability to forgive. Conversely, those with adaptive metacognitive beliefs are better equipped to manage their emotional responses and may find it easier to forgive their partners (Pycroft & Bartollas, 2018).

Jealousy can trigger negative thought patterns and emotional responses, which may be further exacerbated by maladaptive metacognitive beliefs. For example, an individual with high jealousy and negative metacognitive beliefs may find it challenging to forgive their partner due to persistent rumination and fears about future betrayals (Luchies et al., 2010). Conversely, individuals with positive metacognitive beliefs may be better equipped to manage jealousy and facilitate forgiveness. By recognizing and challenging unhelpful thoughts, these individuals can reduce the emotional impact of jealousy and adopt a more forgiving attitude (Cristea, 2023). This adaptive approach can enhance relationship satisfaction and overall well-being, as suggested by studies on the benefits of forgiveness (Sandage & Jankowski, 2010).

Furthermore, the dynamic nature of intimate relationships means that forgiveness, jealousy, and metacognitive beliefs

can influence each other over time. For instance, repeated instances of forgiveness can strengthen relationship trust and reduce jealousy, while persistent jealousy can erode trust and make forgiveness more difficult (Wieselquist, 2009). Similarly, cultivating positive metacognitive beliefs can foster emotional resilience and facilitate more effective conflict resolution, promoting a healthier relational environment (Huntley & Fisher, 2016).

Given the significant impact of relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs on forgiveness, this study aims to explore these relationships in greater depth. Specifically, the study will investigate the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between relationship jealousy and relationship forgiveness?
- What is the relationship between metacognitive beliefs and relationship forgiveness?
- To what extent do relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs predict relationship forgiveness?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence forgiveness in romantic relationships. The findings will have important implications for therapeutic interventions aimed at promoting forgiveness and enhancing relationship quality.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a cross-sectional design to examine the relationships between relationship forgiveness, relationship jealousy, and metacognitive beliefs. A total of 278 participants were recruited for the study, a sample size determined based on the Morgan and Krejcie table for ensuring adequate statistical power. Participants were selected through convenience sampling from various social settings, including universities, workplaces, and community centers. Inclusion criteria required participants to be in a romantic relationship for at least six months and aged 18 years or older. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Relationship Forgiveness

The Relationship Forgiveness Scale (RFS), developed by Dr. Scott McCullough and his colleagues in 1998, is used to assess the tendency to forgive a partner in a romantic relationship. The scale consists of 18 items divided into three

subscales: Positive Forgiveness (measuring positive feelings towards the partner), Negative Forgiveness (measuring negative feelings that may still linger), and Behavioral Forgiveness (measuring forgiving actions). Participants respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a greater propensity for forgiveness. The RFS has demonstrated strong reliability and validity in various studies, making it a robust tool for measuring relationship forgiveness (Friesen et al., 2005; Liao & Wei, 2015; Palerai et al., 2011; Pycroft & Bartollas, 2018; Rijavec et al., 2013; Sandage & Jankowski, 2010; Sharma & Prasad, 2022; Wieselquist, 2009).

#### 2.2.2. Relationship Jealousy

The Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS), created by Dr. Paul Sabini and Dr. Paula Green in 2004, evaluates jealousy in romantic relationships. This scale includes 24 items divided into three subscales: Cognitive Jealousy (thoughts about a partner's potential infidelity), Emotional Jealousy (emotional responses to jealousy-evoking situations), and Behavioral Jealousy (behaviors resulting from jealousy). Participants rate their agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). Higher scores reflect higher levels of jealousy. The MJS has been validated and found reliable across different cultural contexts, confirming its efficacy in measuring relationship jealousy (Attridge, 2013; Pichon et al., 2020).

#### 2.2.3. Metacognitive Beliefs

The Metacognitions Questionnaire-30 (MCQ-30), devised by Dr. Adrian Wells and Dr. Peter Cartwright in 2004, is a comprehensive tool for assessing metacognitive beliefs, which are beliefs about one's own thinking processes. This questionnaire comprises 30 items distributed across five subscales: Positive Beliefs about Worry, Negative Beliefs about Uncontrollability and Danger, Cognitive Confidence, Need to Control Thoughts, and Cognitive Self-Consciousness. Responses are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (do not agree) to 4 (agree very much). Higher scores suggest stronger metacognitive beliefs. The MCQ-30 has consistently shown high reliability and validity in numerous studies, establishing its utility in research on cognitive processes (Aadahl et al., 2021; Capobianco et al., 2020; Cristea, 2023; Debbané et al., 2012; Dodd et al., 2021; Huntley & Fisher, 2016; Luo et al., 2022).

### 2.3. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS-27 software. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and the main variables of interest. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between the dependent variable (relationship forgiveness) and each independent variable (relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs). Subsequently, linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the predictive power of relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs on relationship forgiveness. In this analysis, relationship forgiveness served as the dependent variable, while relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs were the independent variables. Statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$  for all analyses. The reliability of the scales used was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, ensuring the internal consistency of the measures.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables*

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Relationship Forgiveness	3.52	0.84
Relationship Jealousy	2.78	0.93
Metacognitive Beliefs	3.14	0.76

Participants had an average score of 3.52 (SD = 0.84) on the Relationship Forgiveness Scale, indicating a moderate level of forgiveness towards their partners. The average score for Relationship Jealousy was 2.78 (SD = 0.93), suggesting a relatively low to moderate level of jealousy among participants. Metacognitive Beliefs had a mean score of 3.14 (SD = 0.76), reflecting moderately adaptive metacognitive thinking patterns.

Assumptions for the Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses were thoroughly checked and confirmed. For the Pearson correlation, the linearity assumption was verified through scatterplots, which demonstrated linear relationships between relationship forgiveness and each independent variable (relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs). Normality of the variables was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, with results indicating non-significant p-values (relationship

### 3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized as follows. The sample comprised 278 participants, of which 145 (52.16%) were female and 133 (47.84%) were male. The age distribution was as follows: 82 participants (29.50%) were aged 18-25 years, 114 participants (41.01%) were aged 26-35 years, 57 participants (20.50%) were aged 36-45 years, and 25 participants (9.00%) were aged 46 years and older. Regarding relationship duration, 103 participants (37.05%) had been in their relationship for 6 months to 1 year, 89 participants (32.01%) for 1 to 3 years, 54 participants (19.42%) for 3 to 5 years, and 32 participants (11.51%) for more than 5 years.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the main variables in the study, including relationship forgiveness, relationship jealousy, and metacognitive beliefs.

forgiveness:  $p = 0.243$ , relationship jealousy:  $p = 0.318$ , metacognitive beliefs:  $p = 0.107$ ), suggesting that the data were normally distributed. For the linear regression, homoscedasticity was examined through the inspection of residual plots, which indicated no patterns suggesting heteroscedasticity. Additionally, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for relationship jealousy (VIF = 1.22) and metacognitive beliefs (VIF = 1.19) were below the threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity issues. These results confirm that the data meet the necessary assumptions for conducting Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses.

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients and p-values for the relationships between relationship forgiveness and the independent variables: relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs.

**Table 2**

*Correlation between Relationship Forgiveness and Independent Variables*

Variable	Relationship Forgiveness	p-value
Relationship Jealousy	-0.42	< .001
Metacognitive Beliefs	0.36	< .001

The results indicate a significant negative correlation between relationship forgiveness and relationship jealousy ( $r = -0.42, p < .001$ ), suggesting that higher levels of jealousy are associated with lower levels of forgiveness. There is also a significant positive correlation between relationship forgiveness and metacognitive beliefs ( $r = 0.36, p < .001$ ),

indicating that more adaptive metacognitive beliefs are associated with higher levels of forgiveness.

Table 3 summarizes the regression analysis results, including the sum of squares, degrees of freedom, mean squares, R, R<sup>2</sup>, adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, F-value, and p-value.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Regression Analysis*

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	p
Regression	58.34	2	29.17	0.52	0.27	0.26	50.64	<.001
Residual	159.15	275	0.58					
Total	217.49	277						

The regression analysis reveals that the model, which includes relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs, significantly predicts relationship forgiveness ( $F(2, 275) = 50.64, p < .001$ ). The model explains 27% of the variance in relationship forgiveness ( $R^2 = 0.27$ ), with an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.26.

Table 4 provides the detailed results of the multivariate regression analysis, including the unstandardized coefficients (B), standard errors, standardized coefficients ( $\beta$ ), t-values, and p-values for each predictor variable.

**Table 4**

*Results of Multivariate Regression Analysis*

Variable	B	Standard Error	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	2.36	0.27		8.74	<.001
Relationship Jealousy	-0.29	0.06	-0.35	-4.83	<.001
Metacognitive Beliefs	0.34	0.07	0.32	4.57	<.001

The regression coefficients indicate that relationship jealousy ( $B = -0.29, SE = 0.06, \beta = -0.35, t = -4.83, p < .001$ ) is a significant negative predictor of relationship forgiveness. Metacognitive beliefs ( $B = 0.34, SE = 0.07, \beta = 0.32, t = 4.57, p < .001$ ) are a significant positive predictor of relationship forgiveness. This suggests that lower levels of jealousy and higher levels of adaptive metacognitive beliefs are associated with greater levels of forgiveness in romantic relationships.

metacognitive beliefs in romantic relationships. The findings revealed significant correlations between these variables. Specifically, relationship jealousy was negatively correlated with relationship forgiveness, while metacognitive beliefs were positively correlated with relationship forgiveness. The regression analysis further demonstrated that both relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs significantly predicted relationship forgiveness, explaining 27% of the variance.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between relationship forgiveness, relationship jealousy, and

These results indicate that individuals who experience higher levels of jealousy in their relationships tend to have lower levels of forgiveness towards their partners. Conversely, those with more adaptive metacognitive beliefs are more likely to forgive their partners, highlighting the

importance of cognitive processes in emotional regulation and conflict resolution.

The negative correlation between relationship jealousy and forgiveness aligns with previous research. Attridge (2013) noted that jealousy often involves feelings of insecurity and fear of losing the partner, which can lead to increased conflict and decreased trust (Attridge, 2013). These negative emotions and cognitions can hinder the forgiveness process, as individuals may find it difficult to let go of their resentment and thoughts of revenge. Fisher et al. (2008) also highlighted that jealousy can exacerbate feelings of betrayal and hurt, making it harder for individuals to forgive infidelity or other transgressions (Fisher et al., 2008).

The positive correlation between metacognitive beliefs and forgiveness supports the notion that adaptive cognitive processes play a crucial role in emotional regulation. Capobianco et al. (2020) emphasized that positive metacognitive beliefs, such as confidence in one's ability to control thoughts and emotions, are associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression (Capobianco et al., 2020). This study extends these findings by demonstrating that adaptive metacognitive beliefs are also linked to higher levels of forgiveness in romantic relationships. Individuals with such beliefs are likely better equipped to manage their emotional responses to transgressions, facilitating the forgiveness process.

The regression analysis further underscores the importance of both jealousy and metacognitive beliefs in predicting forgiveness. The significant negative predictor role of relationship jealousy is consistent with the "investment model of commitment," which posits that jealousy can undermine relationship commitment and stability (Wieselquist, 2009). On the other hand, the positive impact of metacognitive beliefs suggests that cognitive interventions aimed at enhancing these beliefs could be beneficial in promoting forgiveness and improving relationship quality. Huntley and Fisher (2016) found that positive metacognitive beliefs were crucial in reducing depressive symptoms, which may also translate to more effective management of relational conflicts.

While the study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of relationship forgiveness, several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality. Longitudinal studies are needed to determine the directionality of the relationships between forgiveness, jealousy, and metacognitive beliefs. Second, the use of self-report measures may introduce response biases, such as social desirability or recall bias. Future

studies could incorporate observational or experimental methods to validate self-reported data. Additionally, the sample was recruited through convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. A more diverse and representative sample would enhance the external validity of the results.

Future research should address the limitations of this study by employing longitudinal designs to examine the temporal relationships between forgiveness, jealousy, and metacognitive beliefs. Such designs would provide a clearer understanding of how these variables interact over time and whether changes in metacognitive beliefs can lead to increased forgiveness and reduced jealousy. Moreover, future studies could explore the mechanisms underlying these relationships, such as the role of emotional regulation strategies or cognitive restructuring techniques. Investigating these mechanisms would offer deeper insights into how metacognitive beliefs influence forgiveness and provide evidence for the development of targeted interventions.

Additionally, future research could examine the role of cultural and contextual factors in shaping the relationships between forgiveness, jealousy, and metacognitive beliefs. Cross-cultural studies would help determine whether these findings generalize across different cultural contexts or if specific cultural norms and values influence the dynamics of these relationships. Exploring these factors would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the processes underlying forgiveness in romantic relationships.

The findings of this study have several practical implications for clinicians and therapists working with couples. Interventions aimed at reducing relationship jealousy and enhancing metacognitive beliefs could be beneficial in promoting forgiveness and improving relationship satisfaction. Cognitive-behavioral therapies that focus on restructuring maladaptive beliefs and teaching effective emotional regulation strategies may help individuals manage jealousy and increase their capacity for forgiveness. For instance, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques such as cognitive restructuring and mindfulness could be employed to challenge and modify negative metacognitive beliefs and promote adaptive thinking patterns (Huntley & Fisher, 2016).

Couples therapy could also incorporate strategies to address jealousy and foster forgiveness. Therapists could work with couples to enhance communication skills, build trust, and develop mutual understanding, which are essential components of forgiveness. Techniques such as empathy

training and perspective-taking exercises could help partners understand each other's experiences and emotions, facilitating the forgiveness process (Friesen et al., 2005).

Furthermore, educational programs and workshops aimed at improving relationship skills and promoting emotional well-being could benefit couples. These programs could include components on managing jealousy, developing adaptive metacognitive beliefs, and fostering forgiveness. By equipping individuals with the tools and skills needed to navigate relational conflicts, such programs could enhance relationship quality and stability.

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant roles of relationship jealousy and metacognitive beliefs in predicting relationship forgiveness. The findings suggest that higher levels of jealousy are associated with lower levels of forgiveness, while more adaptive metacognitive beliefs are linked to greater forgiveness. These results underscore the importance of addressing both emotional and cognitive factors in promoting forgiveness and enhancing relationship quality. Future research should build on these findings by exploring the mechanisms underlying these relationships and examining the role of cultural and contextual factors. Practitioners can leverage these insights to develop targeted interventions that reduce jealousy, enhance metacognitive beliefs, and promote forgiveness in romantic relationships. By fostering forgiveness and improving relational dynamics, such interventions have the potential to contribute to greater individual well-being and relationship satisfaction.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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