

Examining the Moderating Effect of Agreeableness on the Relationship Between Forgiveness and Self-Esteem

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Abstract

Forgiveness is often viewed as a positive interpersonal quality associated with stronger relationships and better psychological well-being. However, the outcomes of forgiveness may vary depending on individual personality traits. This cross-sectional study explored the relationship between forgiveness, self-esteem and how agreeableness moderates this relationship. We hypothesized that when agreeableness is high, forgiveness will also be high, resulting in low self-esteem. Participants ($N = 138$) completed self-report measures of the traits forgiveness, self-esteem, and agreeableness through an online survey. We used a moderated regression analysis to examine whether agreeableness has an impact on the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem. Results showed that higher levels of forgiveness were positively associated with higher self-esteem, but agreeableness did not moderate this relationship. In our exploratory analysis, we found that agreeableness was positively related to self-esteem when using the Forgiveness of Others subscale. However, agreeableness did not significantly moderate the relationship between forgiveness of others and self-esteem. Future research may benefit from investigating people-pleasing tendencies more directly to better understand when forgiveness is empowering versus compromising. These insights can help guide future research by highlighting which behavioural factors meaningfully influence forgiveness and which do not.

Introduction

Social relationships are fundamental to the human experience, and forgiveness plays a vital role in repairing them after a transgression (Tirrell, 2021). Our study seeks to explore how forgiveness can impact one's well-being. We were particularly interested in how forgiveness influences self-esteem, especially among individuals who may forgive to maintain harmony rather than to achieve genuine resolution. More specifically, our research explores how a tendency towards agreeableness shapes the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem. This perspective offers insight into how forgiveness may relate to an individual's sense of self-worth in contexts involving interpersonal dynamics.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a broad concept that, in our research, encompasses self-forgiveness, situational forgiveness, and the forgiveness of others (Yamhure Thompson et al., 2005). At its core, forgiveness serves to resolve transgressions by transforming negative feelings toward others into more neutral or positive emotions

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(Tirrell, 2021). While contemporary research often highlights the psychological and relational benefits of forgiveness, it is important to note that this concept is not always viewed positively. Some historical philosophical perspectives, such as those of Nietzsche, have framed forgiveness as a potential sign of weakness, suggesting that it may reflect passivity or a lack of self-respect (Tirrell, 2021). This perspective suggests that forgiveness may stem from desires for personal ease or comfort, overshadowing higher goals, such as the maintenance of self-respect or justice (Turner, 2025). Forgiveness is a core component of repairing relationships with the self and others, and practicing it can increase psychological well-being, as well as decrease anger and anxiety (Freedman, 2018). Not practicing forgiveness can lead to stress, depression, and other negative outcomes (Kim et al., 2022). Research on the outcomes of forgiveness is conflicting, which underscores the complexity of the concept (Kim et al., 2022).

Existing research on forgiveness produces mixed findings. Some studies highlight forgiveness as a psychologically adaptive process that aids emotional regulation, improves relationships, and promotes well-being, thereby strengthening self-worth (Tiwari et al., 2023). In such contexts, forgiving may reflect resilience and a sense of secure self-concept. However, other research provides a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that forgiveness can have adverse consequences on self-esteem (Luchies et al., 2010). Specifically, over-forgiveness, defined as the tendency to forgive to reduce interpersonal tension despite not feeling ready to do so, has been associated with diminished self-respect (Luchies et al., 2010). These mixed findings suggest that forgiveness does not universally promote self-worth and can be disempowering under certain conditions.

When individuals forgive to resolve conflict rather than out of genuine readiness, they are likely engaging in people-pleasing tendencies, which are behaviours aimed at appeasing others, at one's own expense (Luchies et al., 2010). This form of compliance may undermine self-esteem (Luchies et al., 2010). Due to research producing conflicting results on the relationship between self-esteem and forgiveness, we seek to fill the gap. Research has depicted that depending on the *type* of forgiveness, correlations among personality traits such as agreeableness vary. For example, neuroticism can be a predictor of self-forgiveness, while agreeableness has been a predictor of other forms of forgiveness (Ross et al., 2004). Our research has evaluated individuals' total levels of forgiveness to develop a more comprehensive understanding. Research can be beneficial in understanding how forgiveness does not always elicit positive self-esteem outcomes.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem reflects one's inner value and strongly influences their willingness to forgive (Tiwari et al., 2023). For at-risk adolescents deemed deviant, education on forgiveness was able to heighten their self-esteem and overall well-being (Freedman, 2018). Higher self-esteem tends to promote greater levels of forgiveness, enabling individuals to adopt compassionate perspectives towards themselves and others, which in turn, enhances subjective well-being (Tiwari et al., 2023). Conversely, low self-esteem has shown to diminish the likelihood of forgiveness, as individuals may perceive transgressions as more threatening and struggle to reconcile with personal offences (Strelan & Zdaniuk, 2014; Tiwari et al., 2023; Yao et al., 2017). Withholding forgiveness can strengthen self-respect, particularly when the offender has not expressed genuine remorse (Luchies et al., 2010). In such situations, choosing not to forgive may help individuals protect their sense of self-worth and heighten feelings of

personal value (Luchies et al., 2010). Because forgiveness and self-esteem each vary depending on the context, the relationship between the two often produces mixed findings. The majority of research focuses on how self-esteem affects an individual's willingness to forgive (Yao et al., 2017). However, a gap remains when exploring how forgiveness impacts self-esteem with agreeableness as a moderator.

Agreeableness

Despite its relevance in personality models and theories, agreeableness is not frequently regarded as a key personality trait compared to other dimensions of the Big Five (Wilmot & Ones, 2022). Agreeableness is distinguished from other personality traits because it relies on social interactions, resulting in more flexibility (Wilmot & Ones, 2022). Agreeableness is commonly associated with likability and friendliness, yet it encompasses individual differences in traits such as altruism, cooperation, and honesty (Wilmot & Ones, 2022). Agreeableness also shapes people's motivation to cultivate positive relationships, empathize with others' perspectives, and align personal goals with those of others (Graziano & Tobin, 2002).

Agreeableness is not a neutral personality trait, but one that carries an inherently positive social value (Graziano & Tobin, 2002). Research suggests that individuals who score high in agreeableness are more likely to exhibit behaviours that make them well-liked and accepted in social settings (Graziano & Tobin, 2002). Agreeableness scores vary across different contexts, suggesting that it is not a fixed trait, but one that can be adjusted to enhance social desirability (Graziano & Tobin, 2002). There is a well-established positive correlation between agreeableness and forgiveness, with those who are higher in agreeableness being more likely to forgive (Strelan, 2007). This raises the question of whether agreeableness can lead to people-pleasing behaviours when individuals decide to forgive others.

Agreeableness has been studied as a moderator for entitlement and forgiveness, showing that highly entitled individuals tend to be less agreeable, reducing their likelihood of forgiving others (Strelan, 2007). However, the extent to which agreeableness moderates other variables, such as forgiveness and self-esteem, has not been researched extensively. Furthermore, research has shown that those with low self-esteem and high agreeableness are motivated to repair negative moods when it benefits others (Cortes et al., 2019). While previous research has been hesitant to define agreeableness as a fundamental personality dimension, it remains crucial to study due to its pervasive role in social perception and cognition (Graziano et al., 1994).

Current Study

Our study aims to address a gap in the existing research on the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem. We seek to learn if agreeableness is a moderating factor between the two and identify any possible correlations. The link between the three factors is currently unexplored, as prior research has only examined two at a time. Previous studies suggest that individuals high in agreeableness are more likely to forgive (Wang, 2008), which may be caused by people-pleasing tendencies. These findings highlight the complexity of forgiveness and self-esteem, suggesting that additional factors, such as emotional regulation or social expectations, may shape this relationship. Thus, given that agreeableness is closely tied to maintaining social harmony, we hypothesize that when agreeableness and forgiveness are high, self-esteem will be low in situations where individuals forgive out of wanting to please others.

Methods

Participants

Given the recruitment methods, it is likely that many participants were students at McMaster University. People were recruited through social media platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn, physical posters displayed across the McMaster campus, and the SONA online experiment management system. The inclusion criteria for this study required participants to be at least 18 years old, fluent in reading and writing English, capable of self-assessing their trait levels using the provided measures and have online accessibility. To be included in the final analysis, participants had to provide informed consent, complete all items on the three measures used (the *Big Five Inventory Scale*, *Heartland Forgiveness Scale*, and the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*), and correctly respond to all four attention checks. This project received ethics approval from the McMaster Research Ethics Board (#7231).

Using the G*Power software, we conducted two power analysis tests to determine the sample size needed to detect a statistically significant effect in our study. To yield a small effect size between 0.1 and 0.3, 395 participants were needed. To yield a medium effect size between 0.3 and 0.5, 55 participants were needed, which suggests a meaningful relationship exists, although not an especially strong one. This indicates that our target sample size should be between 55-395 participants. A total of 194 participants initially entered the study. Following data cleaning, fifty-six participants were excluded for not meeting the required inclusion criteria. Two participants were removed for not providing consent, and fifty-four for failing to or incorrectly answering the attention check questions. The final sample for analysis consisted of 138 participants.

Most participants were recruited through social media and campus posters, with no incentives provided (71.7%). Additionally, a portion of participants were recruited through the SONA online experiment management system, which is available in various undergraduate courses as a means for students to earn course credit. This study was listed on SONA, allowing students to participate in exchange for 0.5 SONA credits, translating to 0.5% extra course credit. Participants recruited through SONA had two options if they wished to withdraw from the study. They could either exit the study without submitting their response, forfeiting their participation credit, or, if they provided consent, they could skip the remaining questions and submit the survey while still receiving credit. Of the 138 participants included in the final analysis, $n = 39$ completed the study through SONA (28.3%).

Demographic data was collected to understand the generalizability of this study. Participants who entered this study were obtained from the general adult population and ranged in age from 18 to 64 years old ($M = 26.7$, $SD = 11.62$). Out of 138 participants, the sample was dominated by women (76.8%), with the remainder being men (18.8%), non-binary (3.6%), and genderqueer (0.7%). Sexual orientation was reported to be heterosexual (65.9%), bisexual (18.8%), lesbian (4.3%), pansexual (4.3%), questioning (2.9%), queer (1.4%), asexual (1.4%), and gay (0.7%). In addition, many participants reported that they were currently single (46.4%), attending school full time (57.9%), and were completing or had already completed a four-year college or university degree or program (37%).

Participants were primarily European/White (65.9%), the remaining participants reported their ethnicity as East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean, etc.) (12.3%), South Asian (e.g., Afghan, Nepali, Tamil, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, Sri Lankan, Punjabi) (10.1%), West Asian (e.g., Iraqi, Jordanian, Palestinian, Saudi,

Syrian, Yemeni, Armenian, Iranian, Israeli, Turkish) (6.5%), African/Black (including African-American, African-Canadian, Caribbean) (5.1%), Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, Malaysian, Filipino/a, Laotian, Singaporean, Indonesian) (5.1%), Indo-Caribbean, Latin, South or Central American (2.9%), and Indigenous within Canada (e.g., First Nation, Métis, Inuit) (2.2%). Options were included for Indo-African, Indo-Fijian, West-Indian, or Polynesian (e.g., Samoans, Tongan, Niuean, Cook Island Māori, Tahitian Mā'ohi, Hawaiian Mā'oli, Marquesan, New Zealand Māori), although no participants reported their race or ethnicity as such. Refer to Table 1 for additional demographic information.

Table 1

Demographic Information: Age, Relationship Status, Employment Status, and Education Level

Variable		<i>n</i>	%
Age	18 - 29	112	81.2
	30 - 39	4	2.9
	40 - 49	7	5.1
	50 - 59	13	9.4
	60 - 69	2	1.4
Relationship Status	Single	64	46.4
	Dating my current partner exclusively	41	29.7
	Common-law (e.g., living in a conjugal relationship with a person who is not your married spouse)	4	2.9
	Engaged	3	2.2
	Married	24	17.4
Relationship Status: Prefer to self-describe	Casual dating (dating multiple people)	1	0.7
Current Employment Status	Working full time	33	23.9
	Working part time	58	42.0
	Unemployed (not working but looking for work)	15	10.9
	Not working and not looking for work	5	3.6
	Going to school full time	80	57.9
	Going to school part time	4	2.9
	Retired	1	0.7
Current Employment Status is not on the provided list (please specify):	Seasonal work	1	0.7
Highest Level of Education	Less than high school	1	0.7
	High school/GED	27	19.6
	Some college/technical school/university	41	29.7
	2-year college/technical school/university	15	10.9

degree/diploma (e.g., AA, AS)		
4-year college/university degree (e.g., BA, BS)	51	37
Master's degree (MA, MS, MEng, MBA)	2	1.4
Doctorate degree (e.g., PhD, EdD)	1	0.7

Procedure

Data collection for this cross-sectional observational study did not target a specific sub-population, as participants were drawn from the general adult population. The study was conducted through the online survey platform Qualtrics, with data collection occurring between January 27th, 2025, and February 16th, 2025. Eligible and consenting participants completed an anonymous online survey, which took 15-30 minutes to complete. All survey responses remain anonymous, containing no identifiable information.

The survey consisted of multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions, utilizing pre-existing scales to measure forgiveness, self-esteem, and agreeableness. Forgiveness was measured using the (1) *Heartland Forgiveness Scale* (HFS), self-esteem was assessed with the (2) *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (RSE), and agreeableness was measured with the (3) *Big Five Inventory Scale* (BFI). To ensure participant attentiveness, four attention check questions were embedded throughout the survey. Additionally, demographic questions were included to assess the generalizability of the sample, including age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, race/ethnicity, employment status, and level of education.

Measures

Forgiveness

Forgiveness was measured using the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) (Yamhure Thompson et al., 2005), a widely used measure that evaluates an individual's overall tendency to forgive. The HFS consists of three subscales, each capturing a distinct dimension of forgiveness: (1) Forgiveness of Self, (2) Forgiveness of Others, and (3) Forgiveness of Situations. The scale also includes a Total Forgiveness score, which reflects overall forgiveness tendencies. The HFS contains eighteen items, with each subscale comprising six items. Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *almost always false of me*, 7 = *almost always true of me*). Of the eighteen items, nine are reverse scored and nine remain the same score rated by the participant.

Participants responded to items such as "*learning from bad things that I've done helps me get over them*" (non-reverse scored) and "*I hold grudges against myself for negative things I've done*" (reverse scored). Scores for each subscale were calculated by summing the respective six items, and the Total Forgiveness was obtained by summing all eighteen items. Higher scores indicate greater levels of forgiveness, while lower scores suggest lower levels of forgiveness. On this scale, scores range from a minimum of eighteen to a maximum of 126. In the present study, participant scores ranged from 30-120 and reported average levels of forgiveness, with the scale demonstrating good reliability. Please refer to Table 2 to view the descriptive statistics for this scale and correlations between variables.

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale includes three subscales measuring distinct dimensions of forgiveness: (1) Forgiveness of Self (sum of items 1-6), (2) Forgiveness

of Others (sum of items 7-12), and (3) Forgiveness of Situations (sum of items 13-18). The Forgiveness of Others subscale focuses on the shift of negative attitudes toward others (Ascioglu Onal & Yalcin, 2017) and is strongly associated with interpersonal traits such as empathy (Turnage et al., 2012). Scores range from a minimum of six to a maximum of forty-two. In the present study, participant scores on this subscale ranged from 8-42 indicating average levels of forgiveness of others, with the scale demonstrating good reliability. Refer to Table 4 to view the descriptive statistics for this subscale and correlations between variables.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) (Avison & Rosenberg, 1981), one of the most widely used and validated measures of self-esteem (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). The 10-item scale does not contain subscales and was originally developed as a Guttman scale. However, this study used the adapted version where items are scored as a Likert scale. On average, responses are rated on a 4-point Likert scale where (0 = *strongly agree*, 3 = *strongly disagree*). However, this study assigned values of 1-4 for all items, so responses were rated on a 4-point Likert scale where (1 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *strongly disagree*).

The RSE consists of five reverse-score items and five non-reverse-scored items. Participants responded to items such as *"on the whole, I am satisfied with myself"* (non-reverse scored) and *"at times I think I am no good at all"* (reverse scored). Total self-esteem scores were calculated by summing all ten items, with higher scores indicating greater levels of self-esteem. Traditional RSE scoring is based on a 0-3 scale, although for this study, thresholds were adapted to the 1-4 scale where scores ranged from a minimum of ten to a maximum of forty. In the present study, participants' scores ranged from 10-40 and reported average levels of self-esteem, with the scale demonstrating excellent reliability. Refer to Table 2 to view the descriptive statistics for this scale and correlations between variables.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness was measured using the Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John & Srivastava, 1999). This scale is the most widely used scale to measure the Big Five personality traits because of its accepted reliability and validity (Fossati et al., 2011). The BFI consists of 44 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *disagree a lot*, 5 = *agree a lot*) and includes five subscales measuring agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness.

For this study, the Agreeableness subscale was used which consists of nine items, four of which were reverse scored. Participants responded to statements such as *"has a forgiving nature"* (non-reverse scored) and *"tends to find fault with others"* (reverse scored). Scores for the Agreeableness subscale were summed to produce a total score, with higher scores indicating greater levels of agreeableness. On this scale, scores can range from a minimum of nine to a maximum of forty-five. In the present study, participant scores ranged from 22-45 and reported high levels of agreeableness, with the scale demonstrating acceptable reliability. Refer to Table 2 to view the descriptive statistics for this scale and correlations between variables.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analyses

After completing each of the three measures used in this study, participants displayed high levels of agreeableness, average levels of forgiveness, and average

levels of self-esteem. A two-tailed test with a confidence interval of 95% was used to detect correlations between the total scores for forgiveness, agreeableness, and self-esteem. The two-tailed test was used to detect correlations regardless of their direction, and significant correlations were found between each of the variables. Refer to Table 2 for the descriptive statistics and correlations between each of the scales used.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Study Variables

Descriptives and Reliability					Correlations		
	Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	3
1.	Forgiveness	82.02	15.88	0.87	–		
2.	Agreeableness	34.99	5.12	0.73	.45**	–	
3.	Self-Esteem	29.05	6.07	0.92	.53**	.28**	–

Note. **correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Analytic Approach

Moderated Regression Model

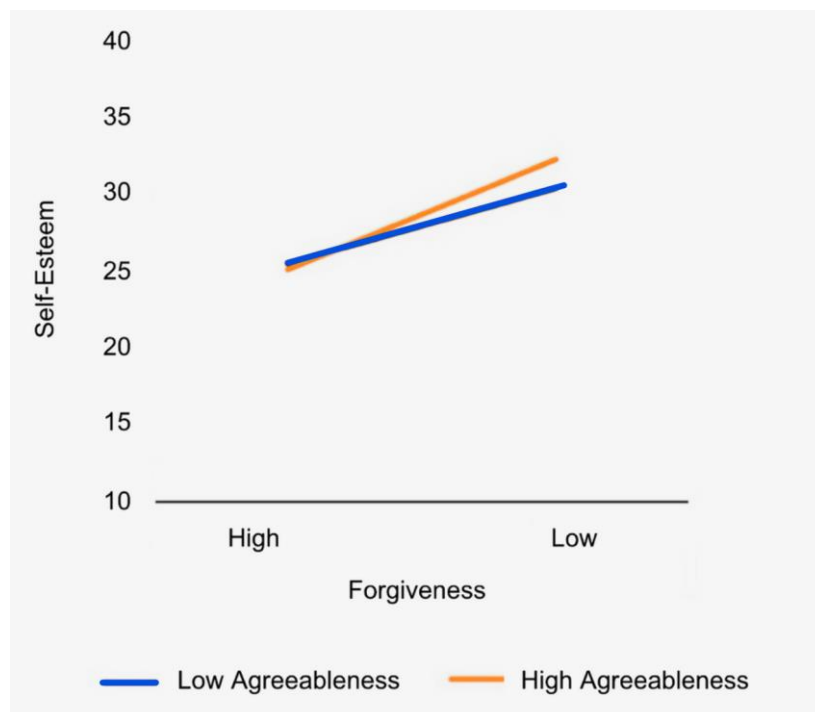
All three variables examined in this study are continuous. Therefore, a moderated regression model was used to analyse how the relationship between forgiveness (predictor) and self-esteem (outcome) varies when agreeableness is input as a moderator. A between-subjects design was utilized, as the study focused on individual differences. To accurately conclude what was higher or lower levels of forgiveness, self-esteem, and agreeableness, relative to average levels, the transformation technique of grand-mean centring was applied. This involved taking each individual score and subtracting the average across all individual elements, to compare how individual scores on the scale range in comparison to the representative variable for each category.

A hierarchical moderated regression model was conducted to examine the relationship between forgiveness (predictor), agreeableness (moderator), and self-esteem (outcome). An initial model was conducted where the independent variable and moderator were included as predictors of self-esteem, and they significantly predicted the outcome ($F(2, 135) = 25.88, p < .001$), accounting for 27.7% of the variance in the outcome variable of self-esteem. Specifically, when both variables were included in the model, forgiveness significantly predicted self-esteem, but agreeableness did not. In the follow-up model, which included the interaction term between forgiveness and agreeableness, this interaction was not significant. This indicates that agreeableness did not moderate the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem. Table 3 displays the moderated regression analysis used to examine the relationships between forgiveness (predictor), and agreeableness (moderator), on self-esteem in model one, and the interaction of forgiveness multiplied by agreeableness on self-esteem to view the moderating effect of agreeableness in model two. Figure 1 displays a graphical representation of the moderated regression model.

Table 3*Moderated Regression Model*

Model	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Forgiveness on Self-Esteem	3.45	.56	.50	6.13	< .001***
	Agreeableness on Self-Esteem	.53	.87	.10	.61	.543
2	Forgiveness by Agreeableness on Self-Esteem	1.10	.783	.10	1.41	.161

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Figure 1*Moderated Regression Model***Exploratory Analyses**

Our hypothesis did not focus on any specific dimension of forgiveness when examining how agreeableness moderates the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem. Previous research has shown that the Forgiveness of Others subscale found within the Heartland Forgiveness Scale is correlated with agreeableness (Strelan, 2007; Turnage et al., 2012), possibly due to its focus on interpersonal relations (Charzyńska et al., 2025), much like agreeableness. An exploratory analysis

was conducted after running the initial moderated model to assess whether the Forgiveness of Others subscale of the HFS would yield a significant effect in the moderated regression model.

In the present study, the sample reported average levels of forgiveness of others. A two-tailed test with a confidence interval of 95% was used to detect correlations between the total scores for forgiveness of others, agreeableness, and self-esteem. Significant correlations were found between forgiveness of others and agreeableness, as well as between agreeableness and self-esteem, but no significant correlation was found between forgiveness of others and self-esteem. Refer to Table 4 to view the descriptive statistics and correlations between the total scores of each of the scales used.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Study Variables

Descriptives and Reliability					Correlations		
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α		1	2	3
1. Forgiveness of Others	27.52	6.90	0.84		–		
2. Agreeableness	34.99	5.12	0.73		.444**	–	
3. Self-Esteem	29.05	6.07	0.92		.125	.276**	–

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Using the same model-building approach, a hierarchical moderated regression analysis was conducted with forgiveness of others as the predictor, agreeableness as the moderator, and self-esteem as the outcome. The model significantly predicted self-esteem, ($F(2, 135) = 5.58, p = .005$), accounting for 7.6% of the variance in the outcome variable of self-esteem. Specifically, when both variables were included in the model, the opposite effect was found from the initial model. Forgiveness of others did not significantly predict self-esteem, but agreeableness did significantly predict self-esteem. In the follow-up model, another interaction term was created between forgiveness of others and agreeableness to test the moderating effect of agreeableness on forgiveness of others and self-esteem, which was also not significant. Table 5 displays the correlations found between forgiveness of others and agreeableness on self-esteem in model one, and the interaction of forgiveness of others multiplied by agreeableness on self-esteem in model two.

This indicates that when focusing specifically on forgiveness of others, agreeableness did not moderate the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem. Although this interaction did not elicit a significant correlation, further research may be warranted to explore potential nuances in the relationship between forgiveness subtype, agreeableness, and self-esteem.

Table 5*Correlations Between Study Variables*

Model	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Forgiveness of Others on Self-Esteem	.02	.49	.00	.035	.972
	Agreeableness on Self-Esteem	2.93	.98	.28	2.98	.003**
2	Forgiveness of Others by Agreeableness on Self-Esteem	1.07	.72	.13	1.49	.138

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Discussion

Despite many scholars' examining self-esteem, forgiveness, and the Big Five personality trait of agreeableness, a gap existed regarding an examination of these concepts together. Our research addresses this gap using a cross-sectional study to examine the moderating effect that agreeableness has on the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem. We found a positive correlation between high forgiveness and high self-esteem, supporting existing empirical evidence that relationship maintenance and reparation has positive outcomes on one's self-esteem (Freedman, 2018). We did not find significant evidence to suggest that being a highly agreeable person will moderate this relationship.

Discussion of Results

Those high in agreeableness have a higher tendency to forgive (Wang, 2008). On average, participants in this study reported high levels of agreeableness, and average levels of both forgiveness and self-esteem. Our results produced a positive correlation between forgiveness and self-esteem, indicating that those high in forgiveness were also likely to have higher self-esteem. This replicates previous research, showing that the act of forgiving others may lead to increased levels of self-esteem (Freedman, 2018). While agreeableness as a moderator of forgiveness and self-esteem did not show statistical significance, the results of this study offer insight into potential future research regarding people-pleasing behaviours and the act of over-forgiving.

To better understand the data, an exploratory analysis examined the relationship between forgiveness, agreeableness, and self-esteem by using the Forgiveness of Others subscale. The analysis revealed positive correlations between forgiveness of others and agreeableness, as well as between agreeableness and self-esteem. This indicates that when the Forgiveness of Others subscale is used, individuals who are more agreeable were more likely to be forgiving of others and have higher self-esteem. Additionally, when forgiveness of others was included in the model, a significant

correlation was found between agreeableness and self-esteem. However, agreeableness did not significantly moderate the relationship between forgiveness of others and self-esteem.

Theoretical Contributions and Implications

Our study examines how agreeableness plays a role in forgiveness and self-esteem. Previous research on the subject is conflicting, with some findings suggesting that forgiveness can elicit high self-esteem (Tiwari et al., 2023), whereas others suggest that high forgiveness can lower self-esteem (Luchies et al., 2010). To address the shortcomings of previous research, we hypothesized that self-esteem would be low when levels of forgiveness and agreeableness were high. No significant correlations were found between variables when agreeableness was used as a moderator. However, a more in-depth exploration of agreeableness could find significance in this research by measuring people-pleasing behaviours more directly. The BFI scale assesses levels of agreeableness which, while useful for investigating general personality traits, lacks specificity for pinpointing behaviours directly related to agreeableness and people-pleasing. A more nuanced agreeableness scale that focuses on specific people-pleasing behaviours could provide deeper insights into this trait and its effects.

Research indicates that low self-esteem is linked to depression and a diminished sense of well-being (Orth & Robins, 2013). Low self-esteem can lead to negative outcomes such as poor moods, depression, and reduced self-confidence (Luchies et al., 2010). Therefore, exploring how excessive agreeableness and people-pleasing behaviours can undermine self-esteem is important for understanding the broader implications on overall well-being. This study contributes to the understanding of personality factors in relation to forgiveness. Contrary to existing findings, forgiveness can lead to lower levels of self-esteem (Luchies et al., 2010) depending on the situation and context of when individuals decide to forgive.

Further research should focus on what defines 'over-forgiveness' and examine at what point levels of forgiveness become too high. This could be beneficial when examining the trait of agreeableness as a moderator, as those high in agreeableness tend to engage in behaviours that please others. More research must be conducted to evaluate how behaviours done to please others can lower self-esteem, since individuals prioritize others wants and needs over their own.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the valuable contributions from this study to research on personality factors and forgiveness, various limitations should be acknowledged. Prior to data cleaning, our sample consisted of 194 participants, of which a significant portion did not meet the inclusion criteria due to failure to provide consent or incomplete attention check questions. Although the remaining sample size falls within a medium effect size range ($N = 138$), a reduction in participants limits the statistical power and accuracy of our findings. Additionally, our sample predominantly consisted of young females of White/European descent, restricting the generalizability of our results to a narrower demographic. Furthermore, since the recruitment process relied primarily on social media, campus posters and the SONA system at McMaster University, our sample may be biased, reducing the representativeness of the broader adult population.

Collecting data online also posed various limitations. Participation was restricted to individuals with internet access, excluding those without access. Furthermore, the survey was available for 21 days, which may not be enough time to recruit a larger and

more diverse sample size. Time limitations restrict the opportunity for larger numbers of participants to sign up, causing a less generalizable study. Moreover, the study relied on self-report measures, which are subject to biases such as social desirability and inaccurate self-assessment, potentially affecting the validity of responses. In addition, the exclusion of non-English speakers and writers further limited the diversity of our sample, reducing the overall generalizability of our findings. Finally, our original model used a measure of total forgiveness. However, some of its subscales, specifically the Forgiveness of Self subscale, does not entirely align with agreeableness, as agreeableness focuses on interactions with others rather than the self. Forgiveness of self and agreeableness have not been strongly correlated in past research (Matuszewski & Morón, 2022; Ross et al., 2004), therefore self-forgiveness as a measure of total forgiveness, could influence the results of this study. These limitations may have hindered the ability to effectively detect whether agreeableness moderates the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem.

Future research could build from this study to gather more information on the relationship between forgiveness, agreeableness, and self-esteem. The correlations found in our moderated models were slightly above the threshold for statistical significance, and a larger sample size could find significant results. In addition, collecting a more diverse sample would not only improve the generalizability of the results but may provide new insights. In our sample, most participants were White North Americans. Alternative findings show that collectivist cultures demonstrate different predictors for forgiveness (Wang, 2008). Therefore, our results may be different because most of our participants are North American. By examining both collectivist and individualistic cultures, research could gain a deeper understanding of how forgiveness may vary based on geographical location.

Future research on this topic could be conducted using semi-structured interviews with participants to reduce potential biases of self-report measures such as those used in this study. Semi-structured interviews would provide more detailed information on the trait levels held by participants and potentially allow the researchers to establish stronger correlations between variables. Another improvement could involve deciding on a type of recent transgression that required forgiveness and recruiting participants who meet such criteria. Focusing on a specific recent transgression would incorporate participants who can accurately reflect on their experiences without a large time lapse biasing their responses. This could potentially allow for a stronger correlation to be found among forgiveness, agreeableness, and self-esteem when applied to a consistent type of transgression.

People-pleasing tendencies is an important topic to delve into as our thoughts and behaviours are shaped by our daily social interactions. A validated scale to measure these tendencies has not been developed. There are similarities between people-pleasing and the personality trait of agreeableness. Both work towards maintaining social harmony, which informed our decision for focusing on the trait of agreeableness. Those high in agreeableness were motivated to repair their moods when it benefited others, not just to increase their likeability (Cortes et al., 2019). This suggests that those who are agreeable do prioritize maintaining social harmony but will not compromise their moods at the expense of being liked by others (Cortes et al., 2019). This is where people-pleasing behaviours and agreeableness differ. Developing a specific scale to measure people-pleasing would be an interesting addition to this research as forgiving to resolve conflict, potentially due to people-pleasing tendencies, could lower self-esteem (Luchies et al., 2010).

Conclusion

Forgiveness can be a meaningful step towards emotional clarity and connection. Our results do not support a link between agreeableness, forgiveness, and lower self-esteem. However, the findings do show that higher levels of forgiveness are associated with higher self-esteem, suggesting that the ability to let go of resentment may reflect a secure sense of self-worth. In choosing to forgive, individuals may be giving themselves the chance to feel not just at peace with others, but also with themselves.

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