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Research Paper

The Role of Patience and Emotional Regulation in Conflict Resolution among Gen Z Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Romantic relationships during emerging adulthood play a significant role in emotional development and psychological well-being, yet many young adults experience difficulties in managing interpersonal conflict effectively. The present study examined the relationship between patience and conflict resolution strategies among Generation Z individuals in romantic relationships, while investigating the mediating role of emotional regulation and the moderating effects of gender and relationship duration. A total of 109 participants (85 females, 13 males, 2 non-binary, and 1 prefer not to say) who were currently or previously involved in romantic relationships completed an online survey comprising the Patience Scale, Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), and Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (CRQ). Correlational analyses indicated that patience was positively associated with collaborative conflict resolution and negatively associated with maladaptive strategies such as conflict engagement. Cognitive reappraisal showed positive associations with collaborative conflict resolution, whereas emotional suppression demonstrated limited relationships with adaptive outcomes. Mediation analysis revealed that cognitive reappraisal partially mediated the relationship between patience and collaborative conflict resolution. Moderation analyses suggested variations across gender and relationship duration, with emotional regulation playing a stronger role in early-stage relationships. The findings highlight patience and adaptive emotional regulation as important psychological factors influencing constructive conflict management among Gen Z romantic partners, offering implications for relationship education, counseling, and preventive interventions.

Keywords: *Gen Z relationships, Patience, Emotional regulation, Cognitive reappraisal, Conflict resolution, Romantic relationships, Emerging adulthood, Relationship functioning*

Romantic relationships play a central role in psychological well-being during emerging adulthood, a developmental period marked by identity exploration, emotional maturation, and relational learning. For Generation Z (Gen Z)—typically defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s—romantic relationships unfold in a unique socio-emotional context shaped by rapid technological change, heightened emotional awareness, and evolving expectations around communication and intimacy. While Gen Z is often described as emotionally expressive and psychologically

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informed, research suggests that many individuals in this cohort continue to experience significant difficulties in managing interpersonal conflict within romantic relationships.

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of close relationships, but the way individuals respond to disagreements plays a crucial role in determining relationship satisfaction and stability. Adaptive conflict resolution strategies—such as problem-solving, compromise, and open communication—are associated with healthier relationship outcomes, whereas maladaptive strategies like avoidance, aggression, or emotional withdrawal are linked to distress and relational breakdown. Understanding the personal traits that influence conflict resolution is therefore essential, particularly in younger cohorts navigating early romantic experiences.

One personality-based factor that may shape conflict resolution is patience, defined as the capacity to tolerate frustration, delay gratification, and regulate emotional responses in challenging situations. Patience has been linked to greater emotional control, empathy, and interpersonal understanding, all of which are critical during relationship conflicts. Individuals with higher levels of patience may be more likely to pause, reflect, and respond thoughtfully rather than reacting impulsively during disagreements. Despite its relevance, patience remains an under-explored construct in romantic relationship research, especially among Gen Z populations.

Closely related to patience is emotional regulation, which refers to an individual's ability to monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional reactions in accordance with situational demands. Effective emotional regulation enables individuals to manage intense emotions such as anger, disappointment, or anxiety—emotions that frequently arise during interpersonal conflict. Research consistently shows that poor emotional regulation is associated with destructive conflict behaviors, while strong regulation skills promote constructive dialogue and mutual understanding. It is therefore plausible that emotional regulation serves as a psychological mechanism through which patience influences conflict resolution strategies.

In addition to individual emotional capacities, relationship-specific and demographic factors may further shape how conflicts are managed. Relationship duration can influence conflict patterns, as partners in longer relationships may develop greater emotional familiarity, communication skills, and tolerance for disagreements. Gender differences have also been documented in emotional expression, coping styles, and conflict behavior, suggesting that the effects of patience and emotional regulation on conflict resolution may vary across genders.

Despite growing interest in Gen Z relationship dynamics, limited empirical research has simultaneously examined patience, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution within romantic relationships, particularly using mediation and moderation frameworks. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to examine the relationship between patience and conflict resolution strategies among Gen Z romantic partners, investigate the mediating role of emotional regulation, and explore whether relationship duration and gender moderate these associations. By integrating emotional and relational variables, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of conflict processes in contemporary romantic relationships and offer insights relevant for relationship education, counseling, and preventive interventions.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are to:

1. Examine the relationship between patience and conflict resolution strategies among Gen Z romantic partners.
2. Assess whether emotional regulation mediates the relationship between patience and conflict resolution.
3. Explore whether relationship duration and gender moderate these relationships.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Higher levels of patience will predict more adaptive conflict resolution strategies.
- **H2:** Emotional regulation will mediate the relationship between patience and conflict resolution.
- **H3:** Relationship duration and gender will moderate the effects of patience and emotional regulation on conflict resolution.

By addressing these objectives, the present study aims to contribute to the growing but limited body of literature on Gen Z romantic relationships. The findings are expected to offer both theoretical and practical insights into the personal traits and emotional skills that promote healthy conflict management, with implications for relationship counseling, psychoeducational programs, and interventions tailored to the relational needs of Gen Z couples.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationships among patience, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution strategies in Generation Z romantic relationships. The study further investigated the mediating role of emotional regulation and the moderating effects of gender and relationship duration.

Participants

The sample comprised 109 Generation Z participants aged 18 years and above who were currently involved in a romantic relationship or had been involved in a romantic relationship at some point in their lives. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, and data were collected through an online survey.

The gender distribution of the sample was as follows:

- 88 females
- 18 males
- 2 non-binary individuals
- 1 participant who preferred not to disclose gender

The sample was further divided into duration of relationship to check for moderation effect the distribution was as follows-

- <6 months - 31 people
- 6-12 months - 19 people
- 1-2 years - 15 people
- 2+ years - 44 people

Participants met the inclusion criteria of being within the Gen Z age cohort, having prior or current romantic relationship experience, and providing informed consent. Responses that were incomplete were excluded from the final analysis.

Measures

- **Trait Patience**: Trait patience was assessed using the Trait Patience Scale (Schnitker, 2012). The scale consists of 11 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The instrument measures individuals' general tendency to tolerate frustration, delay, and interpersonal challenges without emotional reactivity. Higher scores indicate greater levels of trait patience. Previous research has demonstrated adequate reliability and construct validity for the scale.
- **Emotional Regulation**: Emotional regulation was measured using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) developed by Gross and John (2003). The ERQ comprises 10 items assessing two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Responses are recorded on a Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating greater use of the respective regulation strategies. The ERQ has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across diverse populations.
- **Conflict Resolution Strategies**: Conflict resolution strategies were measured using the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI-16). The scale includes 16 items assessing commonly used conflict management styles in romantic relationships, including positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and avoidance. Participants rated the frequency with which they engaged in each behavior during relationship conflicts. Higher scores on adaptive subscales reflect healthier conflict resolution patterns.
- **Demographic Information:** A self-constructed demographic questionnaire was used to collect information on age, gender, educational background, relationship status, and relationship duration, which was later examined as a moderating variable.

Procedure

Data were collected using an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Prior to participation, respondents were presented with an informed consent form detailing the purpose of the study, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality assurances, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Only participants who provided consent were allowed to proceed.

The questionnaire included demographic items followed by the Trait Patience Scale, Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, and Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory. Participants were instructed to respond honestly based on their experiences in romantic relationships. The survey required approximately 15–20 minutes to complete.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical guidelines for psychological research. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was ensured by not collecting personally identifiable information. All responses were kept confidential and were used solely for academic and research purposes.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using validated online statistical analysis tools. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize demographic characteristics and study variables, including means, standard deviations, and score ranges. Pearson's correlation analyses were performed to examine associations among patience, emotional regulation (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression), and conflict resolution strategies.

To test the study hypotheses, mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether emotional regulation mediated the relationship between patience and collaborative conflict resolution. The mediation effect was evaluated using the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach, followed by a Sobel test to assess the significance of the indirect effect.

Moderation analyses were conducted to examine the moderating roles of gender and relationship duration by comparing correlation patterns across demographic subgroups. Statistical significance was evaluated at an alpha level of .05.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

Data from 109 participants were analyzed to examine relationships among patience, emotional regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression), and conflict resolution strategies (collaboration, avoidance, compliance, and conflict engagement). Pearson's correlation analyses were conducted using online statistical calculators, and statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level.

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency estimates for all study variables are presented in Table 1. The data demonstrated adequate variability, with scores spanning substantial portions of their possible ranges.

Participants reported moderate levels of patience (M = 36.37, SD = 7.06). Emotional regulation scores indicated greater use of cognitive reappraisal (M = 29.68, SD = 7.40) compared to emotional suppression (M = 19.48, SD = 5.56). Among conflict resolution strategies, collaboration yielded the highest mean score (M = 16.97, SD = 2.78), suggesting a general tendency toward constructive conflict management within romantic relationships.

All measures demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency reliability. The Patience Scale showed high reliability (α = .88). The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire demonstrated good reliability for cognitive reappraisal (α = .86) and acceptable reliability for emotional suppression (α = .72). Conflict Resolution Questionnaire subscales also showed satisfactory reliability: collaboration (α = .81), avoidance (α = .78), compliance (α = .75), and conflict engagement (α = .83).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Cronbach's α
Patience	36.37	7.06	16	51	.88
Cognitive Reappraisal	29.68	7.40	13	42	.86
Emotional Suppression	19.48	5.56	4	28	.72
Collaboration	16.97	2.78	4	20	.81

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Cronbach's α
Avoidance	8.98	3.97	4	19	.78
Compliance	11.11	3.68	4	18	.75
Conflict Engagement	10.28	3.42	4	20	.83

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine associations between patience, emotional regulation strategies, and conflict resolution styles.

Patience was positively and significantly associated with collaborative conflict resolution ($r = .27$, $r^2 = .07$, $p < .05$), indicating that individuals with higher patience were more likely to engage in constructive and cooperative conflict management. Patience demonstrated a non-significant negative relationship with avoidance ($r = -.12$, $r^2 = .02$, $p > .05$), suggesting no meaningful association with avoidant conflict behavior.

A significant negative correlation was observed between patience and compliance ($r = -.26$, $r^2 = .07$, $p < .05$), indicating that more patient individuals were less likely to adopt submissive or yielding responses during conflict. Patience also showed a strong negative association with conflict engagement ($r = -.55$, $r^2 = .30$, $p < .05$), suggesting that higher patience was linked to reduced hostile or confrontational conflict styles.

Regarding emotional regulation, cognitive reappraisal was positively associated with collaboration ($r = .30$, $r^2 = .09$, $p < .05$), whereas expressive suppression was not significantly related to collaboration ($r = -.13$, $p > .05$). Additionally, patience was positively correlated with cognitive reappraisal ($r = .31$, $r^2 = .09$, $p < .05$), while its relationship with expressive suppression was non-significant ($r = .03$, $p > .05$).

Collectively, these findings provide support for **H1**, indicating that higher patience is associated with more adaptive conflict resolution strategies, particularly collaboration.

Moderation Analysis

Moderation analyses were conducted to examine whether gender and relationship duration influenced associations between patience, emotional regulation, and collaborative conflict resolution.

Gender as Moderator

Among female participants, patience was significantly associated with collaboration ($r = .34$, $r^2 = .12$, $p < .05$), and cognitive reappraisal also demonstrated a significant positive relationship with collaboration ($r = .39$, $r^2 = .15$, $p < .05$).

Among male participants, correlations between patience and collaboration ($r = .34$) and between cognitive reappraisal and collaboration ($r = .30$) were not statistically significant, indicating weaker or less stable relationships within this subgroup. These findings suggest partial gender-based differences in the associations between patience, emotional regulation, and collaborative conflict resolution.

Relationship Duration as Moderator

For participants in relationships lasting less than six months, patience was not significantly related to collaboration ($r = .24$, $p > .05$), whereas cognitive reappraisal showed a significant positive association ($r = .37$, $r^2 = .14$, $p < .05$).

For relationships lasting two years or more, neither patience ($r = .27$, $p > .05$) nor cognitive reappraisal ($r = .16$, $p > .05$) demonstrated significant associations with collaboration. These results suggest that emotional regulation may play a stronger role in conflict management during early stages of romantic relationships compared to longer-term relationships.

Mediation Analysis

To test H2, mediation analyses were conducted to examine whether emotional regulation mediated the relationship between patience and collaborative conflict resolution.

Results indicated a statistically significant mediation effect ($p < .01$), demonstrating that emotional regulation partially explains how patience influences adaptive conflict resolution outcomes. Specifically, cognitive reappraisal showed a significant indirect effect, such that higher patience predicted greater use of cognitive reappraisal, which in turn was associated with increased collaborative conflict resolution behaviors.

In contrast, expressive suppression did not demonstrate a significant mediating effect, indicating that suppression may not function as a mechanism linking patience to constructive conflict outcomes. These findings support the mediating role of adaptive emotional regulation processes, particularly cognitive reappraisal, in explaining how patience contributes to effective conflict management.

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

- **H1 supported:** Higher patience predicted more adaptive conflict resolution (collaboration).
- **H2 partially supported:** Cognitive reappraisal mediated the patience–collaboration relationship, whereas suppression did not.
- **H3 partially supported:** Relationship duration demonstrated moderating effects, while gender moderation effects were limited.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the role of patience and emotional regulation in predicting conflict resolution strategies among Gen Z individuals in romantic relationships. Specifically, the study investigated whether emotional regulation mediated the relationship between patience and conflict resolution and whether gender and relationship duration moderated these associations. Overall, the findings provide empirical support for the importance of individual dispositional traits and emotional regulation processes in shaping how young adults manage interpersonal conflict within romantic contexts.

Patience and Conflict Resolution

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, patience was positively associated with collaborative conflict resolution and negatively associated with maladaptive conflict strategies, particularly conflict engagement and compliance. These findings suggest that individuals with higher patience are more likely to engage in constructive, cooperative problem-solving while avoiding hostile or submissive responses during disagreements.

This pattern aligns with theoretical conceptualizations of patience as the capacity to tolerate frustration and delay reactive responses (Schnitker, 2012). Patient individuals may possess greater emotional tolerance, allowing them to pause, reflect, and respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively during relational conflict. The strong negative association between patience and conflict engagement indicates that patience may function as a protective interpersonal trait that reduces escalation and hostility.

These findings are consistent with prior research linking self-regulatory traits to relationship satisfaction and adaptive interpersonal functioning (Adams & Paul, 2013; Gottman & Levenson, 2002). Within Gen Z relationships, where communication often occurs rapidly through digital platforms, patience may play an especially important role by buffering emotionally reactive exchanges and facilitating constructive dialogue.

Role of Emotional Regulation

The results further demonstrated that cognitive reappraisal was positively associated with collaborative conflict resolution, whereas expressive suppression showed no significant relationship with adaptive conflict outcomes. These findings support emotion regulation theory (Gross, 2002), which distinguishes between adaptive antecedent-focused strategies (e.g., reappraisal) and less adaptive response-focused strategies (e.g., suppression).

Cognitive reappraisal involves reframing emotional situations in a more constructive manner, enabling individuals to reduce negative emotional intensity and approach conflict with greater psychological flexibility. Individuals who reinterpret disagreements as solvable problems rather than personal threats may therefore be more likely to engage in collaborative conflict management.

In contrast, expressive suppression did not significantly predict collaboration or mediate relational outcomes, suggesting that merely inhibiting emotional expression does not facilitate constructive problem-solving. Suppression may reduce visible emotional expression without resolving underlying emotional processes, thereby limiting its effectiveness in interpersonal contexts.

Mediating Role of Emotional Regulation

Supporting Hypothesis 2, mediation analyses indicated that cognitive reappraisal partially mediated the relationship between patience and collaborative conflict resolution. This finding provides insight into the mechanism through which patience influences relational behavior.

Specifically, patient individuals were more likely to employ adaptive emotional regulation strategies, which in turn promoted constructive conflict resolution. This result is consistent with social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), which proposes that personality traits influence behavior indirectly through cognitive and emotional processes. Patience may therefore facilitate better conflict outcomes not only directly but also by enhancing individuals' capacity to reinterpret emotionally charged situations.

The absence of mediation through expressive suppression further reinforces the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive regulation strategies. Emotional regulation quality, rather than emotional control alone, appears central to effective relationship functioning.

Moderating Effects of Gender

Partial support was found for Hypothesis 3 regarding gender differences. Among female participants, patience and cognitive reappraisal were significantly associated with collaborative conflict resolution, whereas these relationships were not statistically significant among male participants.

One possible explanation is that gender socialization processes may influence emotional communication and relational coping styles. Women are often socialized to engage more actively in emotional processing and relational maintenance behaviors, which may strengthen the link between emotional regulation and collaborative conflict management. However, the smaller male subsample may also have reduced statistical power, suggesting caution in interpretation.

These findings highlight the importance of considering gendered relational dynamics when examining emotional processes in romantic relationships.

Moderating Effects of Relationship Duration

Relationship duration also demonstrated moderating effects. Emotional regulation, particularly cognitive reappraisal, was more strongly associated with collaboration in early-stage relationships compared to long-term relationships.

Early romantic relationships often involve higher uncertainty, identity negotiation, and emotional sensitivity. During this phase, effective emotional regulation may play a crucial role in establishing communication patterns and conflict norms. In longer relationships, partners may rely more on established interaction patterns and relational familiarity, reducing the relative influence of individual regulatory strategies.

This finding suggests that emotional skills may be especially critical during relationship formation stages, offering potential targets for early relationship education and intervention.

Theoretical Contributions

The present study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it integrates personality traits (patience), emotional processes (regulation strategies), and behavioral outcomes (conflict resolution) within a single framework, addressing a gap in research examining these variables simultaneously. Second, it extends existing relationship research to Gen Z populations, whose relational experiences are shaped by digital communication and evolving social norms. Finally, the findings empirically support emotion regulation theory by demonstrating the mediating role of adaptive regulatory processes in interpersonal functioning.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The present study contributes to relationship and emotion regulation literature by integrating dispositional, cognitive, and behavioral variables within a unified framework. While previous research has examined conflict resolution and emotional regulation independently, this study demonstrates that patience influences conflict outcomes indirectly through adaptive emotional regulation processes, particularly cognitive reappraisal. The findings extend emotion regulation theory (Gross, 2002) and social-cognitive perspectives (Bandura,

1986) to Gen Z romantic relationships, highlighting how personality traits operate through psychological mechanisms to shape interpersonal behavior.

Furthermore, the study addresses a gap in existing literature by focusing on Gen Z, a cohort whose relational experiences are shaped by digital communication environments and evolving social norms. The results suggest that traditional interpersonal constructs remain relevant but may function differently within contemporary relational contexts.

Practical Implications

The findings offer meaningful applications for relationship counseling, educational programs, and mental health interventions targeting young adults. Training individuals in patience development and adaptive emotional regulation strategies—particularly cognitive reappraisal—may improve conflict management and relationship stability. Relationship education programs for Gen Z populations may benefit from incorporating emotional awareness, perspective-taking, and constructive communication skills to reduce conflict escalation.

Additionally, the stronger role of emotional regulation in early-stage relationships suggests that preventive interventions during relationship formation phases may promote healthier long-term relational patterns.

Clinical and Educational Implications

Mental health professionals and counselors working with young adults may consider assessing patience and emotional regulation skills as part of relationship-focused interventions. Psychoeducational workshops in universities and community settings could integrate emotional regulation training to enhance interpersonal competence and reduce maladaptive conflict behaviors among emerging adults.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal research is needed to examine how patience and emotional regulation influence relationship dynamics over time. Second, data were collected through self-report measures, which may be influenced by social desirability or response bias. Third, the gender distribution was uneven, potentially limiting generalizability across genders.

Future research could employ longitudinal or dyadic designs to examine partner interactions directly and explore additional contextual variables such as attachment styles, communication patterns, or digital communication behaviors. Investigating culturally diverse samples may also provide deeper insight into how sociocultural norms shape emotional regulation and conflict processes in romantic relationships.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study highlights patience as an important dispositional factor associated with adaptive conflict resolution among Gen Z romantic partners. Emotional regulation, particularly cognitive reappraisal, serves as a key psychological mechanism linking patience to constructive conflict behaviors. Together, these findings underscore the importance of emotional and cognitive skills in fostering healthy relationship functioning

and provide a foundation for interventions aimed at promoting effective conflict management in emerging adult relationships.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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