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Shared Strength or Shared Strain? A Dyadic Perspective on
Willpower Beliefs, Conflict Resolution, and Relationship
Satisfaction

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1 Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable part of life. In romantic relationships, it plays an especially central role. Conflict requires not only emotional and behavioral regulation, but the way couples manage conflict also plays a crucial role in predicting both relationship satisfaction and individual well-being (Overall & McNulty, 2017; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Kurdek, 1994a). Therefore, conflict is not fundamentally damaging but can either harm or strengthen the relationship, depending on how it is handled. Research has identified a broad range of conflict resolution strategies, ranging from constructive approaches such as compromise to more destructive patterns like withdrawal or domination (Zacchilli et al., 2009; Kurdek, 1994a).

Importantly, successfully managing conflict requires self-regulation, including emotion regulation, impulse control, and perspective-taking (Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Vater & Schröder-Abé, 2015). While much of the literature has focused on observable communication behaviors, less attention has been paid to the motivational beliefs that may shape individuals' regulatory efforts in such demanding situations.

An important construct about people's beliefs are the implicit theories of willpower (Job et al., 2010). These theories refer to people's assumptions about their own self-control. Some people believe that their self-control is a limited resource that depletes with use, while other people think of it as a non-limited capacity that sustains or even builds with effort. While willpower beliefs have been linked to self-regulation and goal striving in individual domains (e.g., academic or health behavior) (Job et al., 2010; Vohs et al., 2012; Francis & Job, 2018), their role in interpersonal dynamics, especially in close relationships, is less understood.

Initial evidence from dyadic studies supports the idea that willpower beliefs are linked to support provision and relationship satisfaction (Francis et al., 2024), but no study to date has systematically examined how they relate to conflict resolution strategies in romantic dyads. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the relationship between implicit theories of willpower, conflict resolution strategies and relationship satisfaction within romantic relationships.

By using dyadic data from both partners, the research question focuses on whether personal beliefs about willpower relate to one's own and the partner's use of constructive or destructive conflict resolution strategies and, in turn, affect relationship satisfaction. In addition, the inclusion of both partners' perspectives allows us to explore similarity between the couple's beliefs and its association with conflict resolution.

Finally, the study will also look at the contextual factor stress, which could play an important role in the way couples manage conflict. The dyadic study design therefore allows for complex interactions that standard individual-level models may fail to capture. To understand how people's beliefs contribute to their conflict behavior could be an important

step forward to help people be happier in their relationships and to foster empathy not only for their own behavior but also for their partners' actions.

2 Current Research and Hypotheses

2.1 Willpower Theories

Self-regulation plays an important role in an individual's ability to pursue long-term goals, manage emotions, and navigate social relationships (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Finkel & Campbell, 2001). According to the Strength Model of Self-Control (Muraven et al., 1998), self-control becomes temporarily depleted after exertion. That means that acts of self-control, such as resisting temptation or managing emotional reactions, reduce the available capacity for further self-control in the short term. This model has been supported by experimental findings showing that individuals perform worse on a second self-control task after having exerted effort on a first one. This phenomenon is called ego depletion (Muraven et al., 1998). Self-control can then be restored by recharging the resource through rest or relaxation (Tyler & Burns, 2008). However, this model has also faced criticism, particularly regarding its replicability and theoretical generalizability (Hagger et al., 2010).

As an alternative perspective, Job et al. (2010) proposed the concept of the *implicit theories of willpower*. According to this theory, exerting self-control does not per se lead to ego depletion. More important than the act itself is a person's belief about their own self-control resources. Specifically, people with a *limited theory* of willpower believe that self-control resources are finite and must be recharged after use. In contrast, individuals with a *non-limited theory* of willpower believe that exerting effort can be energizing and that self-control is not easily exhausted.

These so-called willpower beliefs may moderate or even override ego depletion effects (Francis & Job, 2018). They are typically measured on a continuum and are considered relatively stable individual differences (Bernecker et al., 2017). However, they can also change across the lifespan and in response to personal experiences (Job et al., 2018). Importantly, their effects are context-sensitive: especially under stress or emotional challenge, people tend to act in ways that reflect their willpower theory (Job et al., 2010; Bernecker et al., 2017).

To better capture the role of willpower beliefs, the construct is assessed using three subscales that capture different domains of self-regulation. These include *strenuous mental activities*, referring to beliefs about sustaining mental effort (e.g., concentration or problem solving), *resisting temptations*, capturing beliefs about the ability to repeatedly withstand temptations, and *emotional control*, which reflects beliefs about the ability to regulate one's emotional states.

While the first subscale is most common in ego depletion research, the inclusion of

resisting temptations provides a more comprehensive picture of willpower in everyday life. The emotional control subscale may be particularly relevant in romantic contexts, where regulating one's emotions (e.g., anger, disappointment, or defensiveness) is important for conflict management.

Recent studies show that these beliefs are not only abstract theories but also shape actual behavior. For instance, individuals with a limited theory performed worse in a task after they finished a demanding exercise (Job et al., 2010; Vohs et al., 2012). In contrast, those with a non-limited theory tend to persist longer and perform better under cognitive strain. Willpower theories have been shown to predict goal persistence, academic performance, and health-related behaviors such as eating healthier (Job et al., 2010; Bernecker et al., 2017; Francis & Job, 2018).

Although the effects of willpower theories have been studied extensively in individual performance settings, less is known about their role in interpersonal contexts. Emerging research suggests that these beliefs might also influence how people interact with others and that these interpersonal consequences should be explored further (Francis & Job, 2018). Building on that, Francis et al. (2024) found that both individuals' and their partners' willpower beliefs were associated with the provision of both instrumental and emotional support.

Romantic relationships hold frequent demands on self-regulation, especially in moments of conflict or disagreement (Finkel & Campbell, 2001). However, the role of willpower theories in romantic conflict yet remains underexplored. The present study addresses this gap: Do people's beliefs about willpower shape how they deal with conflict in romantic relationships?

2.2 Conflict Resolution Strategies in Romantic Relationships

Conflict is a normative and even necessary component of intimate relationships. Differences in needs, expectations, or values often lead to disagreements. Yet it is not the presence of conflict per se that determines relationship quality but the way couples deal with it (Kurdek, 1994). Successful conflict resolution can promote satisfaction and mutual growth, while poor conflict management is closely related to relationship dissatisfaction and disconnection (Overall & McNulty, 2017).

Conflict resolution strategies are generally divided into constructive, destructive and situational (or avoidant) forms. Constructive strategies include behaviors such as compromise, perspective-taking, and problem solving, which aim to resolve the issue in a mutually beneficial way. In contrast, destructive strategies involve escalation, blame, or passive-aggressiveness, which tend to damage relational closeness and satisfaction (Kurdek, 1994; Zacchilli et al., 2009). Situational or avoidant strategies include behaviors like remaining silent, emotionally distancing oneself or giving in without defending one's own

view. These responses may reduce tension in the short term but often undermine long-term resolution (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Heavey et al., 1995; Overall et al., 2013).

To better understand how individuals and couples navigate conflict, Kurdek (1994) developed the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI), which has since been widely used and validated. The CRSI distinguishes four styles of conflict behavior. First, there is *positive problem solving*, which involves calm, constructive communication aimed at mutual understanding and resolution. It includes behaviors such as compromise, open discussion, and negotiation, and reflects both emotional self-regulation and goal-directed cooperation. *Conflict engagement*, by contrast, is a destructive style characterized by escalation, blaming, and intense emotional reactions, such as sarcasm, shouting, or bringing up past problems. It reflects poor regulation of anger. A third style, *withdrawal*, includes behaviors like the “silent treatment”, emotional distancing, or refusing to discuss the conflict altogether. Individuals may shut down or leave the room, avoiding the issue entirely, which can leave their partners feeling ignored, disconnected and not being taken seriously. The fourth style, *compliance*, involves giving in to the partner to avoid conflict, often at the expense of one’s own needs. While it may appear peaceful on the surface, this style can lead to resentment and imbalance within the relationship (Kurdek, 1994; Herzberg & Sierau, 2010).

Beyond their behavioral expression, these strategies might also differ in the cognitive and emotional demands they place on individuals. Constructive strategies may require more emotional regulation, making them more cognitively demanding (Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Vater & Schröder-Abé, 2015). In contrast, destructive strategies may reflect impulsivity, emotional reactivity, or a perceived lack of internal resources. These strategies are associated with lower relationship satisfaction and long-term instability (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Herzberg & Sierau, 2010).

Many studies have examined how factors like personality, attachment style, emotion regulation or communication skills influence conflict behavior (Simpson et al., 1996; Donnellan et al., 2004; Ben-Naim et al., 2013; Egeci & Gencöz, 2006; Shi, 2003). For example, couples with secure attachment styles tend to perceive conflict as less threatening and are more likely to use constructive strategies (Simpson et al., 1996; Shi, 2003). However, there is less research on the role of cognitive-motivational beliefs, meaning how people’s beliefs about internal capacities shape their conflict behavior.

Emerging evidence suggests that such beliefs do matter: people who believe emotions are controllable engage in more adaptive regulation strategies and report better interpersonal functioning (Tamir et al., 2007). Similarly, beliefs about relationship changeability have been shown to influence how people respond to conflict. For example, individuals who hold fixed (soulmate-like) beliefs about relationships are more likely to respond passively or give in during arguments. Those with more dynamic (work-it-out) beliefs

are more willing to engage constructively, because they see conflict as an opportunity for growth (Franiuk et al., 2002).

Beliefs about willpower may function similarly. Conflicts in romantic relationships often require emotional regulation and behavioral control. If someone believes their willpower is limited, they may perceive conflict as overly demanding and be more likely to disengage, avoid effortful communication, or become defensive in conflict. By contrast, individuals with a non-limited theory may see effort as energizing and remain engaged even when conversations become emotionally difficult.

Recent dyadic evidence further supports the idea that motivational beliefs shape behavior in relationships: Francis et al. (2024) found that individuals with a limited willpower theory provided less emotional support and were also less likely to receive instrumental support. Although conflict resolution strategies were not directly examined, these findings suggest that willpower beliefs influence emotionally demanding interpersonal behaviors.

Because romantic relationships are inherently dyadic, it is essential to understand not only how an individual's beliefs predict their own behavior but also how they are influenced by their partner's beliefs and behaviors. Partners shape each other's emotional experiences and behavioral responses, particularly in emotionally charged moments such as conflict (Revenson et al., 2005). The Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) provides a framework for capturing these reciprocal influences by examining how both one's own (actor) and the partner's (partner) beliefs can influence individual outcomes (Kenny & Cook, 1999; Olsen & Kenny, 2006). By applying this model to conflict, it becomes possible to test if both partners' willpower theories are associated with how individuals manage conflict. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1a: Individuals' willpower theories are associated with their own use of conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, individuals with non-limited willpower beliefs are expected to report more constructive and less destructive conflict styles.

Hypothesis 1b: Partners' willpower theories are associated with the individual's use of conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, having a partner with a non-limited willpower belief is expected to be related to more constructive and less destructive conflict styles in the individual.

2.3 Relationship Satisfaction

Romantic relationships are important sources of emotional fulfillment and well-being. The concept of relationship satisfaction refers to someone's global assessment of their romantic relationship (Funk & Rogge, 2007; Bühler et al., 2021). It reflects how well the relationship meets personal needs, aligns with expectations, and contributes to overall happiness. High relationship satisfaction is shaped by positive feelings toward the partner

(Hendrick, 1988; Fincham & Rogge, 2010).

Greater relationship satisfaction is associated with better mental health, physical well-being, and greater life satisfaction (Proulx et al., 2007). Given its importance, understanding the factors that influence relationship satisfaction is an important goal in relationship research.

One well-established correlate of relationship satisfaction is conflict behavior (Gordon & Chen, 2016; Cramer, 2004). Numerous studies have shown that the way couples manage disagreement has long-term consequences for their well-being (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Heavey et al., 1995; Cohan & Bradbury, 1997; Overall & McNulty, 2017). Generally, constructive conflict resolution such as open communication, compromise, and mutual problem-solving is related to higher relationship satisfaction, while destructive behaviors like withdrawal, aggression, or passive compliance relate to declines in satisfaction and stability over time (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Kurdek, 1994; Shi, 2003).

However, not all findings are consistent. Some studies have found that disagreement, criticism, and even expressions of anger can, under certain conditions, predict improvements in relationship satisfaction over time, while overly agreeable or superficially positive behaviors like humor may in fact undermine closeness and long-term outcomes (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Cohan & Bradbury, 1997; Heavey et al., 1995; Overall & McNulty, 2017). These findings suggest that the effect of conflict behavior on satisfaction may depend on context.

Given that conflict resolution is often effortful and emotionally demanding, individuals' beliefs about their own self-regulatory capacity may shape their conflict behavior and in turn also their overall satisfaction. Individuals with a limited willpower theory may think of themselves as less capable of managing relational stress, leading to increased frustration, miscommunication, and emotional distance. Conversely, those with a non-limited theory may approach difficult conversations with more confidence and resilience, fostering more positive interactions and emotional closeness. Supporting this idea, Francis et al. (2024) found that individuals with non-limited willpower beliefs reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

Importantly, the impact of willpower theories on relationship satisfaction may not be direct but rather operate indirectly through conflict behavior. That means beliefs about self-control may shape how individuals manage conflict, which in turn affects their relationship satisfaction.

To examine this indirect path, the present study proposes a mediation model in which the effect of willpower beliefs on satisfaction is mediated through conflict resolution strategies. Additionally, because of the dyadic nature of romantic relationships, I consider both actor and partner effects (see also Section 2.2).

Finally, while the present work focuses on conflict as a mechanism, it is important to acknowledge that other pathways may link willpower beliefs to relationship satisfaction. For example, Francis et al. (2024) suggest that support provision might be another mechanism and call for future research to explore additional mechanisms. The current study therefore investigates conflict behavior as one possible pathway. These considerations lead to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: The association between individuals' willpower theories and their relationship satisfaction is mediated by their own conflict resolution strategies.

Hypothesis 2b: The association between partners' willpower theories and the individual's relationship satisfaction is mediated by the partner's conflict resolution strategies.

2.4 Similarity and Mismatch in Willpower Beliefs Within Couples

Another important question is whether similarity between partners in willpower beliefs influences relationship dynamics. Prior research looked at similarity in certain values or traits and their association with relationship satisfaction. They found that similarity in life goals (Arránz Becker, 2013), political orientation (Leikas et al., 2018), and chronotype (Jocz et al., 2018) has been associated with slightly higher relationship satisfaction, whereas similarity in Big Five personality traits or self-control often shows little or no effect (Vohs et al., 2011; Weidmann et al., 2017). The relevance of similarity in willpower beliefs remains largely unexplored.

Francis et al. (2024) addressed this question by testing whether similarity in willpower theories was linked to relationship satisfaction. They suggested several plausible mechanisms through which similarity in willpower beliefs could positively affect relationship functioning. First, couples with similar beliefs may hold more aligned expectations and goal structures, reducing the potential for friction or misunderstanding. For example, two individuals who both believe willpower is limited may agree to limit simultaneous goals and be more forgiving of lapses, viewing self-control failures as normal. Moreover, similarity in beliefs might foster shared understanding and empathy, particularly during stressful situations or conflicts. If both partners view self-regulation through the same lens, they may be more attuned to one another's needs and less likely to misinterpret withdrawal or disengagement. In contrast, a mismatched pair has different expectations, which may lead to pressure, frustration, or conflict over goal pursuit and behavioral standards.

Another idea is that similarity might not only be a predictor but also an outcome of the relationship. As couples spend more time together, they may grow more similar and construct goals and routines together, especially in long-term relationships. Indeed, some convergence in beliefs and attitudes has been observed in long-term relationships, although such effects tend to be small (Luo, 2017).

While Francis et al. (2024) found that partners' willpower beliefs are more similar than would be expected by chance, similarity was not associated with higher satisfaction or relationship length. Their analyses, including both absolute difference scores and response surface analyses, did not provide robust evidence for beneficial similarity effects. These findings raise the question of whether similarity in motivational beliefs is generally less relevant than assumed or whether its effects depend on specific relational contexts or behavioral outcomes.

Since there is not enough existing literature, particularly regarding conflict resolution styles, the present similarity analyses are conducted exploratorily. In contrast to prior similarity research that has primarily examined relationship satisfaction as an outcome, the present study focuses on conflict resolution strategies as a more proximal behavioral process. The aim is to generate insights into whether more similar beliefs are linked to constructive conflict behavior. Also, this study explores whether relationship length is associated with greater similarity, potentially due to convergence over time.

2.5 Perceived Stress and Its Role in Conflict Behavior

While the core of the present study focuses on willpower beliefs and conflict behavior in romantic relationships, it is also important to consider the broader context in which these processes happen. Romantic conflict does not occur in an isolated space, it happens in daily life. One important contextual factor that can impact conflict behavior may be perceived stress. Perceived stress refers to the extent to which individuals feel overwhelmed, unpredictable, or out of control when it comes to life demands (Cohen et al., 1983).

Higher levels of perceived stress have been linked to poorer attentional control and self-regulation. For example, Sliwinski et al. (2006) found that on high-stress days, individuals showed significantly worse performance on attention-demanding cognitive tasks. Similarly, Muraven et al. (1998) demonstrated that individuals were more likely to report failures in regulation when stressed, supporting the idea that coping with stress consumes regulatory resources needed for self-control and, in turn, for adaptive interpersonal behavior.

In romantic relationships, stress has consistently been associated with lower relationship satisfaction and more negative interaction patterns, such as increased criticism and hostility. Under conditions of stress, partners tend to communicate less effectively and show fewer supportive behaviors (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009; Bodenmann et al., 2007; Neff & Karney, 2007). Over time, such patterns may worsen relationship quality and increase the likelihood of conflict escalation.

From a theoretical perspective, stress may interact with willpower beliefs in important ways. If individuals believe that willpower is limited, they may be especially vulnerable to the effects of stress, which could lead to increased disengagement, conflict escalation, or

withdrawal. In contrast, individuals with a non-limited belief may perceive stress as more manageable or less disruptive to their self-control, which could help them maintain more constructive conflict behaviors even under strain. However, the role of perceived stress in this context remains unexplored. It could be possible that stress moderates the link between willpower beliefs and conflict behavior, specifically that the association is stronger when individuals are under high stress.

Stress might not only moderate beliefs and conflict behavior on the individual level but also have dyadic effects. Research by Neff and Karney (2007) found that stress crossover can occur in couples, meaning that one partner's stress influences the other partner's relationship satisfaction. When stress is high and conflict communication is poor, both partners are at greater risk of dissatisfaction and relational strain.

Given the complex nature of perceived stress and the limited theoretical groundwork for its dyadic interaction with willpower beliefs, no specific directional hypotheses are formulated for this section. Also, perceived stress is not a central construct of the current research focus and is measured at the end of the questionnaire. Therefore, there might be missing data. For these reasons, the role of stress is treated exploratorily. The goal of the analyses is to identify potential patterns and generate directions for future research, rather than to confirm specific predictions.

2.6 Present Research

The present research examined whether individuals' implicit theories of willpower are associated with conflict resolution strategies and relationship satisfaction within romantic partnerships.

The study followed a cross-sectional design and was conducted via an online survey. Because romantic relationships are inherently dyadic, the present research used a dyadic perspective to examine not only how individuals' willpower beliefs relate to their own conflict behavior (actor effects), but also if these beliefs extend to their partner's behavior and satisfaction (partner effects).

Specifically, the study tested whether endorsing a non-limited theory of willpower would be related to greater use of constructive conflict strategies and less use of destructive strategies (Hypotheses 1a and 1b) and whether these associations would extend to relationship satisfaction via mediation processes (Hypotheses 2a and 2b). In addition, the study explored if similarity or discrepancy in partners' willpower beliefs would be associated with conflict resolution and if perceived stress would play a role in how conflict is handled.

This study was conducted as part of a joint master's thesis project by two students, each focusing on a distinct methodological approach. While one project focused on individual-level analyses, the present study centered on dyadic processes using both

partners in each couple. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of interpersonal dynamics.

3 Methods

3.1 Research Design

A key feature of this study was its dyadic structure: 202 couples participated, with data collected from both partners. To ensure anonymity, each participant was asked at the beginning of the survey to create a unique couple code. Data were analyzed dyadically, with partners nested within romantic couples. All types of romantic relationships (e.g., heterosexual and same-gender couples) were included, but no separate group analyses were conducted.

There was no experimental manipulation or random assignment to groups: all participants completed the same set of standardized self-report measures. To assess the key constructs, the study used German adaptations of standardized measures, including the Implicit Theories About Willpower Scale (Job et al., 2010), the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (Herzberg & Sierau, 2010), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hassebrauck, 1991). The Perceived Stress Scale (Klein et al., 2016) was included for exploratory purposes. Personality traits were assessed using the German version of the BFI-10 (Rammstedt et al., 2013). In addition, demographic variables such as age, gender, relationship duration, relationship status (e.g., dating, engaged, married), number of children, and highest education were collected at the beginning of the survey.

3.2 Participants

The couples were recruited using convenience sampling, including personal networks such as friends, family, and colleagues, as well as through online channels such as social media platforms, university bulletin boards, and printed flyers in psychology departments, cafeterias, gynecological practices, and couples therapy clinics. To increase participation rates, couples in which both partners completed the study had the chance to enter into a raffle for an event-related gift voucher.

In total, 892 individuals started the survey, of whom 606 completed it. Because the present study focused on dyadic processes, only couples in which both partners participated were included. In addition, three partners were included who completed all core constructs but failed to complete the supplementary measures. This resulted in a final sample of 404 individuals forming 202 romantic couples.

Participants were required to be at least 18 years old, currently in a romantic relationship, fluent in German, and both partners had to complete the survey independently after providing informed consent. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 88 years ($M = 39.13$,

$SD = 16.85$, median = 32.5). The sample included 210 women (52%), 193 men (48%), and one person identifying outside the gender binary. They had been in their current relationships for an average of 13.31 years ($SD = 14.03$, median = 6.13), with a range from one month to 55 years. Most participants were exclusively dating (54%) or married (42%), with some participants engaged (3%), or in another relationship status (1%). Forty-three percent of participants had at least one child.

Overall, the sample was highly educated, with 50.5% of participants holding a tertiary degree (Bachelor's, Master's, or doctoral level). An additional 28.0% reported a general or subject-specific university entrance qualification (Abitur/Matura). Based on the technical location data recorded during survey completion, most participants completed the survey in Germany (55.2%) or Austria (38.6%). Smaller proportions completed the survey in other countries, each accounting for less than 1% of the sample. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

3.3 Procedure

Data collection was conducted online using the survey platform QuestionPro (o.D.). The survey was available between June and September 2025 and was distributed via social media platforms, flyers, and personal networks.

The survey began with an informed consent form, in which participants were informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, data protection standards, and the option to withdraw at any time without consequence. Only after providing active consent were participants directed to the questionnaire.

At the beginning of the survey, both partners were asked to independently create a couple code (e.g., a combination of initials and birth year). This allowed their responses to be matched manually after data collection. Each partner was instructed to complete the survey independently and without discussing their answers.

The survey was expected to take approximately 10-15 minutes. Based on recorded completion times, the median completion time was 14.6 minutes. The questionnaire began with demographic questions followed by the psychological scales. To reduce potential order effects, the order of the main constructs (*willpower beliefs*, *conflict resolution strategies*, and *relationship satisfaction*) was randomized across participants. Personality traits and perceived stress were always placed at the end of the survey because they were assessed for descriptive and exploratory purposes. There were two attention checks included in the questionnaire.

At the end of the survey, participants could voluntarily provide their email address for entry into the raffle. To ensure data anonymity and confidentiality, email addresses were stored separately from the main dataset and could not be linked to individual responses.

Participants were excluded from the analyses if only one partner completed the survey. They were also excluded if they failed to complete any of the three core constructs: *implicit theories of willpower*, *conflict resolution strategies* and *relationship satisfaction*. Missing responses on the control variable personality traits and the exploratory stress scale did not lead to exclusion. Since demographic variables are presented at the beginning of the survey, these were available for all valid entries.

3.4 Measures

To assess the constructs of interest, the study used validated, standardized self-report questionnaires (Appendix D).

Implicit theories of willpower were measured using the German version of the Implicit Theories about Willpower Scale developed by Job et al. (2010). The scale assesses individual beliefs about self-regulation and if it is perceived as a limited or non-limited resource. It includes 16 items across three subscales: *strenuous mental activities*, *resisting temptations*, and *emotional control*. Participants responded to items such as “After a strenuous mental activity, one feels depleted and needs to rest” (strenuous mental activities), “Resisting temptations makes you feel more vulnerable to the next temptations that come along” (resisting temptations), and “You can’t really suppress strong emotions for long. After a while, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep them under control.” (emotional control). Responses are given on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). All items were recoded so that lower scores reflect stronger endorsement of a non-limited theory of willpower.

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were conducted to examine the factorial structure of the scale in the present sample. A three-factor model reflecting the theoretical subdomains showed suboptimal fit. Allowing a small number of theoretically justified residual correlations between similarly worded items substantially improved model fit. No items were removed based on the CFA results. Given the strong correlations between the subscales and the focus of the present study on global willpower beliefs rather than domain-specific effects, all items were retained and aggregated into a single composite score. Internal consistency of the aggregated scale was high in the present sample (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$). The three subscales showed acceptable to good internal consistencies in the present sample (Cronbach’s α s = .68–.86). CFA results are reported in the results and Appendix C.

Conflict resolution strategies were assessed using the German version of the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI; Herzberg & Sierau, 2010). The CRSI captures how individuals typically behave during conflicts with their romantic partner and distinguishes between four conflict styles: *conflict engagement*, *positive problem solving*, *withdrawal*, and *compliance*. Participants rated how often they use each strategy, for example, “Launching

personal attacks” (conflict engagement), “Sitting down and discussing differences constructively” (positive problem solving), „Remaining silent for long periods of time“ (withdrawal) and „Not defending my position“ (compliance). The CRSI uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

Confirmatory factor analysis supported the proposed four-factor structure, showing excellent model fit. Internal consistencies in the present sample ranged from $\alpha = .78$ to $\alpha = .81$ across subscales. For the main analyses, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance were combined into a single composite reflecting destructive and situational conflict strategies, as these behaviors all represent maladaptive approaches to conflict resolution. Positive problem solving was retained as a separate construct reflecting constructive conflict behavior.

Relationship satisfaction was measured using a German version of the Relationship Assessment Scale (ZIP; Hassebrauck, 1991). This brief scale assesses overall satisfaction with the romantic relationship and includes how well the relationship fulfills personal needs and expectations. It consists of seven items, such as “How well does your partner fulfill your needs and desires?” and “All in all, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present sample ($\alpha = .92$). Due to its well-established unidimensional structure, no additional factor analyses were conducted.

Perceived stress was assessed using the German version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10; Klein et al., 2016). This scale measures the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overwhelming. Participants responded to ten items such as “In the last two weeks, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?” and “How often did you feel in the past month that you were not up to all the tasks ahead of you?”, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

A two-factor structure reflecting perceived stress and perceived coping/self-efficacy showed good model fit in confirmatory factor analysis. Internal consistency of the total scale was high ($\alpha = .86$). For the present analyses, items were averaged to create a global perceived stress score, with higher mean scores reflecting higher levels of perceived stress.

Personality traits were assessed using the German short form of the Big Five Inventory (BFI-10; Rammstedt et al., 2013). The BFI-10 consists of two items for each of the five personality dimensions: *openness to experience*, *conscientiousness*, *extraversion*, *agreeableness*, and *neuroticism*. Example items include “I have an active imagination and am creative” (openness to experience), “I am comfortable and tend to be lazy” (conscientiousness), “I am outgoing, sociable” (extraversion), “I am generally trusting” (agreeableness), and “I get nervous easily” (neuroticism). Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = does not apply at all, 5 = fully applies).

Due to only two items per subscale, internal consistencies are limited. Instead, retest reliabilities are reported, averaging $rtt = .56$ in general population samples and $rtt = .60$ under mode-stable conditions. The BFI-10 shows a clear five-factor structure and strong convergent validity with longer personality measures (Rammstedt & John, 2007). Personality traits were initially assessed to capture individual differences relevant to conflict behavior and relationship outcomes. However, they were not included as covariates in the main analyses. due to concerns about overcontrolling theoretically meaningful variance.

In addition, the study collected a range of *demographic variables* for descriptive purposes. These included participants' age (in years), gender (female, male, or diverse), relationship length (in years), relationship status (dating, engaged, or married), highest level of education, and number of children.

3.5 Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted using the statistical software R version 4.4.3 (R Core Team, 2025). Because of the dyadic structure of the data, the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny & Cook, 1999) was used as the primary analytical framework. This model accounts for non-independence of the partners and allows the analysis of within-person effects (actor effects: how a person's own beliefs affect their outcomes) and between-person effects (partner effects: how their partner's beliefs affect those outcomes). All APIMs were estimated using structural equation modeling (SEM) with the *lavaan* package in R.

Models were estimated using maximum likelihood estimation with full information maximum likelihood (FIML) to handle missing data. Missing values only occurred in variables not central to the primary hypotheses (perceived stress and personality traits). Prior to the main analyses, the data were screened for completeness and plausibility.

Model fit was evaluated using multiple fit indices, including the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Conventional cut-off values were used to evaluate model fit ($CFI/TLI \geq .90$, $RMSEA \leq .08$, $SRMR \leq .08$) (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Dyads were treated as distinguishable because partners differed on a theoretically meaningful characteristic (gender). Therefore, initial models were specified as unconstrained (asymmetric), allowing actor and partner effects to differ between the two partners. I also estimated constrained (symmetric) APIMs in which actor and partner effects were constrained to be equal across partners. Symmetric models therefore estimate a single actor effect and a single partner effect that apply equally to both partners.

I then compared constrained and unconstrained models using chi-square difference tests and did not find a significant worsening of model fit. Partners, therefore, did not differ

meaningfully in the strength of effects. Accordingly, symmetric models were used for interpretation, which were more parsimonious and allowed for increased statistical power.

Before estimating interaction and moderation effects, all continuous predictor variables were grand-mean centered to facilitate interpretation and to reduce multicollinearity.

For Hypotheses 1a and 1b, which examine the association between willpower beliefs and conflict resolution strategies, I estimated APIMs within a structural equation modeling framework.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b were tested using mediation models within the APIM framework to test whether conflict resolution styles mediated the relationship between willpower beliefs and relationship satisfaction. Indirect effects were computed using bootstrapping (5,000 draws).

To explore similarity effects, I included interaction terms between partners' willpower beliefs in the APIMs. To investigate similarity and discrepancy patterns in greater detail, polynomial regression models were estimated and interpreted using Response Surface Analysis (RSA). This analytic approach allows for the examination of linear and nonlinear effects along the line of congruence (LOC) and the line of incongruence (LOIC) and thereby tests whether outcomes are associated with similarity or with differences between partners.

To examine convergence effects, additional analyses tested whether relationship length moderated similarity in partners' willpower beliefs. Specifically, interaction terms between partners' willpower beliefs and relationship length were estimated using linear regression models. This approach was chosen because convergence was examined at the individual level and did not require the APIM framework.

Stress moderation effects were tested by including interaction terms between willpower beliefs and perceived stress in the APIMs at both the actor and partner level.

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations), intraclass correlations (ICCs), and zero-order correlations were computed for all variables of interest. Reliability analyses (Cronbach's alpha) were conducted for all scales but the BFI-10, as it has only two items per subscale. All inferential analyses used an alpha level of $p < .05$. Results were interpreted based on statistical significance, effect sizes, and model fit indices.

3.6 Preregistration and Power Analysis

Prior to data collection, the study was preregistered on AsPredicted on June 11, 2025 (<https://aspredicted.org/qbkw-g9zz.pdf>). The preregistration specified the research question, hypotheses, planned analyses, and exclusion criteria.

All main analyses were conducted in line with the preregistered plan. There was one deviation from the preregistered plan concerning the personality traits: Although personality

variables were assessed as preregistered, they were not included as control variables in the main analyses. This decision was made after the data showed strong correlations between personality traits, especially neuroticism, and core variables. Controlling for personality traits would therefore likely remove theoretically meaningful variance. Thus, personality traits were only examined descriptively and reported in the appendix.

An a priori power analysis was conducted prior to data collection using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009). Assuming a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.02$), $\alpha = .05$, and 80% power, approximately 485 individuals would be required for standard multiple regression analyses. Because of the dyadic nature of the present study and the use of APIMs with mediation and interaction effects, exact power estimation was not possible. A target sample of 200 couples (400 individuals) was chosen, which is consistent with common practice in dyadic relationship research.

4 Results

4.1 Preliminary Analyses

Before conducting the main analyses, several preliminary analyses were performed to prepare the dyadic dataset and to describe the study variables.

Factorial Validity

To examine the factorial validity of the main measurement instruments in the present sample, I conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs).

For implicit theories of willpower, a three-factor model consistent with the theoretical subdomains (strenuous mental activities, resisting temptations, and emotional control) showed suboptimal fit. A model allowing a small number of theoretically justified (e.g., similarly worded items) residual correlations improved model fit ($CFI = .92$, $RMSEA = .07$).

For conflict resolution strategies, confirmatory factor analysis supported the proposed four-factor structure of the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory with the four strategies: conflict engagement, positive problem solving, withdrawal, and compliance. The model showed excellent fit to the data ($CFI = .97$, $RMSEA = .04$).

For perceived stress, a two-factor model distinguishing perceived stress and perceived coping/self-efficacy showed good fit ($CFI = .96$, $RMSEA = .06$). Internal consistency of the total scale was high ($\alpha = .86$). Given the focus on overall stress levels, items were averaged to form a global perceived stress score.

Detailed CFA results are reported in Appendix Table C1. Standardized factor loadings for the willpower beliefs scale are reported in Table C2. Most items showed moderate to strong loadings on their factors. Some items, particularly within the resisting temptations subscale, exhibited comparatively weaker loadings. Given the focus of the present study on

global willpower beliefs and the use of an aggregated score, all items were retained.

Data Structure and Dyad Assignment

Because the present study used a dyadic analytical approach (APIM), the dataset was structured in a wide format so that both partners of each couple were represented within a single row.

Therefore, partners within each couple were assigned to the roles Partner A and Partner B. In all mixed-gender couples, women (Gender = 1) were assigned to Partner A and men (Gender = 2) to Partner B. For same-gender couples, partners were randomly assigned to A or B. For ease of interpretation in the following analyses, Partner A is referred to as women and Partner B as men, although Partner B also included a small number of women from same-gender couples.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive statistics, internal consistencies, intra-class correlations, and zero-order correlations are reported in Table 1. The correlation matrix includes the core constructs (implicit theories of willpower, conflict resolution strategies, and relationship satisfaction) and the moderator (perceived stress). Willpower theories showed moderate variability ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.65$), with higher scores indicating more limited beliefs. Positive problem solving was used relatively frequently ($M = 3.98$), whereas destructive and situational strategies were generally reported less often (CE: $M = 1.95$; WD: $M = 2.10$; CO: $M = 2.32$). Relationship satisfaction was high ($M = 5.98$), and perceived stress was moderate ($M = 2.57$).

Zero-order correlations showed systematic associations among the study variables. In this sample, more limited willpower beliefs were associated with greater use of conflict engagement ($r = .26$), less use of positive problem solving ($r = -.15$), lower relationship satisfaction ($r = -.18$), and higher perceived stress ($r = .41$). Positive problem solving correlated strongly and positively with relationship satisfaction ($r = .50$), whereas conflict engagement ($r = -.45$), withdrawal ($r = -.40$), and compliance ($r = -.23$) correlated negatively with satisfaction. For the APIM analyses, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance were combined into a composite index reflecting destructive conflict behavior, whereas positive problem solving was retained as a separate indicator of constructive conflict resolution. Personality traits were assessed but not included in the main analyses (see section 3.6). Descriptive correlations are reported in Appendix Table B2.

The ICCs indicated dyadic interdependence for relationship variables, particularly relationship satisfaction (ICC = .64), positive problem solving (ICC = .46), and conflict engagement (ICC = .50). Individual-difference constructs showed weaker interdependence (willpower theories: ICC = .19; stress: ICC = .23), indicating that partners share some

similarities in their motivational beliefs and stress experiences, though less strongly than for relational variables. The ICCs indicate that partners' scores are not statistically independent, supporting the use of the APIM.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations.

	M(SD)	α	ICC	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. WT	3.35(0.65)	.84	.20	--					
2. PPS	3.98(0.66)	.76	.46	-.15**	--				
3. CE	1.95(0.79)	.81	.50	.26***	-.38***	--			
4. WD	2.10(0.81)	.81	.16	.17***	-.44***	.42***	--		
5. CO	2.32(0.76)	.78	.01	-.07	-.26***	.05	.16**	--	
6. RS	5.98(0.90)	.92	.64	-.18***	.50***	-.45***	-.40***	-.23***	--
7. PS	2.57(0.62)	.86	.23	.41***	-.23***	.19***	.18***	0.02	-.22***

Note. WT= willpower theories, PPS = positive problem solving, CE = conflict engagement, WD = withdrawal, CO = compliance, RS = relationship satisfaction, PS = perceived stress. ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient (similarity between partners).

N = 404. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

4.2 Associations Between Willpower Theories and Conflict Resolution Strategies (H1)

To test the first hypothesis, I examined whether the willpower beliefs were associated with the conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, I hypothesized that limited beliefs would be related to more destructive strategies, whereas non-limited beliefs would be associated with greater use of positive problem solving. Two symmetric Actor–Partner Interdependence Models (APIMs) were estimated, predicting (a) destructive conflict strategies and (b) the constructive conflict strategy (positive problem solving) from individuals' and their partners' willpower theories.

Symmetric models constrain actor and partner effects to be equal across partners. Chi-square difference tests indicated that these constraints did not significantly worsen model fit compared to unconstrained models (all $ps > .13$), indicating that actor and partner effects did not differ systematically across partners. As described in the Data Analysis section (3.5), symmetric models were therefore used for all subsequent interpretations. All models showed excellent fit (e.g., CFI = 1.00, SRMR $\leq .02$).

The analysis revealed a significant positive actor effect of willpower theories on destructive conflict behavior ($b = .16$, $SE = .04$, $z = 3.78$, $p < .001$). Individuals with more limited willpower beliefs reported more use of destructive conflict strategies. The partner effect was not significant ($b = -.03$, $SE = .04$, $z = -0.79$, $p = .431$), indicating that individuals' destructive conflict behavior was not predicted by their partner's willpower beliefs. Partners' destructive behaviors were moderately correlated ($r = .46$, $p < .001$), indicating dyadic interdependence. Overall, the model accounted for approximately 3-4% of the variance in destructive conflict behavior. These results support Hypothesis 1a (actor effect), whereas Hypothesis 1b (partner effect) was not supported.

The symmetric APIM predicting constructive conflict strategies showed a significant negative actor effect of willpower theories ($b = -.16$, $SE = .05$, $z = -3.25$, $p = .001$). Individuals holding more limited willpower beliefs engaged in less positive problem solving during conflicts. The partner effect was again not significant ($b = .02$, $SE = .05$, $z = 0.39$, $p = .70$), indicating that a person's constructive conflict behavior was not affected by their partner's willpower belief. Detailed parameter estimates for the APIMs are reported in Appendix Table B1.

Partners' constructive strategies were moderately correlated ($r = .47$, $p < .001$). The model explained 2–3% of the variance in constructive conflict behavior. As with destructive strategies, these findings provide support for Hypothesis 1a but not for Hypothesis 1b.

4.3 Mediation of Relationship satisfaction via Conflict Resolution (H2)

In the next hypothesis, I tested whether willpower beliefs relate to relationship satisfaction, specifically if there is an indirect effect through conflict resolution strategies. To test this assumption, two mediation models were estimated within the APIM using two different mediators: a) destructive strategies (Table 2) and b) positive problem solving (Table 3). As in the previous analyses, I used symmetric models, which once more did not significantly worsen model fit compared to the unconstrained models.

In the first step of the analysis, willpower theories were used to predict the use of conflict resolution strategies (a-path). This path corresponds to Hypothesis 1 and therefore brought the same pattern of results, with significant actor effects but non-significant partner effects. More limited willpower beliefs were associated with greater use of destructive conflict strategies ($b = .16$, $p < .001$) and less positive problem solving ($b = .16$, $p < .001$).

Next, the b-path examined whether conflict resolution strategies predicted relationship satisfaction. Destructive strategies were negatively associated with satisfaction at both the actor ($b = -0.68$, $p < .001$) and the partner level ($b = -0.43$, $p < .001$). In contrast, positive problem solving was positively associated with satisfaction at the actor ($b = 0.55$, $p < .001$) and partner level ($b = 0.23$, $p < .001$).

The total effect of willpower theories on satisfaction (c-path) was statistically significant on the actor level ($b = -0.15$, $p = .009$), whereas the partner-level total effect was not significant. Regarding indirect effects, both mediation models showed a significant actor-level indirect effect (destructive strategies: $b = -0.11$, $p < .001$; positive problem solving: $b = -0.09$, $p = .002$). In contrast, partner-level indirect effects were non-significant in both models.

Table 2

Actor–Partner Interdependence Mediation Model Predicting Relationship Satisfaction via Destructive Conflict Strategies

Path	b	SE	z	p	95 % CI
Willpower → Destructive Conflict (Actor, a)	.16	.04	3.99	< .001	[.08, .23]
Willpower → Destructive Conflict (Partner, p)	−.03	.04	−0.80	.427	[−.11, .05]
Destructive Conflict → Satisfaction (Actor, b)	−.68	.08	−8.82	< .001	[−.83, −.53]
Destructive Conflict → Satisfaction (Partner, q)	−.43	.08	−5.13	< .001	[−.60, −.27]
Willpower → Satisfaction (Actor, c')	−.15	.06	−2.59	.009	[−.27, −.04]
Willpower → Satisfaction (Partner, c')	−.03	.05	−0.61	.545	[−.14, .07]
Indirect Effect (Actor: $a \times b$)	−.11	.03	−3.56	< .001	[−.17, −.05]
Indirect Effect (Partner: $p \times q$)	.01	.02	−0.81	.428	[−.02, .05]

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. Indirect effects were estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Actor and partner paths were constrained to equality across partners (symmetric model).

In summary, both destructive and constructive strategies statistically mediate the association between willpower beliefs and relationship satisfaction on the actor level, supporting Hypothesis 2a. On the partner level no significant indirect effects were found, providing no support for Hypothesis 2b.

Table 3

Actor–Partner Interdependence Mediation Model Predicting Relationship Satisfaction via Positive Problem Solving

Path	b	SE	z	p	95 % CI
Willpower → Constructive Conflict (Actor, a)	−.16	.05	−3.29	< .001	[−.26; −.07]
Willpower → Constructive Conflict (Partner, p)	.02	.05	0.41	.679	[−.07; .11]
Constructive Conflict → Satisfaction (Actor, b)	.55	.07	8.43	< .001	[.42; .67]
Constructive Conflict → Satisfaction (Partner, q)	.23	.05	4.33	< .001	[.13; .33]
Willpower → Satisfaction (Actor, c')	−.16	.06	−2.50	.013	[−.28; −.04]
Willpower → Satisfaction (Partner, c')	−.04	.05	−0.82	.412	[−.15; .06]
Indirect Effect (Actor: a × b)	−.09	.03	−3.07	.002	[−.15, −.04]
Indirect Effect (Partner: p × q)	.004	.01	0.40	.69	[−.02, .03]

Note. Standardized coefficients are reported. Indirect effects were estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Actor and partner paths were constrained to equality across partners (symmetric model).

4.4 Similarity and Discrepancy Effects (Response Surface Analysis)

Does similarity in willpower beliefs have an effect on the way couples manage conflict? To address this question, I estimated two symmetric APIMs predicting a) destructive conflict strategies and b) positive problem solving from individuals' and their partners' willpower theories. To test whether similarity in willpower beliefs was associated with conflict resolution, an interaction term between both partners' willpower beliefs was included. This interaction term was statistically significant in the destructive conflict model ($b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .035$) (Figure 1) but did not reach significance in the constructive model ($b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.034$, $p = .08$).

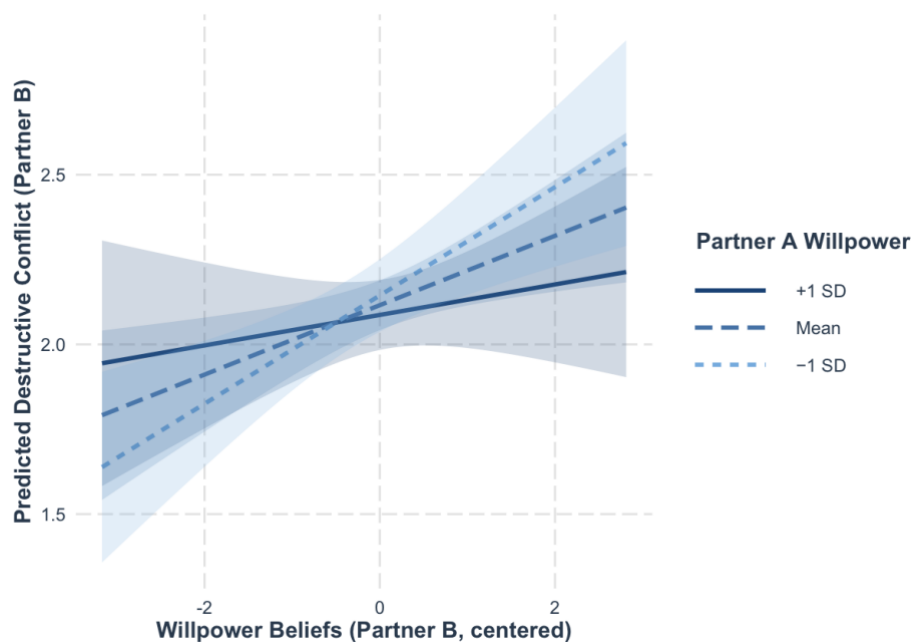
To further examine the nature of this interaction, response surface analysis (RSA) was conducted. RSA allows testing whether similarity (line of congruence; LOC) or dissimilarity (line of incongruence; LOIC) in partners' willpower beliefs are associated with conflict resolution strategies, including potential linear and nonlinear effects.

For destructive conflict strategies, RSA results differed depending on the partner. When destructive conflict behavior of Partner A (women) was examined as the outcome, no

significant effects emerged along either the line of congruence or the line of incongruence. The linear slope along the LOC was not significant, $F(1, 196) = 0.49, p = .484$, nor was the curvature along the LOC, $F(1, 196) = 1.54, p = .216$. Similarly, neither the linear slope along the LOIC, $F(1, 196) = 2.56, p = .111$, nor the curvature along the LOIC, $F(1, 196) = 2.01, p = .158$, reached statistical significance.

Figure 1

Interaction Between Partners' Willpower Beliefs Predicting Destructive Conflict Behavior (Men)



Note. Willpower beliefs were grand-mean centered and standardized.

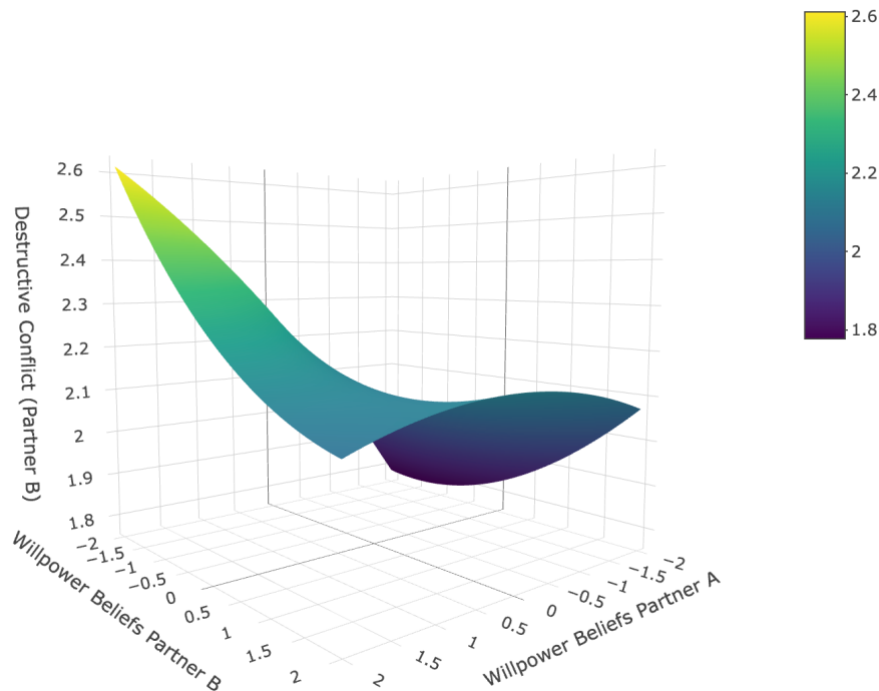
Lines represent predicted values at -1 SD, mean, and $+1$ SD of the partner's willpower beliefs. Higher values indicate more limited willpower beliefs.

For destructive conflict behavior of Partner B (men), no significant effects were observed along the line of congruence, both for the linear slope, $F(1, 196) = 2.16, p = .144$, and for the curvature, $F(1, 196) = 1.15, p = .284$. Along the line of incongruence, however, the linear slope was statistically significant, $F(1, 196) = 5.23, p = .023$, whereas the curvature was not, $F(1, 196) = 0.75, p = .389$. This pattern indicates that discrepancies between partners' willpower beliefs were linearly associated with men's destructive conflict behavior, whereas similarity per se was not related to destructive conflict strategies. Figure 2 illustrates this pattern, which indicates that discrepancies between partners' willpower beliefs were linearly associated with men's destructive conflict behavior. Inspection of the response surface indicates that the highest levels of destructive conflict behavior were observed when men held more non-limited willpower beliefs while their partners endorsed more limited

beliefs.

Figure 2

Response Surface illustrating the Association between Partners' Willpower Beliefs and Destructive Conflict Behavior in Men (Partner B).



Note. Both predictors were grand-mean centered. The colors represent the predicted levels of destructive conflict behavior, with darker colors indicating lower levels and lighter colors indicating higher levels of destructive conflict.

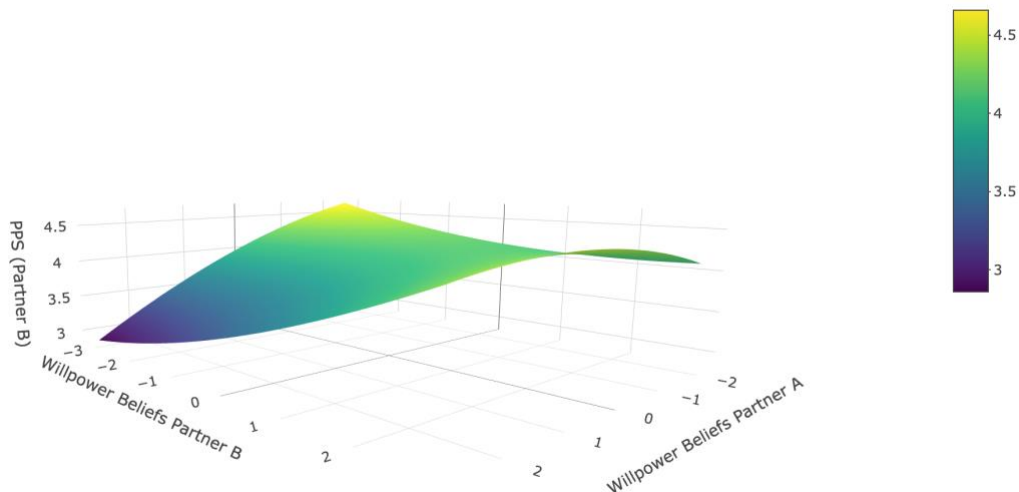
For positive problem solving the same pattern emerged. When Partner A (women) was examined as the outcome, RSA again revealed no significant effects along the line of congruence (linear slope: $F(1, 196) = 1.38, p = .241$; curvature: $F(1, 196) = 2.32, p = .130$). Effects also did not reach significance along the line of incongruence (linear slope: $F(1, 196) = 0.13, p = .719$; curvature: $F(1, 196) = 0.25, p = .619$).

For Partner B (men), no significant effects emerged along the line of congruence for either the linear slope, $F(1, 196) = 0.77, p = .383$, or the curvature, $F(1, 196) = 2.55, p = .112$. In contrast, there again was a significant linear effect along the line of incongruence, $F(1, 196) = 11.89, p < .001$, while the curvature along the LOIC was non-significant, $F(1, 196) = 0.57, p = .451$. This indicates that discrepancies between partners' willpower beliefs were associated with men's use of positive problem solving in a linear manner, whereas similarity and nonlinear discrepancy effects were not observed. Specifically, lower levels of positive problem solving were observed when men endorsed more non-limited beliefs while their

partners reported more limited beliefs (Figure 3). Thus, the same constellation was associated with both higher destructive behavior and lower levels of positive problem solving among men.

Figure 3

Response Surface illustrating the Association between Partners' Willpower Beliefs and Positive Problem Solving in Men (Partner B).



Note. Both predictors were grand-mean centered. The colors represent the predicted levels of positive problem solving with darker colors indicating lower levels and lighter colors indicating higher levels of constructive conflict.

Overall, no significant effects were observed along the line of congruence for either destructive or constructive conflict strategies. Instead, linear effects of dissimilarity emerged only for men, indicating that discrepancies between partners' willpower beliefs were associated with higher destructive conflict behavior and lower positive problem solving among men. No similarity or discrepancy effects were observed for women.

To test whether partners' willpower beliefs converge over time (convergence hypotheses), a moderation analysis was conducted. Partners' willpower beliefs were moderately correlated ($b = -0.004$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(198) = -0.79$, $p = .43$), indicating no evidence that similarity in willpower beliefs increased with longer relationship duration. Independent of relationship duration, Partner A's willpower beliefs were positively associated with Partner B's beliefs ($b = 0.19$, $p = .005$).

4.5 Stress as a Moderator of Willpower Beliefs and Conflict Behavior

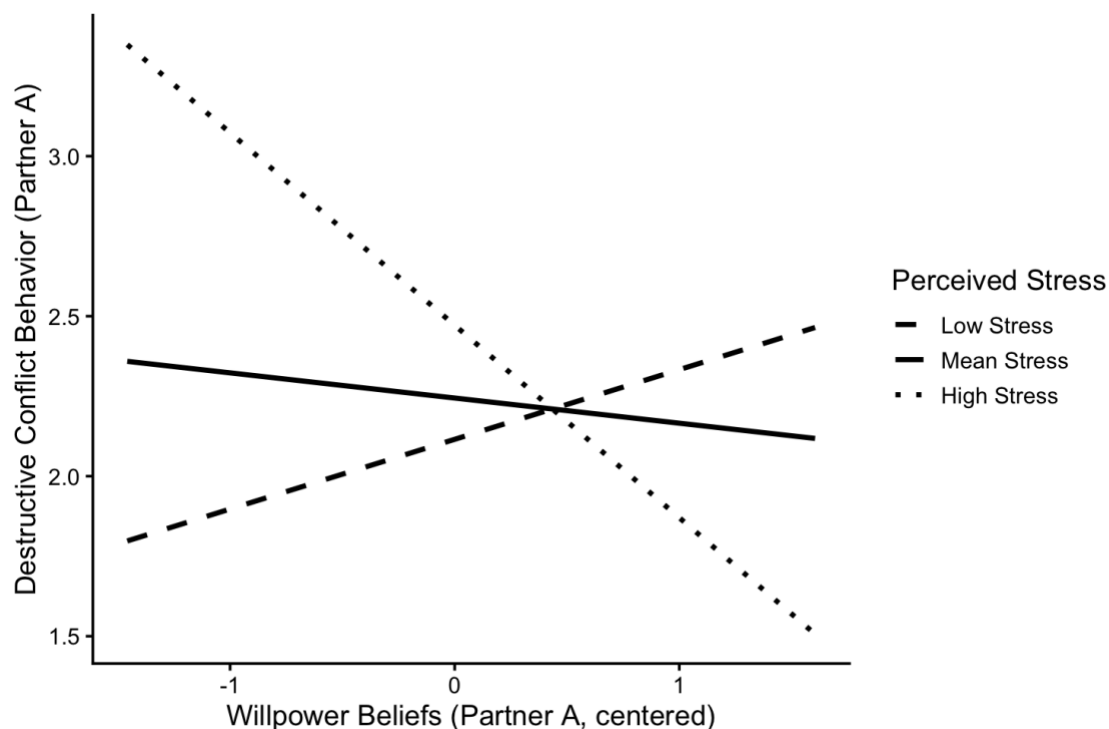
Are there other external factors—such as stress—that relate to willpower theories and conflict resolution? To test if stress moderates the association between willpower theories

and conflict resolution, again two APIMs, including interaction terms, were estimated for (a) destructive and (b) constructive strategies.

The interaction terms were non-significant on the partner level for both models and for both partners (destructive strategy: $b = -0.02$, $p = .592$; constructive strategy: $b = 0.06$, $p = .245$). On the actor level, the interaction between willpower beliefs and perceived stress was significant when predicting destructive conflict behavior of partner A (women, $b = -0.16$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .004$; see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Interaction Between Willpower Beliefs and Perceived Stress Predicting Destructive Conflict Behavior (Women)



Note. The plot displays the actor effect for Partner A (women).

Willpower beliefs and perceived stress were grand-mean centered.

Lines represent simple slopes of willpower beliefs at low (-1 SD), mean, and high ($+1$ SD) levels of perceived stress.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the interaction followed a cross-over pattern. Under low levels of perceived stress, the association between willpower beliefs and destructive conflict behavior mirrored the general actor effect: women holding more limited willpower beliefs reported higher levels of destructive conflict behavior, whereas women with more non-limited beliefs reported lower levels. However, under high perceived stress, this pattern reversed. Women with more non-limited willpower beliefs exhibited higher levels of destructive conflict

behavior compared to those with more limited beliefs. The lines intersect around the mean level of willpower beliefs, indicating a reversal of the association depending on the stress level.

The interaction was non-significant for partner B (men, $b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .371$). In the second model predicting the constructive strategy, both interaction terms were non-significant (partner A: $b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .165$; partner B: $b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .650$). Thus, moderation effects emerged only for destructive conflict behavior and only at the actor level for women.

4.6 Exploratory Analyses

In addition to the confirmatory hypothesis tests, several exploratory analyses were conducted to further describe associations between the study variables and to examine more fine-grained patterns within the data.

Willpower subdimensions

Zero-order correlations were computed for the three subdimensions of implicit theories of willpower. Beliefs about strenuous mental activities showed only small and non-significant correlations with destructive conflict behavior ($r = .07$, $p = .28$), positive problem solving ($r = -.07$, $p = .18$), and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.10$, $p = .06$), but were moderately correlated with perceived stress ($r = .36$, $p < .001$). Beliefs about resisting temptations were positively correlated with destructive conflict behavior ($r = .17$, $p = .004$) and perceived stress ($r = .21$, $p < .001$), and negatively correlated with positive problem solving ($r = -.14$, $p = .025$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.18$, $p = .003$). Beliefs about emotional control showed comparatively larger correlations with conflict-related outcomes, including positive correlations with destructive conflict behavior ($r = .18$, $p = .002$) and perceived stress ($r = .37$, $p < .001$), as well as negative correlations with positive problem solving ($r = -.16$, $p = .008$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.16$, $p = .002$).

To further examine whether these subdimensions differentially predict conflict behavior and relationship satisfaction, the main APIM and mediation models (H1 and H2) were again estimated separately for each subscale.

When predicting destructive conflict behavior, the strenuous mental effort subscale did not show significant actor effects ($b = .04$, $p = .113$). In contrast, both resisting temptations ($b = .12$, $p < .001$) and emotional control ($b = .11$, $p < .001$) showed significant positive actor effects, indicating that more limited beliefs in these domains were associated with greater destructive conflict behavior. No partner effects emerged for each subscale.

A similar pattern was observed for the constructive conflict strategy positive problem solving. The strenuous effort subscale did not significantly predict positive problem solving (b

= $-.05$, $p = .137$). However, resisting temptations ($b = -.12$, $p = .004$) and emotional control ($b = -.12$, $p = .001$) showed significant negative actor effects, indicating that more limited beliefs in these two domains were associated with less constructive conflict behavior. Again, no partner effects were observed.

The mediation models further revealed that the subdimensions differed in their indirect associations with relationship satisfaction. For the strenuous mental effort subscale, the indirect effects via both destructive and constructive conflict behavior were non-significant (all $ps > .14$), although small direct actor effects on satisfaction remained ($b = -.07$, $p = .04$). In contrast, resisting temptations showed significant actor-level indirect effects via destructive conflict ($b = -.08$, $p = .002$) and via constructive conflict behavior ($b = -.07$, $p = .004$). Similarly, emotional control exhibited significant actor-level indirect effects through destructive ($b = -.08$, $p < .001$) and constructive conflict behavior ($b = -.07$, $p = .002$). For emotional control, the total direct effect on satisfaction was not statistically significant ($b = -.07$, $p = .092$), suggesting that its association with satisfaction operated primarily through conflict behavior. No partner-level indirect effects were observed for any subscale.

Overall, these exploratory analyses indicate that the associations between willpower beliefs and conflict-related outcomes were primarily driven by the subdimensions resisting temptations and emotional control, whereas beliefs about strenuous mental activities showed little relevance in the interpersonal conflict context.

Individual conflict resolution strategies

When individual conflict resolution strategies were examined separately, conflict engagement and withdrawal showed a strong positive association ($r = .42$, $p < .001$), indicating that escalation and avoidance tend to co-occur rather than represent opposing styles. Compliance, by contrast, showed weaker and inconsistent associations with willpower beliefs, perceived stress, and relationship satisfaction. This pattern supports the decision to aggregate conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance into a composite index of maladaptive conflict strategies for the main analyses.

Partner differences

I used paired-samples t -tests to examine mean differences between partners. Women reported significantly more limited willpower beliefs than men, $t(201) = 6.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.45], with a mean difference of 0.34 scale points. Women also reported significantly higher levels of perceived stress compared to men, $t(198) = 4.60$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.35], with a mean difference of 0.24. No significant partner differences were found for destructive conflict behavior, $t(201) = 0.93$, $p = .35$, or for positive problem solving, $t(201) = -0.61$, $p = .54$.

5 Discussion

5.1 Summary of Results

This study was the first to examine implicit theories of willpower in the context of relationship conflict. The main goal was to investigate if individuals' willpower beliefs relate to conflict resolution strategies and relationship satisfaction in romantic couples and whether these associations extend to the partner level. Furthermore, the study explored whether similarity or discrepancy in partners' willpower beliefs, as well as perceived stress, shape conflict behavior.

Descriptive findings show that the sample consisted largely of relatively satisfied couples who reported comparatively low levels of destructive conflict strategies. This suggests that the observed associations emerged within a generally well-functioning relational context. The restricted range in conflict severity may have attenuated effect sizes and may limit generalizability to more distressed populations.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, willpower beliefs were systematically associated with conflict resolution strategies at the actor level. Individuals who more strongly endorsed limited willpower reported more destructive conflict strategies, whereas individuals with more non-limited beliefs reported greater use of positive problem solving. There were no significant partner effects, indicating that an individual's conflict behavior was primarily related to their own beliefs rather than their partner's beliefs.

In line with hypothesis 2, conflict resolution strategies mediated the association between willpower beliefs and relationship satisfaction at the actor level. More limited willpower beliefs were therefore indirectly related to lower relationship satisfaction through increased use of destructive conflict resolution strategies and reduced use of positive problem solving. No indirect effects were found at the partner level, which suggests that relationship satisfaction also appears to be influenced primarily by individuals' own regulatory behavior rather than by their partner's underlying motivational beliefs.

There was no evidence that similarity in willpower beliefs per se was associated with conflict behavior. Instead, discrepancy effects emerged for men. In the present sample, men reported more destructive strategies and less positive problem solving when their willpower beliefs differed from those of their partners, specifically in constellations where men endorsed more non-limited beliefs while their partners held more limited beliefs. This suggests that belief mismatches may create tension around effort expectations during conflict interactions.

Finally, perceived stress emerges as a gender-specific moderator. For women, the association between willpower beliefs and destructive conflict behavior depended on stress level: under low stress, more limited willpower beliefs were associated with more destructive conflict behavior, whereas under high stress this association reversed. This pattern

underscores that the interpersonal consequences of willpower beliefs are context-dependent and may vary depending on situational strain.

Exploratory analyses further suggest that beliefs about emotional control and resisting temptations were especially relevant for conflict-related outcomes, indicating that not all facets of willpower beliefs are equally important in interpersonal conflict. Interestingly, women, on average, had higher stress levels and more often endorsed a limited theory of willpower. This pattern may help contextualize the observed gender-specific moderation effects and highlights the potential interplay between regulatory beliefs and experienced strain. These findings are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

5.2 Willpower Beliefs and Conflict Regulation in Romantic Relationships

The present study showed that individuals' willpower beliefs were systematically associated with their own conflict resolution strategies. More limited beliefs were related to greater use of destructive strategies and less positive problem solving, whereas no partner effects were observed.

These findings are consistent with research on implicit theories of willpower, which suggest that individuals who view self-control as a limited resource may disengage more quickly from effortful regulation in demanding situations (Job et al., 2010; Bernecker et al., 2017). Interpersonal conflict represents a situation that requires sustained self-regulation, including emotion regulation, impulse control, and sustained cognitive effort (Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Vater & Schröder-Abé, 2015). The present results extend this work by showing that such beliefs are not only relevant for individual performances but also shape how individuals manage interpersonal behavior during conflict situations.

Importantly, the present findings demonstrate that different conflict resolution strategies vary in their self-regulatory requirements. Individuals who endorsed more limited willpower beliefs reported greater use of destructive conflict strategies and less positive problem solving. Constructive strategies such as problem solving involve calm communication, goal-directed cooperation, and perspective-taking, all of which require self-control (Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Vater & Schröder-Abé, 2015). The observed association between limited beliefs and destructive strategies therefore suggests that when regulatory demands are perceived as too much, individuals are more likely to disengage or resign from conflict or respond reactively through escalation. In contrast, individuals holding more non-limited beliefs appear to perceive effortful regulation as manageable or energizing and persist in constructive conflict behaviors. Taken together, these results suggest that willpower beliefs operate as an internal self-regulatory framework that shapes how individuals approach interpersonal conflict and how they decide whether to invest, sustain, or withdraw effort.

The absence of partner effects suggests that willpower beliefs are primarily intrapersonal cognitions, guiding individuals' own regulatory behavior rather than directly shaping their partner's conflict responses. Partner effects may be more likely to emerge for observable interaction patterns rather than for internal cognitions, which may help explain why no partner effects emerged for willpower beliefs.

Overall, these findings indicate that willpower beliefs are relevant for understanding how individuals manage conflict within their relationships. They also raise the question of whether conflict resolution strategies represent a mechanism through which willpower beliefs relate to broader relationship outcomes, like relationship satisfaction. This possibility is addressed in the next section.

5.3 Conflict Behavior as a Pathway to Relationship Satisfaction

The results extend previous research by demonstrating that individuals' willpower beliefs are not only associated with how they manage conflict but also with how satisfied they are in their romantic relationships. Consistent with hypothesis 2a, the association between willpower beliefs and relationship satisfaction was mediated by individuals' own conflict resolution strategies. In contrast, no indirect effects emerged at the partner level, providing no support for hypothesis 2b.

In the present study, individuals with more limited willpower beliefs reported greater use of destructive conflict strategies and less problem solving, which in turn were strongly associated with lower satisfaction. This suggests that individuals who perceive their self-control resources as limited experience conflict as particularly draining, leading to escalation, withdrawal, or disengagement, which in turn undermines relationship satisfaction. Conversely, individuals with a non-limited theory were more willing to invest sustained effort into constructive conflict management, thereby fostering more positive experiences. This pattern supports the theoretical assumption that beliefs about self-regulatory capacity shape relationship outcomes indirectly by influencing how individuals behave in emotionally demanding interpersonal situations.

These findings are in line with extensive relationship research highlighting conflict behavior as one of the most robust predictors of relationship satisfaction (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Kurdek, 1994; Overall & McNulty, 2017). Importantly, the present study adds a motivational perspective by showing that cognitive beliefs about willpower may influence relationship satisfaction primarily by shaping how individuals regulate themselves during conflict situations. Building on Francis et al. (2024), who demonstrated direct associations between willpower beliefs and relationship satisfaction, the present study extends these findings by identifying conflict resolution strategies as a behavioral mechanism underlying this link.

Notably, conflict resolution strategies showed substantially stronger associations with relationship satisfaction than willpower beliefs themselves, particularly at the partner level. Both destructive conflict strategies and positive problem solving exhibited highly significant effects on partner satisfaction, whereas willpower beliefs showed neither direct partner effects nor indirect effects via conflict behavior on partners' satisfaction. This absence of partner effects for willpower beliefs on satisfaction is consistent with prior research (Francis et al., 2024). Together, these findings indicate that although conflict behavior strongly predicts partners' satisfaction, individuals' willpower beliefs do not appear to influence their partners' satisfaction either directly or indirectly through conflict behavior. This pattern underscores the idea that observable interpersonal behaviors function as more proximal predictors of relationship outcomes than underlying motivational beliefs, especially when considering partner effects.

Importantly, relationship satisfaction is likely influenced by a wide range of factors beyond a single pathway. Prior research suggests that willpower beliefs are also associated with broader indicators. According to Bernecker et al. (2017), individuals holding more limited willpower beliefs experience higher negative affect and lower overall well-being. From this perspective, limited willpower beliefs may influence relationship satisfaction not only through conflict behavior but also by shaping individuals' general emotional experiences and evaluations of their relationship.

Taken together, the mediation results refine prior work linking willpower beliefs to relationship satisfaction by clarifying *how* these beliefs translate into relational outcomes. At the same time, conflict behavior is unlikely to be the only pathway through which willpower beliefs influence relationship outcomes. As suggested by prior work (Francis et al., 2024), other interpersonal processes such as support provision, emotional regulation, or coping with daily stressors may also play an important role and should be considered for further investigation.

5.4 Discrepancy Effects: When Beliefs mismatch

The present study explored if similarity or discrepancy in partners' willpower beliefs are associated with how couples manage conflict. Initial APIM analyses revealed a significant interaction term between partners' willpower beliefs when predicting destructive conflict behavior. The association between one partner's beliefs and conflict behavior therefore depended on the beliefs held by the other partner. This interaction provided the basis for more detailed analyses using response surface analysis (RSA), which allowed inspecting effects of similarity and discrepancy that could not be captured by interaction terms alone.

Contrary to the initial idea that higher similarity would be related to more constructive and less destructive conflict behavior, the RSA did not provide evidence for similarity effects

per se. Couples with similar willpower beliefs (both limited or both non-limited) did not systematically differ in their conflict behavior from less similar couples. Although visual inspection of the response surfaces suggested potential trends toward lower destructive and higher constructive conflict behavior at points of similarity, these patterns were not statistically supported and should therefore not be interpreted as evidence for similarity effects. These findings are in line with Francis et al. (2024), who also did not find robust effects of similarity.

Instead, the results point to the relevance of discrepancy rather than similarity, and these effects were found exclusively for men. Greater discrepancies between partners' willpower beliefs were associated with both higher destructive conflict behavior and lower use of positive problem solving among men. Importantly, the response surface patterns indicated that the most difficulties emerged in a specific combination: men holding non-limited willpower beliefs paired with partners holding more limited beliefs. In this constellation, men showed the highest levels of destructive conflict behavior and the lowest levels of constructive problem solving. This asymmetric pattern suggests that it is not discrepancy per se that is problematic, but rather particular combinations of beliefs that may create especially challenging interaction dynamics.

One possible interpretation is that mismatched willpower beliefs create uncertainty about appropriate effort investment during conflict. Partners may implicitly disagree about how much persistence, emotional control, or engagement is reasonable in a conflict situation. Such uncertainty may be particularly problematic when it coincides with moralized beliefs about effort. Individuals holding non-limited willpower beliefs may not only struggle to judge how much effort is appropriate but may also view persistence as a normative standard, interpreting a partner's disengagement as weakness. This combination of effort uncertainty and moralized expectations may heighten frustration and increase the likelihood of dysregulated, destructive responses during conflict.

Closely related to this interpretation, and consistent with Francis et al. (2024), belief discrepancies may also shape how partners respond to each other's strain. Men holding non-limited willpower beliefs may underestimate their partner's experienced strain and therefore provide less emotional or instrumental support. If non-limited individuals assume that effort can always be mobilized, they may have difficulty recognizing when their partner experiences regulatory depletion. Such a mismatch could reduce supportive responses and increase frustration during conflict interactions.

Both mechanisms align with Francis et al. (2024), who proposed that mismatches in willpower beliefs may generate misunderstandings about effort allocation and self-regulatory capacity within relationships and influence the provision of support. While their study focused on relationship satisfaction, the present study extends this idea by demonstrating how such

mismatches are reflected in concrete conflict behavior. In mismatched couples, partners may misinterpret each other's behavior: the non-limited partner may perceive withdrawal as lack of commitment or insufficient effort, while the limited partner may experience continued engagement as pressure or overexertion.

A social role perspective (Eagly & Wood, 2012) may help explain why these discrepancy effects emerge primarily for men. Social role theory proposes that gender differences emerge from the distribution of women and men into distinct social roles. Men are often more socialized to enact agentic roles characterized by assertiveness, performance, and persistence under pressure. These norms may foster an expectation that effort should be sustained and reciprocated during conflict. When paired with a partner who signals regulatory limits, this may not necessarily violate gender expectations but rather reciprocity expectations concerning engagement. If men therefore continue to invest effort while their partner disengages earlier, this asymmetry may elicit frustration and escalate conflict responses. Women's conflict behavior, by contrast, may be shaped more strongly by communal norms emphasizing relational harmony and emotion regulation, which could make it less directly contingent on discrepancies in effort-related beliefs. In this sense, social role expectations may reinforce underlying differences in effort-related beliefs and intensify their behavioral consequences.

Finally, following Francis et al. (2024), this study tested the idea that similarity is not just a predictor but also an outcome of relationship duration. In line with Francis et al., there was no evidence that partners' beliefs converge over time. Although partners' willpower beliefs were moderately correlated, relationship duration did not moderate this association. This pattern is consistent with previous research suggesting that convergence in beliefs within romantic relationships is typically modest and similarities rather reflect selection processes (Luo, 2017). Together, these findings indicate that willpower beliefs function as a relatively stable individual difference that is not easily reshaped over the course of a relationship.

Overall, similarity per se did not predict how couples manage conflict. This result aligns with previous research, showing that similarity effects are often small and context-dependent, particularly for motivational and self-regulatory traits (Vohs et al., 2011; Weidmann et al., 2017). Instead, specific forms of discrepancy, particularly involving non-limited men paired with limited women, are associated with less adaptive conflict resolution. Together, these findings extend prior research by demonstrating how mismatched motivational beliefs translate into concrete conflict behavior.

5.5 Stress as Contextual Boundary Condition

The present study explored whether perceived stress moderates the association

between willpower beliefs and conflict resolution strategies. Overall, stress moderation effects were limited and emerged only for destructive strategies at the actor level for women. There were no moderation effects for men, for constructive conflict behavior, or at the partner level. Thus, perceived stress did not generally heighten or weaken the effects of willpower beliefs across all outcomes but rather appeared to operate in a context- and gender-specific manner.

Interestingly, the stress moderation followed a cross-over partner rather than a simple amplification of effects. Under low stress, the association between willpower beliefs and destructive conflict behavior mirrored the general pattern observed in the main analyses: women with more limited willpower beliefs reported higher levels of destructive conflict behavior, whereas women with more non-limited beliefs reported lower levels. This pattern aligns with prior research showing that non-limited beliefs relate to more self-regulation and greater persistence when demands are manageable (Job et al., 2010).

However, under high perceived stress, this association reversed. Women holding more non-limited willpower beliefs now show higher use of destructive conflict strategies. In contrast, women with limited beliefs exhibited comparatively lower levels of destructive conflict behavior when stress was high. At first glance, this finding appears to contrast with earlier work, which demonstrated that non-limited willpower beliefs predict better self-regulation under conditions of heightened stress and self-regulatory demand (Job et al., 2010). Importantly however, Job et al. explicitly emphasized that non-limited beliefs may not be universally adaptive and may not promote better regulation across all contexts. The present findings extend this perspective by highlighting the importance of interpersonal contexts and suggest that in emotionally stressful conditions, non-limited beliefs may lose their protective function.

One possible explanation could be that willpower beliefs do not only shape momentary effort allocation but also reflect learned regulatory strategies that develop over time. Individuals who hold a limited theory of willpower may have learned to monitor and distribute their resources more conservatively, anticipating exhaustion and adjusting their engagement accordingly. Under high stress, this expectation of limited resources may promote earlier disengagement, de-escalation, or avoidance of prolonged confrontation, thereby reducing overall levels of destructive conflict behavior. In this sense, limited beliefs may function as a psychological “brake” that promotes earlier limits to effort investment and prevents excessive self-regulatory demands during periods of overload.

In contrast, individuals with a non-limited theory may be more likely to persist and invest effort even when emotional and cognitive resources are already strained. This interpretation is consistent with experimental work by Job et al. (2010), showing that individuals with non-limited willpower beliefs do not interpret feelings of exhaustion as a

signal to reduce effort. While this tendency can be adaptive, it may become maladaptive in emotionally charged interpersonal situations. Under this stress, continued engagement may result in overextension. Importantly, such overload does not necessarily manifest only as escalation but also includes withdrawal and compliance. Thus, heightened stress may increase regulatory instability, leading to both escalation and abrupt disengagement when continued effort becomes unmanageable.

The gender-specific nature of this effect may again reflect broader social and relational expectations. Women are often socialized to take primary responsibility for emotional regulation, relational maintenance, and conflict management within intimate relationships (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Neff & Karney, 2007). These expectations are embedded in everyday life and coexist within substantial external demands, including work, caregiving, and household responsibilities, which may contribute to higher average levels of perceived stress among women. Non-limited willpower beliefs may intensify internalized expectations to remain emotionally engaged and to “work through” conflict regardless of strain. Under high stress, this sustained engagement may increase the risk of overload and dysregulated conflict behavior.

Taken together, these findings highlight the context-dependent nature of willpower beliefs. While non-limited beliefs appear adaptive under manageable conditions, they may become counterproductive when stress levels and role demands are high. Conversely, limited beliefs, which are often conceptualized as disadvantageous, may have short-term regulatory benefits in highly stressful contexts by promoting more conservative effort allocation. Future research should further examine how stress levels shape the interpersonal consequences of willpower beliefs and whether similar reversal patterns emerge in other emotionally demanding relational contexts.

5.6 Exploratory

In addition to the preregistered hypotheses, several exploratory analyses provided further insight into the structure of willpower beliefs, conflict behavior, and partner similarities. These findings are interpreted cautiously and are intended to generate directions for future research rather than confirm specific predictions.

Exploratory correlations suggested that the emotional control subdimension of willpower beliefs was most strongly associated with conflict-related outcomes. Beliefs about emotional control showed the largest correlations with destructive conflict behavior, positive problem solving and perceived stress. In contrast, beliefs about strenuous mental activities were only weakly related to conflict outcomes but showed moderate associations with stress.

To examine these differences more closely, the main APIM and mediation models were re-estimated separately for each willpower subdimensions. These analyses revealed a

differentiated pattern. Most notably, beliefs about resisting temptations and emotional control consistently predicted conflict behavior at the actor level, whereas beliefs about strenuous mental activities did not. Both emotional control and temptation-related beliefs showed significant associations with destructive conflict behavior and reduced positive problem solving, and both exhibited significant indirect effects on relationship satisfaction via conflict strategies. In contrast, the mental effort subscale showed neither consistent actor effects nor significant indirect effects.

This pattern is theoretically plausible, given that conflict situations in romantic relationships are highly emotional and require regulation of anger, frustration, and defensiveness (Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Overall & McNulty, 2017). The emotional control subdimension directly captures beliefs about the sustainability of emotion regulation under strain. This is illustrated by items such as *“You can’t really suppress strong emotions for long. After a while, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep them under control.”* Individuals who endorse such beliefs may expect emotional regulation to break down over time, particularly in prolonged or intense conflicts, which may increase the likelihood of escalation or withdrawal. Similarly, beliefs about resisting temptations may reflect individuals’ perceived capacity to inhibit impulsive reactions during emotionally provocative exchanges. In contrast, beliefs about mental effort appear less relevant and may be more predictive in performance-oriented or cognitive domains (Job et al., 2010).

Importantly, for emotional control, the total direct effect on relationship satisfaction was not consistently significant, whereas indirect effects via conflict behavior were robust. This suggests that the interpersonal consequences of emotional control beliefs operate primarily through behavioral pathways rather than through generalized relationship evaluations.

Overall, these findings suggest that not all facets of willpower beliefs are equally relevant in romantic relationships. Rather, beliefs concerning emotion regulation and impulse control appear to drive observed associations with conflict behavior and satisfaction.

When conflict strategies were examined separately, conflict engagement and withdrawal were strongly positively correlated, indicating that individuals who frequently escalate conflicts also tend to disengage or avoid conflict at other times. This pattern supports the decision to combine maladaptive strategies into a single destructive conflict composite and aligns with prior work suggesting that escalation and withdrawal often co-occur as part of dysregulated conflict cycles (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Overall et al., 2013).

All maladaptive strategies were strongly negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas their associations with willpower beliefs were comparatively weaker. This again highlights that observable conflict behavior is more proximally related to relationship satisfaction than underlying motivational beliefs, a pattern that is consistent with

the mediation results and broader relationship research (Kurdek, 1994; Gordon & Chen, 2016).

Interestingly, compliance showed no meaningful association with willpower beliefs or perceived stress. Compliance may reflect situational accommodation or relational power dynamics rather than self-regulatory capacity per se, which could explain its weaker links to motivational beliefs.

Exploratory partner comparisons revealed that women reported more limited willpower beliefs and higher levels of perceived stress than men, whereas no gender differences emerged for destructive conflict behavior or positive problem solving. The absence of differences in conflict strategies suggests that partners behave similarly during conflict, consistent with dyadic interdependence and shared interaction patterns.

Higher stress and more limited beliefs among women may reflect broader societal and relational expectations, including disproportionate emotional labor and role demands (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Neff & Karney, 2007). Social role theory proposes that women are often more involved in caregiving and relational coordination roles and are more often expected to maintain relational harmony and manage emotional climate. These particular responsibilities require sustained emotional regulation and may increase chronic regulatory demands and subjective strain.

Over time, repeated experiences of emotional strain could contribute to the development of more limited beliefs about their self-control capacity. If women repeatedly experience situations in which emotion regulation feels effortful or depleting, they may increasingly endorse the belief that willpower is limited.

At the same time, the reverse pathway is equally plausible. If women already hold more limited beliefs about willpower, they may perceive demanding situations as more exhausting and experience stress more intensely. From this perspective, limited beliefs may heighten perceived stress rather than result from it. Given the cross-sectional design of the present study, causality cannot be determined. Longitudinal research is needed to clarify whether stress shapes willpower beliefs, whether beliefs shape stress, or whether both processes operate in a reciprocal manner.

The lack of behavioral differences in conflict strategies suggests that couples may either select partners with similar conflict styles or adapt to each other over time. Although the present data did not provide evidence for convergence in willpower beliefs, future longitudinal research could further examine whether convergence occurs at the level of conflict behavior rather than underlying beliefs.

Taken together, the exploratory findings complement the main analyses by highlighting the central role of beliefs about emotional control and resisting temptation, the close coupling of escalation and withdrawal, and the strong link between conflict behavior

and relationship satisfaction. While these patterns should be interpreted cautiously, they point to promising avenues for future research on the interpersonal consequences of motivational beliefs in romantic relationships.

5.7 Implications

The findings of the present study contribute to the theoretical understanding of self-regulation in close relationships and the practical approaches to relationship conflict resolution and intervention.

Theoretical Implications

The present study contributes to the literature on implicit theories of willpower by extending these beliefs from individual self-regulation to the interpersonal domain of romantic conflict. While previous research has mostly focused on willpower beliefs on the individual level (e.g., self-regulation, health behavior and goal pursuit), the current dyadic approach offered a more nuanced view.

As a key theoretical contribution, the study shows that willpower beliefs primarily operate through actor-level pathways, thus shaping an individual's own relationship outcomes. These findings suggest that willpower beliefs function as internal regulatory frameworks rather than as beliefs that directly shape partners' behavior. Importantly, the mediation results highlight conflict resolution strategies as a key behavioral mechanism linking willpower beliefs to relationship satisfaction. The study therefore built a bridge between motivational psychology and relationship science by finding a central pathway through which self-regulatory beliefs unfold interpersonally.

Moreover, the findings challenge simple assumptions about the adaptiveness of willpower beliefs by demonstrating that context matters. Although non-limited beliefs were generally associated with adaptive conflict behavior, they became less beneficial under high stress, particularly for women. This pattern supports more nuanced theoretical perspectives that emphasize situational demands in self-regulation.

Finally, the similarity analyses contribute to dyadic theory by showing that discrepancies rather than similarity in motivational beliefs may be more relevant for conflict behavior. This finding underscores the importance of considering dyadic constellations rather than focusing on individual beliefs alone.

Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer several implications for relationship counseling, relationship interventions, or couple therapy. First, the results suggest that conflict behavior is not only a matter of skills or intention but is also shaped by individuals'

beliefs about their own self-regulatory capacity. Interventions should therefore not exclusively focus on communication techniques but also address the cognitive layer that influences conflict behavior.

Couple therapy therefore, could address willpower beliefs, particularly in couples where mismatched expectations about effort lead to recurring conflict or frustration. Helping partners recognize that differences in conflict behavior do not necessarily come from lack of commitment or motivation may foster mutual understanding and empathy and reduce escalation or blame.

The findings also point to gender-specific implications. Men who held non-limited willpower beliefs while their partner held more limited beliefs used more destructive and less constructive conflict strategies. This implies that men in mismatched couples may benefit from interventions that address expectations about effort investments and self-regulatory limits during conflict.

For women, the stress moderation results highlight the importance of considering external load and role expectations. Under high stress, women with non-limited beliefs showed increased destructive conflict behavior, suggesting that persistent self-regulatory engagement may lead to overextension. In practical terms, this implies that encouraging continual effort and emotional regulation may not always be beneficial, particularly for individuals already facing high external demands. Interventions may therefore benefit from legitimizing disengagement, boundary-setting and recovery as adaptive responses rather than as failure. Helping couples manage external stressors may improve conflict processes by preserving regulatory resources.

Taken together, the present findings suggest that effective relationship interventions should move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach. Considering individual differences, dyadic combinations, and contextual stressors may allow for more tailored and sustainable interventions. At a broader level, the study highlights the value of integrating motivational beliefs into models of relationship functioning and encourages future research to further examine how beliefs interact with stress, role expectations, and relational dynamics over time.

5.8 Limitations

Despite the strengths of the current study, there were several limitations. First, the dyadic nature of the dataset may have brought in a selection bias. Couples who are satisfied with their relationship may be more likely to participate in a study involving sensitive questions about conflict and satisfaction, while unhappy and distressed couples may drop out or not participate in the first place. This possibility is supported by the descriptive statistics, which indicated comparatively high levels of relationship satisfaction and relatively

low levels of maladaptive conflict behavior in the present sample. As a result, the sample might underrepresent couples with severe, chronic, or unresolved conflicts, which could limit the generalizability of the findings.

Second, all constructs were assessed using self-report measures. Topics such as conflict behavior and relationship satisfaction are emotionally charged and could therefore have triggered social desirability or self-protective responses. Individuals may have downplayed the frequency or intensity of conflicts or overstated their satisfaction, either to present themselves in a better light or to avoid confronting uncomfortable truths about their relationship. Moreover, self-reports capture perceived rather than observed behavior. To obtain a more comprehensive picture of conflict processes, future research could use observational or diary-based measures and assess partner-reports of conflict behavior. Some instruments, including the full version of the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994), allow partners to evaluate each other's conflict strategies, which would enable researchers to compare self- and partner-perceptions.

Furthermore, there are limitations concerning the measurement of conflict behavior. No inclusion criteria were applied in terms of relationship length or conflict frequency. It is therefore possible that some couples, especially those in new or particularly harmonious relationships, had not experienced a lot of conflicts, making it difficult for them to accurately report their typical conflict behavior. Although the relationship assessment scale included an item asking about relationship problems ("How many problems are there in your relationship?"), it remains unclear whether this can be equated with actual conflict experience. This introduces the possibility that conflict style frequency was confounded with the general frequency of conflict. In other words, participants who reported higher use of certain strategies may have done so because they have experienced conflict more often, not necessarily because they were more prone to using that style. Future studies should assess both the frequency of conflict and the relative frequency of each conflict strategy to consider these effects.

Another limitation relates to the exploratory nature of the final two questions regarding perceived stress and similarity. Although these analyses showed theoretically interesting patterns, they were not central to the initial confirmatory model and should therefore be interpreted with caution. Replication in different samples is needed to evaluate the robustness of these findings.

Lastly, as with all cross-sectional designs, no causal conclusions can be drawn. Although the theoretical model assumed that willpower beliefs shape conflict behavior and, in turn, relationship satisfaction, alternative directions are plausible. For example, repeated conflict experiences may influence individuals' beliefs about their regulatory capacity, or lower relationship satisfaction may reinforce perceptions of depletion. It is also possible that

third variables, such as personality traits, contribute to both willpower beliefs and conflict behavior. Longitudinal and experimental designs are needed to disentangle the possibilities.

Finally, although personality traits were assessed, they were not included as control variables in the main analyses due to their strong associations with key study variables, particularly neuroticism. Controlling for personality would have removed theoretically meaningful variance. Nevertheless, future research could more systematically examine how willpower beliefs interact with personality, for example, by testing moderation or mediation models or by investigating whether motivational beliefs explain interpersonal behavior beyond personality traits.

Despite these limitations, the present study also has several important strengths. Most notably, it adopts a dyadic perspective and applies the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model, allowing for the examination of both actor and partner effects while accounting for interdependence between partners' responses. This method represents an advantage over individual-level approaches. In addition, the use of response surface analyses further allowed for a differentiated examination of similarity and discrepancy effects that go beyond traditional difference score approaches. Finally, the relatively large sample of romantic couples enhanced the robustness of the findings.

6. Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that willpower beliefs are not only abstract cognitive beliefs but meaningfully shape how individuals handle one of the most essential challenges of intimate relationships: conflict. Instead of exerting a direct interpersonal effect, willpower beliefs seem to primarily affect individuals' own regulatory behavior. In this sense, these beliefs function as internal frameworks that guide how people persist, disengage, or escalate in emotionally demanding interactions.

Importantly, the findings underscore that the consequences of such beliefs are not fixed. Their relevance depends on the context: under manageable conditions, non-limited beliefs may help sustain engagement, whereas under high stress or belief mismatch, the same beliefs may become maladaptive. Thus, willpower beliefs do not consistently function as strengths or vulnerabilities, but their interpersonal implications change within situational contexts.

This research embeds theories of willpower within dyadic processes and highlights that beliefs about self-control shape not only individuals' experiences but also how partners coordinate effort and experience their relationships. Therefore, understanding how people think about their own regulatory capacity could offer deeper insight into the dynamics of everyday relationships and the psychological processes that either support or undermine them.

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Appendix A – Abstracts

Abstract English

Conflict is an inevitable part of romantic relationships. While disagreements are common, couples differ in how they manage them. Research has shown that effective conflict resolution is central to relationship satisfaction, yet most work has focused on communication skills or interaction patterns, leaving underlying motivational processes less understood.

One such factor concerns individuals' beliefs about their willpower: some people see self-control as a limited resource that can be depleted, whereas others view it as non-limited and renewable. These beliefs have been shown to shape self-regulation in demanding situations, but their role in conflict situations remains largely unexplored.

The present study examined how these implicit theories of willpower (ITW) relate to conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction in romantic couples. Dyadic data from 202 couples were analyzed using the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM). Results revealed consistent actor effects: individuals with a more limited theory of willpower reported greater use of destructive and less use of constructive conflict strategies. No partner effects were observed. Mediation analyses showed that conflict resolution partially mediated the association between willpower beliefs and relationship satisfaction.

Exploratory analysis further highlighted contextual influences. Perceived stress moderated the association between willpower beliefs and destructive conflict for women, showing a reversed pattern under high stress. Response surface analyses indicated that discrepancies in partners' willpower beliefs, particularly involving non-limited men paired with limited women, were associated with less adaptive conflict behavior among men.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that motivational beliefs about self-control are relevant for understanding interpersonal behavior in relationship conflict, especially under conditions of stress and belief mismatch.

Keywords: implicit theories of willpower; self-regulation; romantic conflict; relationship satisfaction; dyadic processes; stress

Abstract German

Konflikte sind ein unvermeidlicher Bestandteil romantischer Beziehungen, jedoch unterscheiden sich Paare darin, wie sie mit ihnen umgehen. Forschung zeigt, dass die Art der Konfliktbewältigung maßgeblich mit der Beziehungszufriedenheit zusammenhängt. Während bisher vor allem Kommunikations- und Interaktionsmuster untersucht wurden, sind zugrundeliegende motivationale Prozesse weniger berücksichtigt worden.

Ein solcher Prozess betrifft die individuellen Überzeugungen über die eigene Selbstkontrollkapazität: während einige Personen Selbstkontrolle als begrenzte Ressource wahrnehmen, die erschöpft werden kann, sehen andere sie als unbegrenzt und erneuerbar. Frühere Forschung belegt, dass diese sogenannten impliziten Willenskrafttheorien tatsächliches selbstregulatorisches Verhalten beeinflussen. Ihre Rolle in Konfliktsituationen in romantischen Partnerschaften wurde jedoch bislang nicht untersucht.

Die vorliegende Studie untersuchte daher, inwiefern implizite Willenskrafttheorien mit Konfliktlösung sowie Beziehungszufriedenheit in romantischen Beziehungen zusammenhängen. Dyadische Daten von 202 Paare wurden mittels des Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) ausgewertet. Es zeigten sich konsistente Akteureffekte: Personen mit stärker limitierten Willenskrafttheorien berichteten häufiger destruktive und seltener konstruktive Konfliktlösestrategien. Partnereffekte traten nicht auf. Mediationsanalysen ergaben, dass Konfliktverhalten den Zusammenhang zwischen Willenskrafttheorien und Beziehungszufriedenheit teilweise vermittelte.

Explorative Analysen verdeutlichten zudem kontextuelle Einflüsse. Wahrgenommener Stress moderierte den Zusammenhang zwischen Willenskrafttheorien und destruktivem Konfliktverhalten bei Frauen und zeigte ein Kreuzungsmuster unter hoher Belastung. Darüber hinaus waren Diskrepanzen in den Willenskrafttheorien beider Partner*innen mit weniger adaptivem Konfliktverhalten assoziiert—insbesondere bei einer Kombination aus nicht-limitierten Männern und limitierten Frauen.

Insgesamt unterstreichen die Ergebnisse, dass motivationale Überzeugungen über Selbstkontrolle eine bedeutsame Rolle für partnerschaftliches Konfliktverhalten spielen und ihre Wirkung kontextabhängig ist.

Schlüsselwörter: Implizite Theorien der Willenskraft, Selbstregulation, romantische Beziehungen, Konfliktlösung, Beziehungszufriedenheit, dyadische Prozesse, Stress

Appendix B – Supplementary Analyses

Table B1

Actor-Partner effects of willpower beliefs on conflict resolution strategies (H1)

Outcome	Path	Est	SE	z	p
Destructive Conflict	Actor (a)	0.156	0.041	3.78	< .001
	Partner (p)	−0.033	0.041	−0.79	.431
Constructive Conflict	Actor (a)	−0.161	0.050	−3.25	.001
	Partner (p)	0.020	0.050	0.39	.696

Note. Est = unstandardized estimate; SE = standard error. All estimates are based on symmetric Actor–Partner Interdependence Models.

Table B2
Descriptive statistics and correlations including the big five

	M(SD)	A	ICC	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. WT	3.35(0.65)	.84	.20	--										
2. PPS	3.98(0.66)	.76	.46	-.15**	--									
3. CE	1.95(0.79)	.81	.50	.26***	-.38***	--								
4. WD	2.10(0.81)	.81	.16	.17***	-.44***	.42***	--							
5. CO	2.32(0.76)	.78	.01	-.07	-.26***	.05	.16**	--						
6. RS	5.98(0.90)	.92	.64	-.18***	.50***	-.45***	-.40***	-.23***	--					
7. PS	2.57(0.619)	.86	.23	.41***	-.23***	.19***	.18***	0.02	-.22***					
8. O	3.25(0.64)	--	--	-.14***	.04	-.01	-.01	-.00	.08	-.13*				
9. C	3.73(0.82)	--	--	-.20***	.12*	-.01	-.11*	-.03	.11*	-.18***	.01			
10. E	3.54(1.02)	--	--	-.11*	.18***	.05	-.18***	-.13**	.12*	-.13*	.21***	.09		
11. A	3.34(0.80)	--	--	-.13*	.15**	-.15**	-.15**	.16**	.11*	-.22***	.01	.08	.12*	
12. N	2.83(1.00)	--	--	.52***	-.13**	.26***	.21***	-.05	-.14**	.46***	-.15**	-.01	-.24***	-.19**

Note. WT= willpower theories, PPS = positive problem solving, CE = conflict engagement, WD = withdrawal, CO = compliance, RS = relationship satisfaction, PS = perceived stress, O = openness, C = conscientiousness, E = extraversion, A = agreeableness, N = neuroticism
 ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient (similarity between partners).

N = 404. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Appendix C – Measurement Models

Table C1

Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Study Measures

Measure	Model	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Willpower beliefs	Three-factor model	522.62	101	.81	.77	.10	.08
Willpower beliefs	Three-factor model (with residual correlations)	268.27	95	.92	.90	.07	.07
Conflict resolution (CRSI)	Four-factor model	165.38	98	.97	.96	.04	.04
Perceived stress (PSS-10)	Two-factor model	87.99	34	.96	.95	.06	.04

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

Modification indices were used to allow a small number of residual correlations between items within subscales of the willpower beliefs measure. All correlated residuals were theoretically justified and involved items with overlapping content or similar phrasing.

Table C2*Standardized Factor Loadings (Willpower Theories)*

Item	Mental effort	Resisting Temptations	Emotional Control
WT_A1	.78		
WT_A2	.84		
WT_A3	.62		
WT_A4	.51		
WT_A5	.76		
WT_A6	.62		
WT_B1		.60	
WT_B2		.75	
WT_B3		.31	
WT_B4		.72	
WT_B5		.22	
WT_B6		.45	
WT_C1			.66
WT_C2			.40
WT_C3			.57
WT_C4			.61

Note. All factor loadings were statistically significant ($ps < 0.001$).

Appendix D – Study Materials

Table D1

Implicit Theories of Willpower Scale (Job et al., 2010)

Im nächsten Abschnitt geht es um Ihre persönlichen Überzeugungen zum Thema Willenskraft.	
Willenskraft ist was man braucht, um Verlockungen zu widerstehen, um Vorsätze und Vorhaben umzusetzen und um bei anstrengenden mentalen Tätigkeiten dranzubleiben. Bitte lesen Sie jede Aussage aufmerksam und geben Sie an, wie sehr Sie ihr zustimmen. Es gibt kein richtig oder falsch, es geht nur um Ihre persönliche Einschätzung.	
Item	Item wording
WT_A1	Anstrengende mentale Tätigkeiten (z.B. Nachdenken über eine schwierige Fragestellung, sich stark auf Etwas konzentrieren) erschöpfen meine Kraftressourcen, welche ich im Anschluss wieder aufladen muss (z.B. durch Pausen, Nichtstun, Fernsehen oder Essen).
WT_A2	Nach einer anstrengenden mentalen Tätigkeit ist meine Energie erschöpft und ich muss mich erholen, um sie wieder aufzuladen.
WT_A3	Wenn ich an einer anstrengenden mentalen Aufgabe gearbeitet habe, fühle ich mich voller Kraft und bin im Stande, sofort eine neue herausfordernde Aufgabe anzupacken.*
WT_A4	Meine Willenskraft ist unerschöpflich. Auch nachdem ich mich eine Zeit lang auf Etwas konzentriert habe, kann ich mit etwas Anspruchsvollem fortfahren.*
WT_A5	Nach einer anspruchsvollen geistigen Tätigkeit kann ich nicht mit derselben Konzentration eine neue Tätigkeit angehen, weil ich mich zuerst erholen muss.
WT_A6	Nach einer anstrengenden mentalen Tätigkeit fühle ich mich voller Kraft für weitere herausfordernde Aktivitäten.*
WT_B1	Verlockungen zu widerstehen (z.B. Diät halten oder etwas nicht kaufen, was einem gefällt) macht mich anfällig gegenüber anderen Verlockungen, mit denen ich konfrontiert werde.

- WT_B2 Wenn sich Situationen häufen, bei denen ich Verlockungen widerstehen muss, wird es zunehmend schwieriger, mich zu kontrollieren.
- WT_B3 Wenn ich eben einer starken Verlockung widerstehen konnte, fühle ich mich gestärkt, weiteren neuen Verlockungen gegenüber standhaft zu sein.*
- WT_B4 Ich finde es besonders schwierig, einer Verlockung zu widerstehen, wenn ich eben schon einer anderen Verlockung widerstanden habe.
- WT_B5 Verlockungen zu widerstehen, aktiviert meine Willenskraft und ich bin zunehmend besser in der Lage mich selbst im Griff zu haben.*
- WT_B6 Meine Kapazität, Verlockungen zu widerstehen, ist unbegrenzt. Auch wenn ich mich gerade stark beherrschen musste, habe ich mich weiter unter Kontrolle.*
- WT_C1 Nachdem ich eine starke Emotion (z.B. Wut, Freude, Enttäuschung) empfunden habe, ohne sie jemandem zu zeigen, fühle ich mich erschöpft und weniger fähig, mich in neuen Situationen im Griff zu haben.
- WT_C2 Selbst wenn ich an einem Tag häufig die Ruhe bewahren und meine Emotionen kontrollieren musste, beeinflusst das nicht meine Fähigkeit meine Gefühle weiterhin unter Kontrolle zu haben.*
- WT_C3 Man kann starke Gefühle nicht wirklich lange unterdrücken. Schon nach einer Weile wird es immer schwieriger, sie unter Kontrolle zu haben.
- WT_C4 Meine Fähigkeit Gefühle zu kontrollieren, verändert sich nicht. Selbst wenn ich mich gerade in einer bestimmten Situation im Griff haben musste, kann ich auch danach „cool“ bleiben.*

Note. WT_A = strenuous mental activities, WT_B = resisting temptations, WT_C = emotional control. Items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 6 = strongly disagree).

Reverse coded = *

N = 404

Table D2*Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI; Herzberg & Sierau, 2010)*

Geben Sie bitte auf einer Skala von 1 = niemals bis 5 = immer an, wie häufig Sie jede dieser Verhaltensweisen zeigen, wenn Sie und Ihr Partner unterschiedlicher Meinung sind.

Item	Item wording
PPS_1	Sich auf das vorliegende Problem konzentrieren.
PPS_2	Sich zusammensetzen und in Ruhe über die Auseinandersetzung sprechen.
PPS_3	Lösungen finden, die für beide akzeptabel sind.
PPS_4	Dinge aushandeln und Kompromisse finden.
CE_1	Persönlich angreifen oder beleidigen.
CE_2	Explodieren und außer Kontrolle geraten.
CE_3	Sich von der Wut hinreißen lassen und Dinge sagen, die man später bereut.
CE_4	Spitze Bemerkungen und Beleidigungen loslassen.
WD_1	Für längere Zeit nichts sagen.
WD_2	Wenn eine bestimmte Grenze erreicht ist, „zumachen“ und mit dem Partner kein Wort mehr reden.
WD_3	Die andere Person nicht mehr beachten.
WD_4	Sich zurückziehen und kein Interesse zeigen.
CO_1	Sich für die eigenen Interessen nicht einsetzen.
CO_2	Zu nachgiebig sein.
CO_3	Die eigene Position nicht verteidigen.
CO_4	Nachgeben, ohne die eigene Sichtweise zu vertreten.

Note. PPS = positive problem solving, CE = conflict engagement, WD = withdrawal, CO = compliance. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 6 = always).

N = 404

Table D3*Relationship Assessment Scale (ZIP; Hassebrauck, 1991)*

Im Folgenden bitten wir Sie, anzugeben, wie zufrieden Sie mit verschiedenen Bereichen Ihrer Paarbeziehung sind. Bitte beantworten Sie die Fragen ehrlich.

Item	Item wording
1	Wie gut erfüllt ihr Partner Ihre Wünsche und Bedürfnisse?
2	Wie zufrieden sind Sie im Großen und Ganzen mit Ihrer Beziehung?
3	Wie gut ist Ihre Beziehung im Vergleich zu den Beziehungen der meisten anderen Paare?
4	Wie oft wünschen Sie sich, dass Sie diese Beziehung lieber nicht hätten?
5	Wie gut erfüllt Ihre Beziehung Ihre ursprünglichen Erwartungen?
6	Wie sehr lieben Sie Ihren Partner?
7	Wie viele Probleme gibt es in Ihrer Beziehung?

Note. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (different scales per item).

N = 404

Table D4*Big Five Inventory (BFI-10; Rammstedt et al., 2013)*

Im Folgenden finden Sie eine Reihe von Aussagen, die sich auf Sie selbst beziehen.
Bitte geben Sie für jede Aussage an, inwieweit sie auf Sie zutrifft.

Item	Item wording
E_1	Ich bin eher zurückhaltend, reserviert.*
A_1	Ich schenke anderen leicht Vertrauen, glaube an das Gute im Menschen.
C_1	Ich bin bequem, neige zu Faulheit.*
N_1	Ich bin entspannt, lasse mich durch Stress nicht aus der Ruhe bringen.*
O_1	Ich habe nur wenig künstlerisches Interesse.*
E_2	Ich gehe aus mir heraus, bin gesellig.
A_2	Ich neige dazu, andere zu kritisieren.*
C_2	Ich erledige Aufgaben gründlich.
N_2	Ich werde leicht nervös und unsicher.
O_2	Ich habe eine aktive Vorstellungskraft, bin fantasievoll.

Note. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree 5 = strongly agree).

Reverse coded = *

N = 400

Table D5*Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10; Klein et al., 2016)*

Die folgenden Fragen beschäftigen sich mit Ihren Gedanken und Gefühlen während des letzten Monats. Bitte geben Sie für jede Frage an, wie oft sie in entsprechender Art und Weise gedacht oder gefühlt haben.

Item	Item wording
1	Wie oft waren Sie im letzten Monat aufgewühlt, weil etwas Unerwartetes passiert ist?
2	Wie oft hatten Sie im letzten Monat das Gefühl, nicht in der Lage zu sein, die wichtigen Dinge in Ihrem Leben kontrollieren zu können?
3	Wie oft haben Sie sich im letzten Monat nervös und gestresst gefühlt?
4	Wie oft waren Sie im letzten Monat zuversichtlich, dass Sie fähig sind, Ihre persönlichen Probleme zu bewältigen?*
5	Wie oft hatten Sie im letzten Monat das Gefühl, dass sich die Dinge zu Ihren Gunsten entwickeln?*
6	Wie oft hatten Sie im letzten Monat den Eindruck, nicht all Ihren anstehenden Aufgaben gewachsen zu sein?
7	Wie oft waren Sie im letzten Monat in der Lage, ärgerliche Situationen in Ihrem Leben zu beeinflussen?*
8	Wie oft hatten Sie im letzten Monat das Gefühl, alles im Griff zu haben?*
9	Wie oft haben Sie sich im letzten Monat über Dinge geärgert, über die Sie keine Kontrolle hatten?
10	Wie oft hatten Sie im letzten Monat das Gefühl, dass sich so viele Schwierigkeiten angehäuft haben, dass Sie diese nicht überwinden konnten?

Note. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never 5 = very often).

Reverse coded = *

N = 398

Use of AI

Hereby, I declare that I have used the following AI tools for the creation of my master's thesis titled "Shared Strength or Shared Strain? A Dyadic Perspective on Willpower Beliefs, Conflict Resolution, and Relationship Satisfaction". I confirm that the identification of the AI tools used is complete, including the purpose of use, product name, and, if applicable, the prompts and outputs of the AI tool. I take full responsibility for the selection and incorporation of all results from the AI tools I have used.

Purpose of use*	Product name of the AI tool	If applicable, prompt (input) and output of the AI tool
Statistical analysis support and code generation	ChatGPT	Examples: „Please write an R code for the stress interaction using ggplot2 with different line types instead of colors“ „How does the code have to change if I have indistinguishable dyads?“
Revision and refinement	ChatGPT	„How would you rate my text on a scale from 1-100? What are the strengths and what could be improved?“
Translation aid	DeepL	
Improve my English writing (finding transitions, synonyms etc.)	ChatGPT, DeepL	“How would you improve the following paragraph in regard to formal language or transitions between sentences? Are there any good synonyms that I could use? Please suggest more suitable academic wording when you think it is necessary. Please don't change the meaning and content of my text.

Paraphrasing to improve formal tone, fluency, readability, and flow.	Gemini, ChatGPT, DeepL	“Please paraphrase the following paragraph from my thesis to improve the fluency & flow. Please keep my original tone and meaning. Do not add new arguments, interpretations or references. Here is my Paragraph: Individuals with more limited willpower beliefs disengage faster in situations that require sustained self-control. In relationship conflict, this could lead to destructive behavior such as withdrawal or escalation“
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* Tools used for grammar and spell-checking or the automated creation of bibliographies are excluded from this declaration.

Vienna, March 10th, 2026