



DYADIC EMPATHY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES ACROSS GENERATIONAL LINES

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Abstract

This literature review explores the interplay between dyadic empathy and conflict resolution strategies within romantic relationships, focusing on generational differences between Millennials and Generation Z. Drawing upon four theoretical perspectives, Empathy-Altruism Theory, Dual Concern Theory, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, and Life Course Theory, the review examines how empathy (both cognitive and affective) informs the choice and effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies in intimate relationships. Empirical findings suggest that dyadic empathy fosters constructive strategies such as collaboration and compromise, which enhance relational satisfaction and stability. In contrast, the absence of empathy correlates with destructive styles like avoidance or competition. Generational differences further moderate these dynamics, with Millennials generally demonstrating greater emotional regulation and a preference for reflective conflict management. Gen Z, shaped by the digital era, often exhibit heightened emotional sensitivity and reliance on indirect conflict resolution methods. Despite growing research linking empathy and conflict resolution, few studies have explored how these constructs operate across generational cohorts in African contexts. This review highlights a significant gap in the literature concerning dyadic processes in romantic relationships within Nigeria's rapidly evolving socio-cultural landscape, thereby providing a foundation for future empirical investigations.

Keywords: *Dyadic empathy, Conflict resolution strategies, Generation Z, Millennials, Romantic relationships*



Introduction

Empathy and conflict resolution are foundational to the quality and sustainability of romantic relationships. As couples navigate emotional intimacy, disagreement, and relational expectations, their capacity to understand each other's emotions, referred to as dyadic empathy, plays a crucial role in determining the health of their interactions. Simultaneously, partners' strategies to manage constructive or destructive conflict can reinforce or erode relationship stability. While a growing body of research has explored these dynamics independently, there is increasing interest in how dyadic empathy and conflict resolution strategies intersect, particularly across different generational cohorts. Millennials and Generation Z represent two emerging adult populations with distinct socialisation patterns, communication preferences, and emotional capacities shaped by technological, cultural, and developmental contexts. These differences may influence how empathy is experienced and expressed and how romantic conflict is managed. Although existing literature has examined empathy and conflict in Western contexts, limited research addresses these phenomena within sub-Saharan Africa, particularly among urban populations in Nigeria. This review synthesises conceptual, theoretical, and empirical insights into the relationship between dyadic empathy and conflict resolution strategies, while examining the moderating role of generational identity. By focusing on Millennials and Generation Z in Lagos, Nigeria, the review aims to highlight

culturally situated relational patterns and identify gaps in the literature that future research can address.¹ Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework

This section discusses the key variables of this study: conflict resolution strategies, dyadic empathy, and generation. It will explore how these variables are interconnected, examining how a couple's use of constructive or destructive conflict resolution strategies is influenced by their shared empathetic understanding and shaped by their generation.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Conflict resolution strategies are fundamental to the health and sustainability of relationships, more specifically romantic relationships (Ayun & Shanti, 2021). Individuals use them to navigate disputes, disagreements or conflicts. As Swanzen (2018) notes, the techniques individuals adopt to address conflicts influence immediate relational harmony and shape long-term relational satisfaction, emotional security, and stability. The same applies in romantic relationships, as the conflict resolution strategies often determine the couple's capacity to build and maintain trust, intimacy, satisfaction and emotional connection. Understanding these strategies is essential for fostering healthier and more resilient partnerships (Appelbaum et al., 2022). Conflict resolution strategies can be broadly categorised as constructive or destructive, based on their impact on relationship dynamics (Forbes, 2024). Constructive strategies, such as



collaboration and compromise, aim to manage conflict in a way that promotes

understanding, strengthens bonds, and leads to mutually satisfying outcomes (Appelbaum et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2015). On the other hand, destructive strategies such as avoidance, accommodation and competition tend to exacerbate conflict, damage relationships, and leave partners feeling resentful, hurt, angry, and disconnected (Appelbaum et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2015). Collaboration, characterised by a mutual effort to satisfy the needs of both partners, is frequently lauded as the most effective approach, fostering mutual understanding and strengthening relational bonds (Abunemeh, 2024). As a constructive strategy, collaboration requires partners to be open, honest, and willing to work together as a team, prioritising the relationship's well-being. This approach involves actively listening to each other's concerns, expressing one's needs clearly and respectfully, and working creatively to find solutions that address the underlying issues and satisfy both individuals, leading to a mutually beneficial outcome that strengthens the relationship (Rogers & Farson, 2015). While offering a pragmatic middle ground, compromise may leave both partners partially unsatisfied, potentially leading to unresolved issues and lingering resentment (Abunemeh, 2024). Whether compromise is constructive or destructive depends on the extent to which both partners feel their needs are being met. If implemented fairly and equitably, it can be a constructive way to manage conflict. However, if one or both partners feel their needs are being

sacrificed, it can become destructive in the long run. Competition, marked by a desire to 'win' the conflict, is generally a destructive strategy that can harm the relationship if employed excessively, fostering an environment of animosity and undermining trust (Navidian, Bahari, & Kermansaravi, 2014). A competitive approach often leads to power struggles, where one partner's needs are prioritised over the other's, creating an imbalance that can erode the foundation of the relationship. This conflict resolution style can create a climate of fear and intimidation, where partners are apprehensive about expressing their actual needs and feelings for fear of reprisal, leading to a breakdown in communication and a loss of intimacy (Mandal & Lip, 2022). Avoidance, while helpful in de-escalating heated situations, can also be a destructive strategy if used as a primary means of dealing with conflict, as it can lead to the accumulation of unresolved issues, ultimately eroding the foundation of the relationship (Zhao et al., 2015). While avoiding conflict may provide temporary relief, it prevents couples from addressing the root causes of their disagreements, leading to a buildup of resentment and weakening their connection (Bao, Zhu, Hu, & Cui, 2016). Over time, this pattern of avoidance can create a sense of emotional distance and detachment, making it increasingly difficult for partners to reconnect and resolve issues, potentially leading to a breakdown in communication and a loss of intimacy (Malec, 2023).

Accommodation, characterised by one partner yielding to the other's demands,



can foster short-term harmony but may result in long-term resentment and an imbalance of power within the relationship (Tehrani & Yamini, 2020). While it may seem constructive in the short term, if one partner consistently accommodates the other, it can create a dynamic where their needs are unmet, leading to frustration, resentment, and a sense of being undervalued. This can lead to a situation where one partner perceives that their needs are not essential or that their voice does not matter in the relationship, potentially leading to a loss of self-esteem and a sense of powerlessness, making it a potentially destructive strategy in the long run (Mandal & Lip, 2022). The presence of unresolved conflicts, particularly when destructive conflict resolution strategies are employed, introduces potential risks even to relationships with high satisfaction levels (Adegboyega, 2021; Gottman & Gottman, 2017). The capacity to engage in constructive conflict resolution is, therefore, a crucial attribute for maintaining relationship quality and stability over time, as it enables couples to navigate disagreements and challenges effectively, minimising the negative impact on their bond (Igbo, Awopetu, & Ekoja, 2015). Constructive conflict resolution equips couples with the tools and strategies to communicate effectively, manage their emotions, and find solutions that work for both individuals, fostering collaboration, understanding, and mutual respect (Ayun & Shanti, 2021). It allows couples to view conflict as an opportunity for deeper connection and growth instead of a threat, strengthening their bond and

promoting long-term relationship satisfaction.

Dyadic Empathy

Dyadic empathy is the shared experience of empathy between romantic partners, encompassing both partners' cognitive and affective attunement to each other's internal states. It involves not only an individual's ability to understand (cognitive empathy) and feel (affective empathy) their partner's emotions, but also how both partners mutually perceive and respond to each other's emotional cues (Healey & Grossman, 2023). Cognitive empathy provides the rational framework for understanding, enabling individuals to anticipate their partner's reactions and behaviours. In contrast, affective empathy creates a deeper emotional bond, fostering a sense of shared experience and mutual support (Chang, Tillem, Benson-Williams, & Baskin-Sommers, 2021). Cognitive empathy facilitates comprehension of why a partner might feel a certain way, whereas affective empathy allows for a genuine experience of their affective state. For instance, if a partner is experiencing anxiety about a job interview, cognitive empathy, by understanding the pressure and uncertainty, enables the other partner to feel some of that anxiety, offering comfort and reassurance. This interplay between understanding and feeling creates a powerful dynamic that strengthens the bond between partners.

In romantic relationships, this translates to partners grasping the logical reasoning behind their significant other's actions and genuinely experiencing their affective state. For instance, if one partner is



experiencing stress due to work, cognitive empathy enables the other to understand their pressures. In contrast, affective empathy allows them to experience the weight of that stress, leading to more supportive and understanding responses. When partners feel understood and emotionally connected, they are more likely to perceive care, strengthening their empathetic responses (Ulloa et al., 2017). This creates a positive feedback loop, where empathy fosters care, and care reinforces empathy (Atta, Hammad, & Elzohairy, 2024). This perceived care is deeply intertwined with both cognitive and affective empathy. It is particularly relevant in the context of conflict resolution, where understanding the partner's perspective (cognitive empathy) and experiencing their emotional distress (affective empathy) can significantly influence the outcome of the conflict (Garrazone, 2024; Gaur & Bhardwaj, 2015). During disagreements, empathy can de-escalate tension, promote constructive dialogue, and facilitate the discovery of mutually agreeable solutions. A partner who feels genuinely understood and validated is less likely to become defensive or entrenched in their position, and more likely to be open to finding common ground, fostering a sense of collaboration and shared problem-solving (Gottman, Driver, & Tabares, 2015). In this way, dyadic empathy not only shapes the selection of conflict resolution strategies but also sustains the environment necessary for those strategies to thrive.

Generation, Dyadic Empathy and Conflict Resolution Strategies

While dyadic empathy and conflict resolution strategies are essential for romantic relationships, generational context plays a significant role in shaping how these are expressed and managed (Huo et al., 2020). Generation Z (born 1997–2012) and Millennials (born 1981–1996) represent two distinct cohorts with divergent life experiences, socialisation patterns, and relational expectations, all of which influence their romantic behaviours and emotional competencies (Rahman, 2023; Vancia et al., 2023). Millennials matured during a transitional period marked by the rise of technology, globalisation, and shifting gender roles. While they are often described as adaptable and open-minded, they also emphasise emotional intelligence and commitment in their relationships (Miller, 2018). Their approach to empathy and conflict resolution tends to be reflective and deliberate, with many Millennial couples favouring collaborative methods that emphasise communication, compromise, and emotional attunement (Healey & Grossman, 2023; Verma, 2021). Having navigated the early digital era, Millennials often balance traditional relational expectations with a growing awareness of emotional health and relational equality.

Additionally, this generation cohort is more stable and experienced, which increases their capacity for dyadic empathy, making them more attuned to their partner's emotional needs and perspectives (Türk, 2018). This increased dyadic empathy, in turn, can foster more



constructive conflict resolution strategies, such as collaboration and compromise, which prioritise mutual understanding and relationship maintenance (Gaur & Bhardwaj, 2015; Huo et al., 2020). In contrast, Generation Z came of age in a fully digitalised world, surrounded by fast-paced information, social media, and evolving narratives around identity and mental health (Talmon, 2019). Gen Z individuals prioritise authenticity, emotional expression, and mental well-being in relationships. However, their deep immersion in online communication may also result in difficulties with emotional regulation and face-to-face conflict resolution.

Research suggests that while Gen Z is more likely to express vulnerability and openness, they may also struggle with prolonged emotional discomfort, leading to tendencies toward avoidant or indirect conflict resolution strategies, especially under relational stress (Heshmati, Cabrerros, Ellis, & Blackard, 2021). This generational cohort also represents a critical developmental period that influences individuals' approach to and management of conflict in romantic relationships (Heshmati et al., 2021; Khullar, Kirmayer, & Dirks, 2021). During this stage of life, individuals are still undergoing significant social, emotional, and cognitive development, which shapes their understanding of relationships and conflict resolution behaviours (Trifan, Meeus, & Branje, 2024). These generational distinctions manifest in varying patterns of dyadic empathy and conflict handling. Influenced by traditional values and relational maturity, millennials

may lean more toward emotionally balanced responses and perspective-taking. At the same time, Gen Z may demonstrate heightened emotional sensitivity but reduced tolerance for emotionally taxing interactions. For example, Gen Z partners may quickly withdraw during conflict or rely on digital communication to express grievances, while Millennials may prefer verbal negotiation and compromise (Appelbaum et al., 2022). These tendencies are shaped by technological exposure and societal narratives, peer dynamics, and family structures that differ across the two generations. Understanding these intergenerational patterns provides a more nuanced view of how romantic partners engage emotionally and navigate relational challenges. Investigating dyadic empathy and conflict resolution through the lens of these two generations allows a deeper exploration of the socio-emotional competencies characterising contemporary romantic relationships in urban Nigerian settings.

Theoretical Framework

Various psychological and interpersonal factors influence the ability to resolve conflicts effectively in romantic relationships, with dyadic empathy being a crucial determinant. Dyadic empathy enables individuals to understand and share their partner's emotions, which fosters mutual understanding and reduces the likelihood of conflict escalation (Davis, 2018). Collins et al. (2013) found that couples with high empathy levels are more likely to engage in constructive conflict resolution strategies like compromise and active listening, rather



than destructive ones such as avoidance, blame, or aggression. This study draws on four psychological theories to explain the link between dyadic empathy, conflict resolution strategies and generation in romantic relationships:

- Empathy-Altruism Theory by Batson (1991)
- Dual Concern Theory by Blake & Mouton (1964)
- Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) Theory (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974)
- Life Course Theory by Elder (1998)

Empathy-Altruism Theory (Batson, 1991)

The Empathy-Altruism Theory (EAT) posits that when individuals experience empathy toward another person, they are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour out of genuine concern rather than self-interest (Batson, 2011). This theory challenges egoistic perspectives by asserting that true altruism exists and is driven by empathetic concern, which is particularly relevant in romantic relationships where emotional understanding plays a crucial role in conflict resolution. Empathy-Altruism Theory suggests that individuals who deeply understand and share in their partner's emotions are more likely to prioritise their partner's well-being, even during conflicts. This process fosters trust, strengthens emotional bonds, and reduces negative interactions such as blame, defensiveness, and withdrawal (Morelli et al., 2017). In romantic relationships, the ability to feel and respond to a partner's

distress with compassion and support creates a foundation for effective conflict resolution.

Studies have further supported this theory by demonstrating how higher empathy correlates with positive relationship outcomes. For instance, the survey by Verhofstadt et al. (2016) indicates that empathy, both cognitive (understanding a partner's perspective) and affective (sharing their emotions), plays a crucial role in how spouses provide support to each other. Practical support, in turn, contributes to positive relationship outcomes. Thus, the Empathy-Altruism Theory explains how empathy-driven behaviours contribute to healthier and more resilient romantic relationships. Empathy comprises two key dimensions (Decety & Cowell, 2014).:

- **Affective (Emotional) Empathy:** The ability to share and feel another person's emotions. For example, a partner's frustration during an argument.
- **Cognitive Empathy:** understanding another person's perspective, for example, recognising how a partner perceives a disagreement.

This theory provides a solid framework for understanding how empathy-driven conflict resolution strategies can improve relationship quality among Gen Z and Millennials.

Dual Concern Theory (Blake & Mouton, 1964)

The Dual Concern Theory, developed by Blake and Mouton (1964), provides a framework for understanding different



conflict resolution strategies. This theory posits that individuals' choices in conflict situations are based on two fundamental dimensions: concern for self and others (Musenero, Baroudi, & Gunawan, 2021). The combination of these concerns results in five distinct conflict resolution styles: competing (high concern for self, low concern for others), accommodating (low concern for self, high concern for others), avoiding (low concern for both self and others), collaborating (high concern for both self and others), and compromising (moderate concern for both self and others) (Windon, 2023). The Dual Concern Theory suggests that individuals prioritising their needs and goals over those of their partners are more likely to adopt competitive strategies, resulting in destructive conflict resolution (Carnevale, 2013). Conversely, those who prioritise their partner's needs at their own expense may use accommodating strategies, which can also be destructive in the long run due to suppressed resentment. Avoidance reflects a low concern for self and others, leading to withdrawal from conflict and a failure to address the underlying issues. Collaborating, characterised by a high concern for self and others, is considered the most constructive conflict resolution strategy (Windon, 2023). It involves open communication, mutual respect, and a willingness to work together to find solutions that fully satisfy both partners' concerns. Compromise involves a moderate level of concern for both self and other, leading to solutions where both parties make concessions to reach a mutually acceptable outcome.

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode (TKI) Theory (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974)

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode (TKI) theory is a foundational conflict management theory, developed by Thomas and Kilmann in 1974. It categorises individuals' typical responses to conflict into five distinct modes based on two dimensions: cooperativeness, the extent to which a person attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns, and assertiveness, the extent to which a person tries to meet their concerns (Kilmann, 2018; Kilmann, 2022). These five conflict modes are: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating.

Each mode represents a different strategy or style for managing conflicts, reflecting varying balances between one's own needs and the needs of others. For example, competing is highly assertive and low in cooperativeness, often involving a win-lose approach where one pursues their own goals at the expense of the other (Kilmann, 2018; Kilmann, 2022). Conversely, collaborating is highly assertive and cooperative, focusing on working together to find solutions that satisfy the needs of all parties involved. Compromising falls in the middle, where both parties give up something to reach a mutually acceptable solution. Avoiding involves low assertiveness and low cooperativeness, where conflict is sidestepped or ignored. Lastly, accommodating is low assertiveness but high cooperativeness, where one person yields to the other's concerns, sometimes at their own expense. These conflict modes can be broadly grouped into constructive and destructive conflict resolution strategies based on their



typical impact on relationship quality and outcomes. Constructive strategies foster communication, understanding, and mutual respect, contributing to relationship satisfaction and stability (Kilman & Thomas, 1978; Sayadat, 2024). Within this framework, collaborating and compromising are considered constructive because they promote problem-solving that considers both partners' needs, encourages empathy, and helps build emotional intimacy.

On the other hand, avoiding, competing, and accommodating are often regarded as destructive strategies because they can lead to unresolved issues, emotional distance, or resentment. For example, avoidance may temporarily reduce tension but usually leaves conflicts unaddressed, allowing problems to fester. Competing can escalate disputes by creating a win-lose dynamic, damaging trust and connection. Accommodating, while sometimes helpful in de-escalating tension, may lead to feelings of neglect or imbalance if one partner consistently sacrifices their needs. Understanding these conflict resolution strategies through the TKI lens is crucial for analysing how generations navigate romantic conflicts. Dyadic empathy plays a vital role in influencing which strategies are employed. For example, couples with higher cognitive and affective empathy are more likely to engage in a collaborative or compromising strategy because they understand and feel their partner's perspectives and emotions, fostering a cooperative rather than adversarial approach to conflict. Ultimately, the Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode theory

offers a detailed, behaviourally anchored framework for understanding conflict resolution strategies within romantic relationships and generational differences.

Life Course Theory (Elder, 1998)

Developed by Elder (1998), the Life Course Theory offers a framework for understanding how historical events, social contexts, and developmental transitions shape individuals' lives, including their relationship experiences and conflict resolution behaviours. This theory suggests that individuals' experiences and behaviours are influenced by their age and the specific historical period and social context in which they live. It also highlights the importance of understanding how individuals transition through different life stages and how they affect their relationships (Settersten, 2017).

In the context of this study, Life Course Theory provides a valuable lens for examining how generations experience and navigate romantic relationships based on the different socio-cultural and historical contexts in which they grow up (Heshmati et al., 2021). Millennials who grew up during the transition from analogue to digital technology and social media have different experiences influencing the development of dyadic empathy and the conflict resolution strategies they employ in resolving conflict, compared to Gen Z, who have been immersed in a digital era with distinct cultural narratives about relationship norms (Marzo, 2024). The Life Course theory also suggests that younger adults (Gen Z) may still develop emotional



maturity and communication skills to resolve conflicts constructively. These individuals' life transitions also evolve in response to changing responsibilities and life experiences. These cohort-specific experiences shape the perception, reception and expression of dyadic empathy, the conflict resolution strategies employed and how they are used, making this theory a vital lens for understanding how generational differences moderate the relationship between dyadic empathy and conflict resolution strategies.

Empirical Framework

Studies have established a strong link between empathy and constructive conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, research has shown that empathy reduces defensiveness, criticism, and contempt, key predictors of relationship dissatisfaction (Gottman & Silver, 2015). Based on extensive observations of couples in conflict, Gottman and Silver (2015) highlight how a lack of empathy can manifest in communication patterns that erode relationship quality. When partners are unable to understand and share their partner's feelings, they are more likely to engage in these destructive behaviours, creating a negative cycle that can be difficult to break. This underscores the importance of empathy as a foundational element for healthy and constructive conflict resolution. A lack of empathy can lead to a breakdown in communication, increased misunderstandings, and a general erosion of trust within the relationship. Morelli et al. (2017) further support this connection, finding that individuals who score higher

in empathetic concern are more likely to engage in collaborative problem-solving, which leads to greater relationship satisfaction. Their findings highlight the importance of empathy in facilitating effective communication and cooperation between partners during conflict. Specifically, Morelli et al. (2017) demonstrated that empathy, which involves compassion and concern for another person's well-being, is a key driver of collaborative behaviour. When individuals truly understand their partner's perspective, including their needs, desires, and emotional state, they are better equipped to work together to find mutually beneficial solutions. This collaborative approach resolves the immediate conflict and strengthens the bond between partners, increasing feelings of closeness, connection, and mutual respect. It fosters a sense of partnership and shared responsibility, where both individuals feel heard, valued, and understood. Promsri (2020) explored the relationship between conflict resolution styles and empathy and found that accommodating and collaborating conflict resolution styles positively affect empathy. The study suggests that how couples handle conflict can also influence their ability to empathise with one another. Promsri's (2020) research indicates that when partners engage in constructive conflict resolution behaviours, such as actively listening to each other's concerns, showing a willingness to compromise, and validating each other's feelings, it can foster a greater sense of understanding and connection, which in turn enhances their capacity for empathy. This creates a



positive feedback loop where empathy promotes constructive conflict resolution, and constructive conflict resolution, in turn, strengthens empathy. This dynamic underscores the importance of developing healthy conflict resolution skills as a means of not only managing disagreements but also nurturing empathy within the relationship. Additional studies have also emphasised the importance of empathy and related constructs in conflict resolution. For instance, a meta-analysis by Schrodtt et al. in 2014 found that constructive communication patterns, which are often rooted in empathy, are consistently linked to positive relationship outcomes across various couple types and conflict situations (Jolin, Lafontaine, Brassard, & Lussier, 2022). The study, which synthesised findings from numerous studies on communication and conflict, revealed that couples who engage in open, respectful, and validating communication experience positive outcomes such as increased intimacy, satisfaction, and stability. Empathy often facilitates these constructive communication patterns, as understanding and sharing a partner's feelings is essential for such positive exchanges. Empathy allows individuals to move beyond their perspectives and consider their partner's thoughts, feelings, and needs, creating a foundation for more productive and mutually satisfying dialogues. Similarly, research by Verhofstadt et al. (2016) highlighted the role of empathic accuracy, or the ability to correctly infer a partner's thoughts and feelings, in predicting successful conflict resolution and overall relationship satisfaction. Verhofstadt et al. (2016)

found that when individuals can accurately understand what their partner thinks and feels during a conflict, they can better tailor their responses to address their needs and concerns. This empathic accuracy fosters understanding and validation, promoting constructive conflict resolution and enhancing overall relationship satisfaction. These findings underscore the role of dyadic empathy in helping couples navigate conflict healthily and productively, fostering a sense of security and connection that strengthens the relationship. In addition to the abovementioned studies, research has explored how these capacities may develop with age. For example, a study by Khanjani et al. (2015) found that emotional empathy increased in older adults but that cognitive empathy did not. This suggests that with greater life experience and emotional maturation, individuals may better understand and respond to their partner's emotions in a supportive way, facilitating more constructive conflict resolution. As individuals mature, they may develop a greater capacity for emotional regulation, allowing them to manage their reactions to conflict more effectively and respond to their partner with greater patience and understanding.

Similarly, research on ageing and conflict resolution has indicated that older couples in the Millennial generation tend to use more mature and adaptive strategies when dealing with disagreements. A study by Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman (1993) observed that older spouses exhibit more positive emotional expression and less negative behaviour during conflict



discussions than younger spouses. This suggests that older adults may have developed greater emotional regulation skills and a stronger motivation to maintain positive relationships, leading them to employ more constructive approaches to conflict. They are more likely to prioritise maintaining harmony and connection, and less likely to engage in behaviours that could damage the relationship. While the studies above provide a general overview of the relationship between empathy, generation, and conflict resolution, research focusing specifically on Gen Z and Millennials in Lagos, Nigeria, is still emerging. This underscores the importance of considering the unique socio-cultural context of Lagos, with its specific challenges and dynamics, when examining conflict resolution within romantic relationships.

Conclusion

Dyadic empathy and conflict resolution strategies are deeply interconnected constructs that shape romantic relationships' emotional and functional quality. The ability to understand and respond to a partner's emotional state influences how couples navigate disagreements and whether those conflicts lead to growth or disconnection. Generational context further nuances this relationship; Millennials and Generation Z demonstrate varying levels of emotional regulation, communication style, and relational expectations, differences that are reflected in their approach to managing conflict. The reviewed literature confirms that higher levels of empathy are associated with more constructive conflict

resolution styles, while lower empathy correlates with avoidance, aggression, or accommodation. These patterns are moderated by age, suggesting that generational influences cannot be overlooked when examining intimate relationships. However, there remains a dearth of empirical studies focused on African populations, particularly in urban Nigerian settings where global influences intersect with local cultural norms. This review, therefore, provides a conceptual foundation for future studies investigating how dyadic empathy and conflict management strategies vary across generational lines. It also underscores the need for culturally informed interventions that promote emotional attunement and healthy communication in contemporary Nigerian romantic relationships.

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