

RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION, RELATIONAL EQUITY, PERCEIVED
PARTNER RESPONSIVENESS AND EMOTION REGULATION DIFFICULTIES
IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD: A DYADIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION, RELATIONAL EQUITY, PERCEIVED PARTNER RESPONSIVENESS AND EMOTION REGULATION DIFFICULTIES IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD: A DYADIC ANALYSIS

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The current study uses a hypothetical model to investigate the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties in the association of relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness to romantic relationship satisfaction at a dyadic level. Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM) was carried out to investigate how individuals influence both their own and their partners' outcomes.

One-hundred-forty-six heterosexual couples (N=292) who met the inclusion criteria of being emerging adults (18–29 years old), not being married, and having been in a romantic relationship for at least six months were included in the study. A convenience sampling method was used. The Turkish adaptation forms of Relationship Assessment Scale, Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale, and Relational Equity Scale were utilized as measuring instruments. Additionally, information regarding the participants' personal and relationship-related details was gathered using the Personal Information Form created by the researcher.

Results indicated that men's perceptions of relational equity and relationship satisfaction were partially mediated by difficulties with emotion regulation. No additional mediation effect was noted. Regarding the remaining study questions, significant gender differences and actor and partner effects were observed. Each finding was discussed in accordance with the literature, implications, and recommendations were offered.

Keywords: relational equity, perceived partner responsiveness, romantic relationship satisfaction, emerging adulthood, actor-partner interdependence mediation model



ÖZ

BELİREN YETİŞKİNLİKTE ROMANTİK İLİŞKİ DOYUMU, İLİŞKİSEL EŞİTLİK, ALGILANAN PARTNER DUYARLILIĞI VE DUYGU DÜZENLEME GÜÇLÜKLERİ: İKİLİ BİR ANALİZ

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Bu çalışma, beliren yetişkinlerde ilişkisel eşitlik ve algılanan partner duyarlılığının romantik ilişki doyumu ile ilişkisinde duygu düzenleme güçlüklerinin aracı rolünü ikili düzeyde araştırmak amacıyla hipotetik bir model sunmaktadır. Bireylerin hem kendilerinin hem de partnerlerinin ilişkiye dair çıktılarını nasıl etkileyebileceklerine ilişkin açıklamalar getirebilmek araştırmanın amaçlarından biri olup bu sebeple Aktör-Partner Karşılıklı Bağımlılık Aracılık Modelinden (APIMeM) faydalanılmıştır. Beliren yetişkin (18-29 yaş) olma, evli olmama ve en az 6 aydır romantik bir ilişkide bulunma şartlarını karşılayan 146 heteroseksüel çift (N=292) çalışmaya dahil edilmiştir. Örneklemin oluşturulması sırasında elverişli (uygun) örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Ölçme aracı olarak ise katılımcılara İlişki Değerlendirme Ölçeği, Algılanan Partner Duyarlılığı Ölçeği, Duygu Düzenleme Güçlüğü Ölçeği ve İlişkisel Eşitlik Ölçeğinin Türkçe formları uygulanmıştır. Ayrıca, kişisel ve ilişkisel özelliklere ilişkin veriler araştırmacı tarafından oluşturulan Kişisel Bilgi Formu kullanılarak elde edilmiştir.

Bulgular, duygu d zenleme g  l klerinin sadece erkeklerin e itlik algılarının ili ki doyumlarına olan etkisine kısmen aracılık etti ini ortaya koymu tur. Ara tırmada ba ka bir aracılık etkisi g zlenmemi tir. Di er ara tırma sorularına ili kin olarak,  e itli akt r ve partner etkileriyle birlikte belirgin cinsiyet farklılıkları g zlenmi ; her bir bulgu literat re uygun olarak tarti ılmış,  ıkarımlar ve  neriler sunulmu tur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ili kisel e itlik, algılanan partner duyarlılı ı, romantik ili ki doyumunu, beliren yeti kinlik, akt r-partner kar ılıklı ba ımlılık aracılık modeli



To my dearest family,



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APIM	Actor-Partner Interdependence Model
APIMeM	Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
EQ	Relational equity
PPR	Perceived partner responsiveness
SAT	Romantic relationship satisfaction
DER	Emotion regulation difficulties

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

*“We seem to know far too much about how love starts,
and recklessly little about how it might continue.”*

Alain de Botton, The Course of Love (2017, pp. 21)

Being in loving, encouraging, and supportive relationships is necessary for mental wellness (Kane et al., 2007). People, who are born with the innate ability to identify and satisfy their own needs by arranging the surroundings and themselves (Daş, 2020), are expected to consider their fulfillment also in the establishment of romantic relationships, which are characterized by concern for and sensitivity to the needs of their partner (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021).

For an extended period, scholars have long explored how an individual's inner or exterior arrangements can manifest themselves and the mechanisms through which close relationships are established and maintained. Self-regulation skills (e.g., Vater & Schröder–Abé, 2015), communication skills (e.g. Carlson et al., 2020; Yoo et al., 2014), conflict resolution (e.g., Gordon & Chen, 2016), the balance of power in the relationship (e.g., Aydin, 2017), closeness to the partner (e.g., Yoo et al., 2014), interpersonal support (e.g., Cramer, 2004), one's own attachment patterns (e.g. McCarty & Maughan, 2010; Fournier et al., 2011), values (e.g., Leikas et al., 2018), and expectations from the relationship (e.g., Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2017) are some of the important factors addressed. The degree of fulfillment that partners experience in a relationship is determined by their subjective evaluation of such different aspects of

the relationship. It is also related to a relationship's stability (Rusbult et al., 1998), and partners' level of commitment (Rusbult et al., 1998). Therefore, as it affects the continuity of the relationship, investigations of the mechanisms related to satisfaction are of core importance.

Although every age group is worthy of consideration in line with the scope outlined, emerging adults, who are attempting identity exploration and setting expectations for their own, life and relationships (Arnett & Mitra, 2018), require particular attention. In addition to exploring and experimenting, people seek ways to establish enduring relationships including people other than family members during this stage of life (Arnett, 2015), which is characterized as a time of discovery and transition (Douglass, 2007). The relationships formed or the lessons acquired from their experiences accompany life's later phases - since they could contribute to their identity, which emerging adults are attempting to define through a strong sense of self-focus (Shelley et al., 2020). Thus, comprehending the features of the relationships formed during this time, considering the factors that render them fulfilling, and figuring out the drives can help not only understand the individual's current situation but also provide insight into the future and facilitate implementation.

Due to the emerging adulthood period's self-focused nature, the individual focuses not only on building genuine and long-lasting relationships but also on understanding their position in the world (Arnett, 2000). In relationships they also try to decide what they expect, what they tend to tolerate, what they will set boundaries against, how they cope with things, which principles they have, and accordingly maturing the relevant skills (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Feeling supported by significant others who might remain with them for a long time is also especially important for individuals going through this stressful process of identity construction and searching for answers (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014). All of this suggests that the satisfaction of a romantic relationship should not be based on only the need for romantic intimacy and support; the emergence of associations related to one's own identity, skills, and boundaries is additionally considered to be significant in terms of developmental characteristics. Inconsistencies in any of the domains concerned, either on a personal or relational le-

vel, might lead to unfavorable emotions. Relationships are not always consistently fulfilling due to the potential conflicts (Flynn et al., 2017). Dysfunctional patterns that the individual carries from previous experiences (McCarthy & Maughan, 2010), having experiences that contradict their beliefs about themselves (Letzring & Nofhle, 2010), not having expectations met (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017), not receiving soothing support from the surrounding environment may result in unsatisfying relationships (Candel & Turliuc, 2021). Relationship dynamics theories concentrating on distinct aspects are utilized to offer proper explanations.

As a theoretical attempt to explain the dynamics, social exchange theories focus on the fair distribution of the various components of one's relationship and include many sub-theories. One of them, equity theory, focuses on the perception of fairness in a person's relationship with their partner and tries to explain satisfaction in regard. It contends that dissatisfaction in relationships can be explained by disparities that arise when the partners' perceived giving and receiving are out of balance (Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). As such, the individual anticipates receiving what they believe they deserve in the relationship and the satisfaction level is negatively impacted when they perceive themselves as being in a considerably more favorable or disadvantaged position (Hatfield & Rapson, 2011).

There have been criticisms of the exchange notion and competing theories regarding relationship outcomes and individuals' evaluation processes. Even equity theory itself, when applied to romantic relationships, highlights that expected rewards are assessed from an emotional and relational standpoint rather than economic, and it places a higher priority on establishing a balance between giving and receiving while accounting for interpersonal feelings of like, love, and cohesiveness (Hatfield et al., 1979). Furthermore, Clark and Mills (1979) introduced the concept of a communal relationship in opposition to the idea of exchange. They emphasized that the desire to consider the welfare of a partner and the drive to fulfill this desire take precedence over pragmatic considerations in close relationships. According to this perspective, it is an individual's responsibility to give consideration to the needs of the other person in a close relationship and to be sensitive to those needs as an inherent part of the re-

lationship (Clark et al., 1998). The concept of perceived partner responsiveness, which encompasses the components of feeling understood, validated, and supported by the partner (Reis et al., 2004), is accordingly in a position that is expected from the relationship and promotes thriving (Feeney & Collins, 2015). The current study attempts to explain relationship satisfaction within the framework of two important concepts: relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness.

In previous studies, these two variables were independently associated with satisfaction. For instance, studies by Utne et al. (1984) and Van Yperen and Buunk (1990) have demonstrated a direct correlation between relationship satisfaction and the perception of equity. Van Yperen and Buunk (1990) also investigated gender differences and found that women view themselves as being at a disadvantage. A contrasting outcome was noted in a 1984 investigation by Michaels et al. (Michaels et al., 1984). The study's findings indicate that women have a more advantageous position in relationships.

Gender disparities have also been explored in the majority of research that examined equity in romantic relationships, and it can be claimed that it manifests itself as more of an issue for women. For instance, a study by Bellani et al. (2018) demonstrates that women who feel inferior to others make greater efforts to maintain stable relationships.

A similar conclusion was found by Yum et al. (2015) that women who believe they are in a disadvantageous position strive more to improve it. For women residing in the West, this was the case; nevertheless, it was not observed for women whose traditional roles have greater significance. Equity has been defined by researchers as a Western ideal because of this. Therefore, it may be generally concluded that the perception of equity is a bigger issue for women in romantic relationships and shows more variability among them. It has been explained through gender roles in research. Traditional gender roles are also at the forefront not only in the equity between partners in a relationship but also in the communication based on social support (Matud et al., 2003). Romantic relationships were also assumed to be the inevitable domain in that this influence would manifest itself.

For instance, it has been indicated that women are more proactive in approaching and requesting support from their partners. Specifically securely attached women exhibit support-seeking behaviors in moments of anxiety (Simpson et al., 1992). Research on the importance of perceived support from romantic partners, which is just as significant as the actual support (Lemay & Clark, 2015), has considered the concept of perceived partner responsiveness. Studies have demonstrated that it is associated with satisfaction in relationships irrespective of gender (Candel & Turliuc, 2021; Pagani et al., 2019; Sasaki & Overall, 2020).

The underlying mechanisms may be questioned in light of the detrimental effects on partners of not perceiving their partner as responsive or their relationships as unequal. Studies indicate that perceived partner responsiveness and equity are consistently connected to other feelings, which are both positive and negative, that arise during the relationship or the ways individuals express them. Emotions, which can be characterized as the individual's primitive response forms (Strasser, 1970) that arise based on subjective experiences and cognition (Brenner, 1974), shape the reactions to situations and mobilize individuals (Brown, 1976), have the power to influence social behaviors and also decision-making processes (Averill, 1980). So, while examining people's romantic experiences and their fulfillment in this experience, it seems important not to ignore their emotions related to relational dynamics. Accordingly, people are happier and more satisfied in relationships where equity is achieved (Utne et al., 1984; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990), while stress, anger, and depressive feelings accompany relationships where this is not the case (Sprecher, 1986; Utne et al., 1984). Moreover, relational equity was also found to be related to women disclosing their feelings, and gender differences appeared to be salient at this point (Larson et al., 1998). In addition, expressing or suppressing emotions was further examined in relation to perceived partner responsiveness. People who perceived their partners as more responsive tended to disclose their feelings to them more, whereas perceived less responsiveness was associated with suppression of emotions (Ruan et al., 2020). The inability to manage one's emotions can lead to hostile or withdrawn behavior in the relationship, which lowers satisfaction. Conversely, honest and open communication and expression of feelings foster a more responsive perception of one's

partner and increased satisfaction (Pagani et al., 2019). Here, it can be argued that having the ability to regulate emotions might play an instrumental part as a resilience source in relationships' challenging circumstances (Troy & Mauss, 2011).

According to Gratz and Roemer (2004), emotion regulation means having the ability to understand and accept the emotion, having clarity, controlling impulsive actions accordingly, acting in accordance with the purposes of the individual about the situation, and having strategic sources to be able to do all these. A deficiency in any of these components may be linked to communication issues, issues with the partner, and ultimately detrimental effects on relationship satisfaction (Bradburry & Shaffer, 2012). Therefore, while investigating how people's perceptions of relational equity and their partners' responsiveness may be associated with relationship satisfaction, it appears important to investigate how the ability or inability to regulate the experienced emotions might play a role in that association. It was concluded to conduct the current study using dyadic data due to the interdependent nature of relationships, potential gender disparities regarding variables, and the value of examining the impact of one's perceptions about the dynamics on partner experience.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties in the association of relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness to romantic relationship satisfaction at a dyadic level. The data collected from heterosexual couples were used in this study, which also aims to investigate possible actor and partner effects in the relationship between romantic relationship satisfaction and related variables.

1.3. Research Question and Hypotheses

The key focus of this research is to answer the following research question: “What is the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties in the association of relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness to romantic relationship satisfaction in emerging adulthood?”.

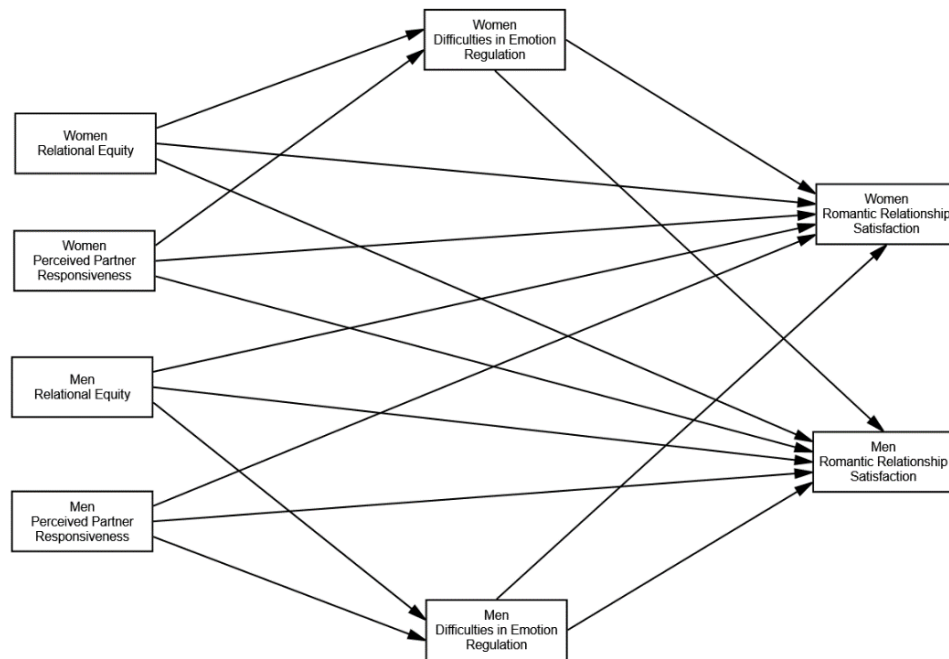


Figure 1.1. *Hypothesized Model for the Current Study*

The hypothesized model's schematic representation is shown in Figure 1.1. The following is a list of the hypotheses that address the research question and take the actor, partner, and mediator's effects into account. The term "actor effect" in the current research refers to how the characteristics of an individual affect their own, whereas the term "partner effect" refers to how an individual's outcome variable is affected by their partner's variables (Cook & Kenny, 2005). The hypotheses addressing the research question can be listed as follows:

H1: Women's and men's relational equity will be positively associated with their own and their partners' romantic relationship satisfaction.

H2: Women's and men's relational equity will be negatively associated with their own emotion regulation difficulties.

H3: Emotion regulation difficulties of both women and men will mediate the relationship between relational equity and romantic relationship satisfaction.

H4: Women's and men's perceived partner responsiveness will be positively associated with their own and their partners' romantic relationship satisfaction.

H5: Women's and men's perceived partner responsiveness will be negatively associated with their own emotion regulation difficulties.

H6: Emotion regulation difficulties of both women and men will mediate the relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and romantic relationship satisfaction.

1.4. Significance of the Study

It is widely acknowledged that the satisfaction of each partner's emotional needs defines the nature of relationships (Butler, 2011; Luginbuehl & Schoebi, 2018); this is seen even in the attempts to apply the exchange notion *characterized* by pragmatic considerations to romantic partnerships (Hatfield et al., 1985). It is evident from the literature that perceiving the romantic partner as responsive is a circumstance that has an impact on how satisfied people are in the relationship (Candel & Turliuc, 2021) as well as how they express their feelings, and communicate with each other (Ruan et al., 2020). Nevertheless, not enough research has been done to figure out how this association can arise. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate how emotion regulation difficulties relate to perceived partner responsiveness and satisfaction. The current research appears to be significant as it attempts to shed light on the extent to which partner responsiveness and satisfaction are related to emotions, which are key to partner communication. Apart from the fundamental need for support, it is also recognized that individuals nowadays prioritize their own personal fulfillment; and individualization becomes increasingly apparent.

The idea of how individual investments in the relationship, alternative options, and the satisfaction that individuals derive from current relationships affect relationship continuity is currently more on the agenda within exchange theories (e.g. Rusbult et al., 1998). On the other hand, studies on the concept of evaluating one's sense of fairness and equity in a relationship and an individual's earnings in response to their investments -which is, in fact, the core of the idea of exchange- have been overlooked in the expansion of theory. The studies were outdated, conducted mainly with married couples, or are about merely power equity (e.g., Aydin, 2017; Felmlee, 1994). This research was carried out with the idea that it is important to investigate the importance

of individuals' self-preservation while considering relational balance in their relationships, particularly in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015), where embracing independence and self-discovery is just as important as nurturing relationships. The study is important in terms of providing insight into how caring for both the relationship and self might manifest themselves in relationships.

Since emotions were found to be consistently related to the perception of relational equity, as in perceived responsiveness, the question of how the relationship between satisfaction and equity can be related through the regulation of these emotions was also aimed to be answered. In an effort to improve relationship satisfaction, it is anticipated that the results will not only identify an association and add to the body of relationship research but also improve interventions trying to enhance self-regulation abilities in relationships by offering a new perspective on its connection to the dynamics. Ultimately, employing the actor-partner interdependence model, it is aimed to demonstrate how partners influence one another, how they help one another develop coping and regulatory abilities, and how this influences one another's level of satisfaction. It is anticipated that it will add to the body of knowledge on relationship satisfaction by explaining the associations and by serving as a base for interventions focusing on couple communication and individual features.

1.5. Definitions of Terms

This section provides definitions for the terms used in the study.

Equity is defined in the context of this study as both individuals in the relationship benefiting fairly from it (Hatfield, & Traupmann, 1981). *Relational equity* is the belief that people believe their relationships are mutually beneficial and that their investments in their relationships are justified (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985).

Perceived partner responsiveness refers to an individual's perception of their partner's genuine concern for them and support for the core aspects of their identity (Reis et al., 2004; Ruan, et al., 2019).

Romantic relationship satisfaction is an individual's assessment of the romantic relationship and its degree of favorable emotions for the person (Keizer, 2014; Rusbult, 1980).

Emotion regulation is the ability to manage one's emotions, including how to feel and express them, in a way that serves the individual's goals (Eisenberg et al., 2000; Gross, 2001).



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, after providing an overview of romantic relationships and romantic relationship satisfaction in emerging adulthood, the theoretical background and empirical findings are presented for the other variables of the study: namely relational equity, perceived partner responsiveness, and emotion regulation difficulties. Afterward, a general summary of the literature review is given.

2.1. Emerging Adulthood and Romantic Relationships

Emerging adulthood, “*the age of identity explorations, instability, self-focusing, feeling in-between and possibilities*” according to Arnett (2015, pp. 9), is a time of numerous alternative routes and also a transition to adulthood. Identity exploration is a crucial aspect of this period. To develop a strong sense of who they are, people go through a process of discovery and exploration of themselves (Shelley et al., 2020) in many different areas of life, such as romantic relationships, worldviews, or work (Arnett, 2015). They advance in an enhanced comprehension of who they are, their abilities, beliefs, and values, as well as a knowledge of how to integrate into society and how to shape relationships as a result of exploring various options (Arnett & Mitra, 2018).

Therefore, possibilities, which relate to the sense of optimism and willingness to new opportunities, are one of the primary concerns of emerging adulthood. The desire to try new things and get to know oneself goes hand in hand with the belief that one has the power to influence their own future and make important life decisions. There are many decisions that could be taken at this time, possibly more than at any other point in life (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017). It is also a period of instability due to cons-

tant transformation and change, including adjustments in individuals' intimate relationships, life tasks, and work opportunities (Arnett & Mitra, 2018; Shelley et al., 2020). When predicting the near future and adjusting to changes, emerging adults frequently feel unsure and unpredictable. It also takes longer to get used to the new roles associated with being an adult.

Since the person views themselves as neither entirely adult nor totally adolescent, a feeling of in-betweenness is a typical experience (Nelson et al., 2004). Self-focusing, the final critical characteristic Arnett identified (2015), describes people prioritizing their growth and self-sufficiency throughout this period (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017). Emerging adults are more able to pursue their interests, beliefs, and desires thanks to their self-focus. Making choices related to goals and needs is another key component of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015). Self-recognition and growth are inevitable components of the process. Discovering one's desires and goals during transitions and making decisions accordingly are among the key needs of emerging adults. Self-focus, defined as prioritizing one's growth and independence (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017), is a characteristic of the period that makes it possible to pursue interests, beliefs, and goals more skillfully (Arnett, 2015).

Driven by a desire to explore and also a sense of uncertainty, many discoveries in areas such as identity, emotions, sexuality, morality, values, academic achievement, career, etc. (Santrock, 2017) take shape in emerging adulthood even though they first take place in adolescence (Atak & Cok, 2010). People learn from their explorations as a part of this period's most unique characteristic, identity exploration, and then apply the knowledge to a range of situations encountered in adulthood. The enduring nature of the experiences of this period and their impact on the rest of life are both stressed (Arnett, 2015). Social environment and close relationships also constitute an important part of the discoveries (Fincham & Cui, 2010). In the relationships they establish in this period, individuals are in the process of learning about themselves and are self-focused (Arnett, 2015), and on the other hand, they can make decisions that will affect their future, such as marriage decision, choosing the person they will continue their lives (Fincham & Cui, 2010).

Although close relationships are important for all age periods in terms of providing a sense of security (Deci & Ryan, 2000), especially romantic relationships seem to be not only an important part of emerging adulthood but a crucial developmental task (Furman & Collibee, 2014). The enduring nature of experiences that affect future periods is also apparent. The important question across this age range is "What kind of person do I want to continue my life with?" rather than "Whom do I want to be with right now to feel happy?" (Arnett, 2000). Making such prospective decisions earlier, there is a wide range of possibilities to take into account based on their personal romantic experiences. The potential variety of romantic experiences that people in this age group have increased as a result of the rise in marriage age that came with the societal change in the last fifty years and adolescents developing romantic relationships earlier (Rauer et al., 2013).

The tendency of emerging adults to focus on themselves is additionally evident while they are considering their partner alternatives and initiating and maintaining relationships, all of which contribute to the formation of their self-definition. Protecting oneself from being rejected and failed, presenting oneself strategically according to their goals, and acting by evaluating life options constitute the basis of the initiations of this period, including romantic relationships. Their intensity often decreases as the relationship progresses and deepens. In the case of romantic relationships, the goal is often to have a mutually beneficial and pleasant cooperative relationship with a romantic partner (Clark & Beck, 2011), although it is known that there are emerging adults who do not prefer it (Backmeyer & Cromwell, 2018), and when beginning a relationship, attempts are made to achieve this goal and partners are made up of people with this potential (Clark & Beck, 2011).

In short, exploration of self and possibilities, a sense of in-betweenness, and instability during discoveries are key characteristics of emerging adulthood. Individuals during this period are mostly in need of establishing relationships that can be carried through to later stages of life while also concentrating on their needs, and discovering who they are. The literature has addressed the variables influencing relationship satisfaction in this "winding road"- as Arnett (2015) stated.

The next sub-heading presents related studies after a brief explanation of the concept of relationship satisfaction.

2.1.2. Romantic Relationship Satisfaction on Emerging Adulthood

Romantic relationship satisfaction is an individual's assessment of their relationship, which takes into account people's perspectives and experiences (Keizer, 2014). This definition encompasses one's perceptions of the extent to which their romantic relationship satisfies their desires and expectations (Ta, 2017). The concept is generally expressed in combination with positive emotions, a desirable feeling or attraction experienced towards a partnership (Rusbult, 1983).

This positive state of being fulfilled, which is felt depending on the subjective experiences of the person in the relationship, is closely linked to different factors affecting life such as mental and physical health (Graham et al., 2011) and is known to affect the general well-being of the person (Demirtaş & Tezer, 2012). So, despite considering that satisfaction is a large aspect of a relationship that has been addressed using many different concepts in such different age ranges in the close relationships literature, the satisfaction of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood and associated variables are covered in this section. Romantic competence is one of the concepts that are frequently investigated concurrently. This also means that they have the opportunity to grow over time or develop "romantic competence," as Norona et al. (2017) stated, in their relationships. Although romantic competence is not a concept specific to adolescents and is important for the functioning of romantic relationships in all life stages, its foundations are shaped in emerging adulthood. This concept, which is closely related to relationship satisfaction, security, and functioning, consists of three basic components: insight, mutuality, and emotion regulation. Insight consists of being aware of the reasons for and consequences of one's behavior and having the ability to draw lessons from the past. Considering one's own needs, drives, and the impact of one's actions on others is also included in the definition. Mutuality is the capacity to fulfill one's own needs while ensuring favorable results for both people involved in a relationship.

Emotion regulation comprises being aware of one's emotional state, expressing emotions in healthy ways, tolerating challenging emotions, and sustaining a balanced state of mind. These three basic components, self-awareness, reciprocity in the relationship, and the ability to regulate emotions, are vital for maintaining romantic competence (Davila et al., 2017). This concept is one of the commonly investigated concepts in the literature on emerging adulthood romantic relationship satisfaction, which is consistent with its importance in romantic functioning (Davila et al., 2017) and romantic relationships' being essential as emerging adults' social development (Furman & Collibee, 2014). Satisfying relationships formed in this period might pave the way for an endurance of secure and fulfilling relationship experiences, while unpleasant and painful relationships may reinforce insecure attachment patterns by creating a sense of insecurity (Godbout et al., 2017).

Several variables that appear to be connected to emerging adult features have been studied in relation to romantic relationship satisfaction. Whitton and Kuryluk (2012) discovered a negative correlation between depressive symptoms and relationship satisfaction, with a stronger correlation in women. They also highlighted that feeling committed had an impact on this relationship in men and consequently, men who show little commitment in their relationships also have a lower correlation between depressive symptoms and satisfaction. Demirli Yıldız et al. (2017) demonstrated a moderately negative correlation between relationship satisfaction and having an anxious attachment style. Low satisfaction has also been associated with avoidance, emotional cutoff, and intimacy-related anxiety (Norona, Welsh, 2016).

According to Beckmeyer and Cromwel (2018), individuals who have a desire for a romantic relationship and who are in it, possibly due to the support they experience, express feeling less alone and having higher levels of overall well-being. At this point, it's crucial to feel supported by your romantic partner. Yet, Candel (2022) found that excessive levels of entitlement, or the high expectation that needs will be met by the romantic partner, lower relationship satisfaction. Vannier and O'Sullivan also showed in their 2017 study that the failure of the relationship to meet expectations negatively affects relationship satisfaction.

Studies that supported the research model were discovered following the evaluation of the findings. Romantic relationship satisfaction in emerging adulthood was also examined with the variables of insecure attachment (Godbout et al., 2017; Stackert, Bursik, 2003), relationship violence (Godbout et al., 2017), relationship conflict (Sağkal, Özdemir, 2019), dysfunctional relationship beliefs (Stackert, Bursik, 2003), and dysfunctional individuation (Ran Zhang & Chen, 2023) and a negative relationship was found between them. Romantic beliefs such as believing that love will overcome everything or believing in the existence of a soul mate (Vannier, O’Sullivan, 2017), dyadic coping behaviors (Eyisoğlu & Erdem, 2023), and similarities in text-based communication (Ohadi et al., 2018) were found to be positively related to relationship satisfaction in this period. In addition, high relationship satisfaction and quality are also positively related to the general life satisfaction of emerging adults (Eryılmaz & Doğan, 2013).

This study is based on equity theory, which is one of the theories trying to explain the issue of satisfaction. Along with the explanation of the theory, relational equity, perceived partner responsiveness, and emotion regulation were discussed in detail in the following sections.

2.3. Equity Theory

The previous section provided a discussion of the profound importance of relationships, particularly romantic ones, in the lives of individuals. This circumstance has intensified research on the nature of relationships and sparked scholarly interest. There are many theories and empirical studies in the academic literature on how romantic relationships begin, continue, and ultimately end.

2.3.1. Social Exchange Theories: The Position of Equity Theory

For many years, it has been addressed in a variety of sources what causes a decision to start a relationship (such as Clark, et al., 2011; Eastwick et al. 2011; Ireland, et al., 2011), what motivates and an impact on that decision (such as Appel, et al., 2015;

Guldner, et al., 1995; McNulty, et al., 2008) and what dynamics and processes result in a relationship ending (such as Le et al., 2010; Sprecher, et al., 2014; VanderDrift, et al., 2013).

One theory that has advanced concepts for comprehending relationship dynamics is equity theory. The foundations, which constitute an important part of social exchange theories, are based on economic and political factors (Adams, 1963; Hatfield & Rapson, 2011) and support a balanced and fair distribution of what is given to the relationship and what is received in return (Adams, 1965).

At this point, it seems important to elaborate on the basic principles of social exchange theory to understand equity theory more comprehensively. As a social exchange theorist, Homans (1958) claims that the notion of exchange can be used to explain interactions with others. He proposes that people act in social manners with the hopes of getting benefits and avoiding costs- what social exchange theory is fundamentally about. To preserve an equilibrium between what they offer and get in social connections, he underlines that people structure their behavior upon the reciprocity principle: *“I will give you something because I expect that you will return my gift in due time or when necessary (for instance in the case of help).”* (Komter, 2007, p. 100). In this context, social exchange theory emphasizes the significance of rewards as interpersonal activity motivators, such as company, approval, or substance gains (Homans, 1958). This point of view leads to the notion that any relationship in which there can be an exchange can be analyzed within the framework of this theory (Adams, 1963). In his 1958 study, which focused on small group communication in general, Homans explained the social exchange theory through in-group communication, norm formation, cohesiveness, and the power of people in the group to influence each other. Accordingly, the greater the cohesiveness in small groups, the greater the power of individuals to influence each other, and the faster norms are formed within the group (Back, 1950).

The formation of norms in relationships and communication leads to the establishment of a balance in the relationship, also the stabilization of the behavior of people, and the

fixing of dynamics. However, this is not suggested to be seen as an ideal or a situation that can be observed at any time (Blau, 1964). The person is expected to behave in a way to provide what is best for him/her under the current circumstances. Although the state of equilibrium continues as long as distributive justice, which means that the gains/rewards are proportional to the investments/costs (Adams, 1965), continues, cognitive dissonance will reappear when the perceived cost is thought to be more than the benefit received, will result in a feeling of distress (Hegtvedt, 1990) and the person will take action to compensate for it (Homans, 1958).

Another exchange theorist, Blau (1964) contributed an additional viewpoint to Homans' ideas and the use of distributive justice; and emphasized the vagueness of the criteria used to identify the previously indicated condition of equilibrium, the perception of reward, and the perception of cost: He contends that people do not establish a reward-cost balance for themselves using generalized criteria but rather rely on their values, expectations, and the established social norms of the culture in which they live. As a study showing the importance of accepted social norms and the impact of social comparisons, Keith and Schafer (1987) emphasized the importance of the concept of relative deprivation.

According to Adams' definition of relative deprivation (1965) it is a belief that one's situation is less fortunate compared to others; in contrast to the concept of relative gratification, which means feeling that one is more fortunate than others. In their study, Keith and Schafer (198) revealed that psychological well-being is more negatively impacted by situations where a person feels inferior to others due to social comparisons than by relationships that fail to measure up to their individual expectations.

In line with the foregoing, Adams (1963, 1965), the author of the first articles on equity theory in the 1960s, approached the principles in the context of the employee-employer relationship. He presented a study within the scope of inequalities by evaluating the work, training, and labor of the employee as costs and the wage as a reward. In this study, self-assessment of oneself in comparison with other employees, which is called social comparison, was also discussed and how employees can compensate for perce-

ived negative workplace deficiencies (such as providing on-the-job training and making efforts to increase salaries) was handled. At this point, Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance was applied, and the employees' compensation efforts were explained in terms of it. The theory claims that people want to be in a state of balance and consistency in their thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes. Accordingly, in any situation that would disrupt the state of equilibrium, people make efforts to reduce or eliminate the existing inconsistency (Festinger, 1957). This circumstance causes a discrepancy for both those who believe they receive less than what they give (those who underbenefit) and those who believe they receive more than what they give (those who overbenefit) (Adams, 1963).

Condensing the previous work, Walster et al. (1973) defined four propositions of equity theory:

- a. The goal of each individual is to maximize their outcomes, where outcomes are defined as benefits minus expenses.
- b.
 - b.1. By developing recognized mechanisms for "equitably" dividing rewards and costs across attendees, groups can increase their overall reward. Members will therefore create equity mechanisms and make an effort to persuade members to embrace and follow them.
 - b.2. Individuals in groups will typically be rewarded for treating others fairly, and generally punished (had their costs rise up) for treating others unfairly.
- c. Individuals become irritated when they find themselves taking part in unfair partnerships. People experience more distress when the connection is more unequal.
- d. Once individuals acknowledge they are in an unequal relationship, they attempt to restore equity in the relationship and eradicate their discomfort, which can take two forms: Restoring actual equity or restoring psychological equity. In order to achieve actual equity, the person has to act and behave in a way that changes the situation, whereas in order to achieve psychological equity, the person has to change the way they think about their situation and misrepresent the actual things that happened (Hatfield & Rapson, 2011). In situations where equity cannot be restored, people who are in a situation of

inequity in their favor (overbenefitted) will feel guilty and people who are in a situation of inequity against them (underbenefitting) will feel angry (Hatfield, Traupmann, 1981). Besides, people in equitable relationships feel more satisfied with their relationships (Hatfield & Rapson, 2011).

Due to the elaboration offered, social exchange and equity theories appear to be inseparable by explaining how people perceive the fair distribution of benefits and costs and how they try to make adjustments when that distribution is not fulfilled; since the analysis of the distribution of rewards and its consequences seem to be the primary goal of exchange theorists (Leventhal, 1980).

However, the social exchange theory includes equity theory as a sub-theory and it has grown over time as new ideas that theorists consider important and various sub-theories have been incorporated. The interdependence theory and the investment model are the two most common of these.

Interdependence theory provides a framework for examining romantic relationships and includes essential terms and ideas needed to comprehend these dynamics. The primary ideas of the theory center on how partners in romantic relationships relate to and influence one another. In addition to equity and benefit-cost balance, which are conceived as "outcome" in the context of this theory; "dependence," which refers to how much a person depends on their partner to achieve desired results, is also regarded as critical. Furthermore, "comparison level" specifies the results a person anticipates from a relationship, whereas "comparison level for alternatives" refers to evaluations of the present relationship as compared to alternative possibilities (Kelley, 1984; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

The Investment Model of Rusbult, which also has several important phrases and ideas at its foundation, is an effective structure for comprehending the dynamics of romantic connections (Rusbult et al., 2011). According to the model, people assess the romantic relationship based on three main considerations: satisfaction, alternatives, and investments. First, when considering both the benefits and costs of a relationship, "satisfaction" refers to the overall pleasure a person experiences as a result of the relationship.

Second, "alternatives" refer to chances one perceives to satisfy desires and objectives unrelated to their present relationship. If appealing alternatives are available, loyalty to the current partnership may suffer. The term "investments" also refers to the material and emotional resources that each party has brought to the partnership, which would be diminished or devalued if the relationship terminated (Rusbult et al., 1998; Rusbult et al., 2011).

2.3.2. Equity Theory and Romantic Relationships

Social exchange theories, which can be handled in every context of relationship and communication and are found effective in investigating formal relationships (Sprecher & Shehan, 1993), have also been studied in the field of romantic relationships. It is important to consider how equity theory defines "intimate relationships" to understand how its principles become established in such types of interactions. Important theorists in the area of intimate/romantic relationships, Hatfield et al. (1979) defined what an "intimate relationship" entails as follows:

First of all, the love and liking that the parties in the relationship feel for each other is necessary for the communication to be considered close. The characteristics of close relationships that follow this "precondition" are usually shaped by the concept of exchange and the comparison of intimate relationships with more casual interactions, according to equity theorists' conceptualization. They therefore can be described as relationships where the information exchanged is more personal, connected to past experiences, values, and vulnerable and strong sides. They are also anticipated to last longer than casual relationships (Hatfield et al., 1979).

As can be deduced from the foundations of the theory, people are more willing to invest for their intimate relationships and the variety of investments made for the relationship as well as the substitutability of the expected returns is high. Although there are various resources that people can invest in, it may not be necessary to use all of the resources for investment in a relationship. Turner et al. (1971) categorize the resources that can be used in interpersonal relationships into six: love, status, information, money, goods, and services.

In close relationships, most or all of these resources can be utilized, whereas casual relationships usually involve investment from a single resource. Similarly, in close relationships, the return is not expected to be received exactly and in the same resource form, whereas in casual relationships, a similar expectation of return is in question.

According to an example given by Hatfield et al., (1979), an exchange with someone who is in a relationship only for academic reasons can be based only on lecture notes, whereas a person who asks for a loan from his/her partner in a close relationship can repay this debt in money, only with a thank you or a dinner. Leaving aside the question of how much satisfaction the partner will get from different kinds of paybacks, intimate relationships open up space for the use of different sources of exchange. Furthermore, there are studies showing that the type of resource is also important (e.g., Lloyd et al., 1982). In casual relationships, the status that people provide to each other is considered more valuable, while in close relationships, love and information sharing become more important. Finally, a strong cohesiveness and a “we” perception are at the forefront when it comes to intimate relationships. Individuals perceive and identify as a single entity with their partner, increasing the likelihood of identification. The unity of the couple, combined with the fact that the resources used can be quite diverse and the complexity in the substitutability of the resources exchanged, measures perceptions of equity and fairness in close relationships more complex than in more formal ones (Hatfield et al., 1979). The equity theory recognizes this complexity and provides particular hypotheses to address it in the setting of intimate relationships that go beyond the outcome maximization idea (Hatfield et al., 1979; Walster et al., 1978).

These hypotheses are (a) that if they believe the relationship is equal, men and women in relationships are more inclined to stay together and get married, (b) that a man or woman will feel discomfort if he/she feels that he/she is getting more (overbenefitted) or less (underbenefitted) than he/she deserves in the relationship and that the greater the inequity, the greater the discomfort, and (c) that equal relationships are more satisfying than relationships in which partners feel over-benefitted or under-benefitted, (d) sexual satisfaction is higher in close relationships perceived to be equal than in relationships perceived to be over-benefitted or under-benefitted, (e) there are some

important crisis moments for intimates such as moving into the same house, the birth of the first child, loss of job and such moments may shake the perception of equity, and (f) relationships perceived to be equal are stable relationships (Hatfield et al., 1985; Hatfield & Traupmann, 1981).

Including the mentioned hypotheses, and despite the difficulty of measuring equity in intimate connections due to their complexity, attempts are made to investigate equity with several variables using global measures (Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). The research studies are presented in the following section.

2.3.3. Research on Romantic Relationships within the Framework of Equity Theory

The concept of equity has been addressed together with various variables in the literature. Depending on the scope of this study, in this section, studies that include variables such as satisfaction, also commitment and stability, which are concepts related to satisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1998), are presented.

In their research on married people, Utne et al. (1984) discovered that spouses are happier in relationships where equity is ensured; over-benefitting is associated with discomfort and under-benefitting is associated with stress. Similarly, in their longitudinal study conducted in 1990 with married individuals, Van Yperen and Buunk focused on the relationship between equity and satisfaction and showed that satisfaction is higher in relationships that people think are fair. On the other hand, they revealed that under-benefited people have less satisfaction and that women are generally in this position, while men are more often concerned with ensuring equality in the relationship.

Sprecher is a significant researcher who has examined satisfaction in her research and examined equity with emotions. For instance, it was proposed that individuals who are in close relationships, regardless of gender, feel emotions according to their perception of equity in the connection in her 1986 study done with university students, 63.1% of whom were women. The findings indicated that anger is more severe in men who feel

under-benefitted in the relation, whereas in women, feelings take the shape of sorrow, frustration, and depression. Regardless of whether there was under-benefitting or over-benefitting, it was shown that positive emotions like contentment, joy, and respect were negatively connected in instances where there was inequity.

According to a different work of hers from 2001 (a), with a sample consisting of dating couples who are undergraduate students, individuals who believe they are underbenefited are less satisfied, but people who believe they are over-benefitted do not substantially correlate over-benefitting with satisfaction. The relationship phases were also examined in this study, and it was discovered that being under-benefitted in the initial phase was a significant predictor of commitment for women and satisfaction for men. It was also discovered that in the later stages of the relationship, when it came to relationship quality, the perceived degree of reward was more significant than the perception of equity, especially for women, and this additionally performed a role in satisfaction. Additionally, equity has been investigated using a sample of sixty-six married couples and evaluated in terms of intimacy (Larson et al., 1998). This study showed that decreased intimacy was linked to inequity for women but not for men. It was also shown that women's equity and willingness to express their ideas, emotions, and opinions to their partners were related. Women's intimacy was also positively correlated with both romantic alignment and self-confidence. Intimacy components such as autonomy, feeling of unity, conflict resolution, and emotional closeness between partners were not shown to be associated with equity in either gender.

Considering the foregoing studies, it appears that gender differences have been taken into account when it comes to romantic relationships and equity. Another one of the studies addressing the differences is Michaels et al.'s (1984) with exclusively dating university students. The researchers found that women are generally more favorable in relationships and claimed that this finding contradicts the perception that men generally get more benefits.

In addition, as a finding that draws attention to the importance of restoring equity, increasing the relationship outcomings of those in disadvantaged positions has a posi-

tive role on satisfaction by helping to restore equity, while as the relationship outcomings of those in advantaged positions increase, satisfaction decreases as the equity and balance is disrupted.

Another research was conducted by Joyner in 2009. In this longitudinal study, Joyner divided couples into married or cohabiting couples and engaged or unengaged couples and revealed gender and marital status differences. Accordingly, the perception of equity may play a justification role at the point of separation in married couples, and feeling disadvantaged while there is satisfaction in the relationship is not a reason for ending the marriage. For cohabiting couples, it was found that being engaged or not being engaged was determinant in the equity and dissolution relationship: In engaged couples, the fact that the woman feels disadvantaged is a reason for separation, while in unengaged couples, the disadvantaged position of the man causes separation. This is explained by the fact that the increase in the duration of the relationship in unengaged couples reduces the role of the woman's disadvantaged position and its effect on relationship stability.

Yum et al. (2015), on the other hand, addressed the effect of culture and gender roles as well as gender in their investigation. In this context, they worked with a sample of mostly dating relationships from Malaysia, Singapore, and the United States and focused on relationship maintenance. Relational maintenance refers to what is done to make the relationship functional, stable, and satisfying, and is related to other variables such as commitment, satisfaction, and love (Canary et al., 2002; Yum et al., 2015).

In order to analyze these strategies to maintain relationships, three countries were evaluated under two separate headings: survival values and self-expression values. While the US and Malaysia are more individualistic and focused on self-expression ideals, Singapore is more traditional and focused on survival values. As a result of the research, it was revealed that self-expression societies have more relationship maintenance efforts and use more related strategies, and it was observed that individuals in these societies use the strategies more frequently when they perceive relational equity.

Accordingly, equity was considered a "Western standard" within the scope of relationship maintenance strategies. While no gender differences were observed in countries other than the United States, women in the United States were found to be more inclined to use maintenance strategies, which was explained by the influence of traditional gender roles in other countries and the fact that women in the United States, as a self-expression society, paid more attention to relational exchanges. A similar study was conducted by Bellani et al. (2018) and addressed different cultures. Working with married couples from the United States and West Germany, the researchers focused on marital stability and dissolution variables. Based on the results, in West Germany, wives in under-benefited positions behave in a way to maintain marital stability, which can be explained by traditional gender role dominance, while in the United States, low marital stability was observed if wives were under-benefited. They also examined the risk of divorce when wife-husband salaries are equal and found that the risk of divorce increases for couples in the United States if the wife's under-benefitting is observed in the case of salary equity, while marital stability is preserved in West Germany. By comparing two different cultures, how traditional gender roles and behavior in accordance with these roles affect the stability of the marriage, which is related to marital satisfaction (Yucel, 2016), is revealed.

As evidenced by these two separate studies with married and unmarried couples, gender roles and cultural distinctions play a significant role in understanding how people see gender equity and the differences between men and women in intimate relationships. In support of the findings of the studies, Donaghue and Fallon, in their 2003 study in which they examined the relationship between gender-role, equity, and relationship satisfaction stated that people who adopted traditional roles did not attach much importance to equity in their relationships, and that they regarded possible inequity situations as natural processes due to gender differences. Equity was found to be significantly related to relationships in which people do not stereotype themselves according to gender roles.

Conversely, there is research that has demonstrated equity does not significantly affect relationship satisfaction as well as the ones that examine which variables may in fact

significantly contribute to satisfaction. For instance, Michaels et al.'s (1984) study stated above demonstrated that people's perceptions about their outcomes from a relationship play a greater role in satisfaction than their perceptions of equity. Likewise, Cate et al. (1985) demonstrated the perceived degree of rewards is a more significant predictor than the overall perception of equity in the relationship.

The level of rewards was found to be a significant predictor of stable relationships, which was explained by the significance of prioritizing partner needs and responding in accordance with those requirements at certain times rather than acting in accordance with static equity standards. The result appears to be noteworthy in light of the significant correlation between satisfaction, commitment, and stability (Rusbult et al., 1998).

In their investigation of the connection between the perception of equity and satisfaction, Medvene et al. (2000) discovered that the sense of unity in the relationship has a greater impact on satisfaction. Accordingly, high levels of inclusivity in a relationship have an impact on satisfaction apart from perceived equity. No gender differences are also claimed in this circumstance.

As is apparent, the majority of research found that partners' perceptions of equity play a key role in romantic relationships and that many factors that may be connected were taken into consideration. There was no substantial correlation between relationship satisfaction and equity in some studies, and a couple of them provided explanations for several factors other than equity that were involved. Also remarkable is the prevalence of foreign literature in illuminating the connection between the variables under discussion. The only study that examines the idea of equity in Türkiye is Akçabozan-Kayabol and Hatipoğlu Sümer's (2020) investigation of married couples' relationship maintenance behavior while controlling for feelings of equity and expressions of appreciation. Her research demonstrated that relationship maintenance behaviors and marital satisfaction were mediated by perceptions of equity for partners and for themselves. The association between satisfaction with relationships and self and partner-maintenance behaviors was also mediated by perceived appreciation.

It can be observed that research generally addressed gender disparities, gathered data from individuals in long-term, committed, and mostly married couples, and concentrated on factors including relationship maintenance, commitment, stability, and satisfaction.

2.4. Perceived Partner Responsiveness

The idea of maximizing one's outcomes in communication has been explained in terms of the selfish nature of human beings by some social exchange theorists (Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). It was explained in the previous section that the theorists who applied equity theory to the field of romantic relationships put forward more distinctive hypotheses in this sense. Clark and Mills are also two important theorists who argue that the exchange notion is valid only for formal relationships and cannot be validated for intimates (Clark & Mills, 1993; Reis & Shaver, 1988). They define intimate kinds of relationships as communal relationships. The term describes partnerships where members feel obligated to address the needs of their communal partners and where benefits are provided without restriction in response to those needs (Clark & Mills, 1979).

Both parties involved in these relationships are motivated to support the welfare of their partner, and family relationships, close friendships, and romantic relationships are examples of such connections (Lemay Jr. et al., 2023). They are characterized by the supportive listening of the individual who listens and the discloser's sense of being understood and supported (Reis & Shaver, 1988). According to Clark and Mills (1979), qualities like empathy, responsiveness, and consideration for the partner create a distinction between communal and exchange interactions.

One of the major differences is seen in the perception of benefits given and received and the motivation for providing benefits to the other. In communal relationships, the motivation for giving to the other is not to get something in return, but to respond to the other's needs and a case of exchange does not exist (Clark & Mills, 1979). It is assumed that each partner is sensitive to the needs of the other and mutual responsive-

ness is the norm (Clark & Mills, 1979; Pruitt, 1972). Instead of the exchange notion that means maximizing the outputs and expecting to get back in return for giving, in such relationships the communal rule is followed: both partners have a concern for the well-being of the other, have the motivation to benefit when needed, and behave in accordance. It is argued that following this rule in relationships is more ideal than pursuing exchanges. It is emphasized at this time how vital it is for partners to recognize one another's needs as well as their own and reach a shared agreement.

Following the communal rule may be difficult if what one person considers necessary is not significant to another, or if there are not enough resources to meet needs. It could therefore lead the person to have doubts about the other partner's motivations. Exchanges can now be taken into consideration to ensure fairness in relationships. Although this might maintain the relationship, it diminishes satisfaction and does not result in the restoration of a solid mutual relationship (Mills & Clark, 2001). Thus, having expectations from the partner is not denied also in communal relationships. In such relationships, since both partners care about the well-being of the other, the belief that the close romantic relationship should be fair by nature and the trust in the partner in this regard is dominant (Grote & Clark, 1989). At the point where trust decreases, as mentioned above, the exchange notion becomes more influential (Mills & Clark, 2001). Multiple other explanations have been proposed to explain this complicated framework related to romantic intimacy.

One of these is the relational orientation view. According to Milardo and Murstein (1979), the degree of reciprocity expected from one's partner refers to one's exchange orientation. Therefore, individuals' behaviors can be considered on a continuum. If the exchange orientation is high, the person expects to receive the full return of what he/she gives from the same source.

It is also believed that equity exists outside of exchange and communal standards and can be taken into account for both. It follows that motivation is crucial to attaining it. According to Grote and Clark (1989), numeric equivalency without regard for needs is more in keeping with the exchange norm, whereas equity that is performed by part-

ners in respect of each other's needs is more in line with the communal norm. The researchers employed the example of married couples' family visits to provide a more tangible illustration of their claim. They stated that although it is more consistent with the exchange norm to observe an equal number of visits for each partner's family, it is more consistent with the communal norm to come to an agreement and schedule them while accounting for the needs of the family and the necessity of meeting with them. In a similar line, there are arguments that the notion of need itself can be a principle of justice and that this is the case in relationships in which caregiving is considered- according to this idea, the principle of equity works in favor of the person in need at that particular time (Steil & Makowski, 1989).

These ideas can be expanded further, and although researchers' perspectives may differ, there is a shared understanding of the significance of needs and the essential role relationships have in meeting them. The literature frequently indicates that close relationships are characterized by satisfying the requirements for support, care, love, and being loved (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2007; Kane et al., 2007; Lemay Jr et al., 2023).

The extent to which the partner satisfies emotional needs is therefore an issue stated in the literature. One key idea that has been raised and discussed in this context is perceived partner responsiveness. It refers to people's belief that the important aspects of their self are supported by their partner. These parts can be quite diverse, such as one's characteristics, feelings, goals, and needs. Mutual responsiveness to one another in these areas is seen as the basis of close relationships, and people desire to feel supported by their partner's behaviors, valued, emotionally connected to the other, and acknowledged (Reis et al., 2004). Gadassi et al. (2016) proposed that this concept might function as the primary structuring component for relationships and considering that the idea is frequently examined in important areas of romantic relationships, this proposal might make sense. When the literature is examined, it gets noticeable that studies have focused on romantic intimacy (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021; Debrot et al., 2012; Ruan et al., 2020), relationship satisfaction (Candel & Turliuc, 2021; Pagani et al., 2019; Sasaki & Overall, 2020), emotions (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021; Candel &

Turliuc, 2021; Ruan et al., 2020), and attachment (Knapp et al., 2016). Perceived partner responsiveness has also been used to address variables related to communication and conflict resolution (Pagani et al., 2019; Sasaki & Overall, 2020), as well as rejection sensitivity (Richter & Schoebi, 2021) and self-improvement (Overall et al., 2010), which also related to the emerging adulthood developmental features.

Moreover, the fact that the concept is based on perception and focuses on a person's "belief" that they are supported and their "feelings" about it is reasonably chosen. Studies seem to concentrate on subjective reports, and research emphasizes the significance of partners' subjective experiences of responsiveness. Compared with actual events, subjective impressions appear to be more important and closely related to personality. For instance, it has been shown that in circumstances where getting support is expected, the impression of support availability—in the absence of concrete evidence of the quantity and quality of support offered—is helpful for individuals (Reis et al., 2004). As intimate relationships are highly influenced by personal patterns, expectations, and desires, motivated cognition, which means thinking in a manner consistent with one's own desired outcomes (Lemay & Clark, 2015), should be taken into account in the comprehension of perceived partner responsiveness (Lemay & Clark, 2015; Reis et al., 2004).

Considering the significance of an individual's own perception, it is more comprehensive to incorporate the subjective experiences of individuals in romantic relationships and the effects these experiences have on their partners. The influence of both partners on common relationship outcomes is also worth consideration. At this point, research on dyads is crucial because of the way individuals interact with one another and influence each other's experiences. Despite this importance, not many studies have looked at the effects of actors on their partners (Sasaki & Overall, 2020).

However, through reviewing the literature on perceived partner responsiveness, it can be seen that the number of dyadic studies is remarkable. The following sub-heading presents studies both at the dyadic and individual levels respectively.

2.4.1. Research on Romantic Relationships and Perceived Partner Responsiveness

To start with, the relational variables investigated via dyadic data include relationship stability and intimacy in addition to relationship satisfaction. Related research is also present at the individual level. Since such relationship dynamics are profoundly linked to satisfaction and relationship functioning (Dandurand & Lafontaine, 2013; Rusbult et al., 1998), studies on these concepts are also reviewed.

Relationship stability was studied together with perceived caregiving responsiveness in a large sample of 6385 couples (Knapp et al., 2016). All couples were heterosexual and married or living together. As a result of the study, it was observed that couples who thought that their relationship was not stable also had low perceptions of care from their partners.

Debrot et al. (2012) showed in their study with 102 couples that there is a relationship between intimacy and perceived partner responsiveness. It has also been shown that intimacy and one's own responsiveness are positively related and that this relationship remains valid even when one considers how responsive one perceives his/her partner and oneself to be. Moreover, the individual's sense of intimacy was observed to be associated with the partner's responsive behaviors, regardless of whether they were perceived as such. It has also been shown that when one's partner perceives one as responsive, feelings of intimacy rise. In other words, the responsive behaviors of both partners towards one another reinforce their mutual sense of intimacy and perceived responsiveness.

Another study on intimacy was conducted by van Lankveld et al. in 2021 at the individual level. This study found a high correlation between partner responsiveness and reported intimacy in a large sample of 7692 women and 2501 men (of whom 85.3% and 90.2% were heterosexual). Sexual desire was another study variable that was linked to intimacy and perceived relationship responsiveness. It was shown that intimacy and partner responsiveness together had a stronger explanatory power for sexual desire than intimacy by itself. In other words, sexual desire is highest when the

person feels close to his/her partner and the partner exhibits responsive behaviors. With intimacy, people may also face the risk of hurting and offending each other. In a study with 187 married individuals, Taşkıreç and Solmazer (2023) investigated the relationship between forgiveness and perceived partner responsiveness as well as the mediating effects of interpersonal emotion control techniques such as co-brooding and co-reappraisal. The findings of this study indicate that forgiveness and perceived partner responsiveness are positively correlated, with co-reappraisal acting as a partial mediator in this relationship. This suggests that in married couples, perceiving the partner as responsive plays a role in its relationship with forgiveness by facilitating constructive reconsideration of the situation together.

A few studies have examined satisfaction and one of them is the 2021 study by Candel and Turliuc. In addition to relationship satisfaction and perceived partner responsiveness, they also investigated self-disclosure behavior and relational entitlement. 99 couples were assessed for seven days as part of the study. The level of expectation that one's partner can meet one's needs within the boundaries of the study was defined as relational entitlement. This study revealed an association between perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction for both men and women. Furthermore, relationship satisfaction was shown to be lower in men who had high expectations of their partners (excessive sense of relational entitlement) and low and moderate levels of perceived responsiveness. On the other hand, excessive entitlement and satisfaction were not shown to be related when high partner responsiveness was perceived. When perceived partner responsiveness is high, there is a negative and significant correlation between satisfaction and not believing that one deserves to get benefits (restricted sense of relational entitlement). Low and moderate levels of perceived partner responsiveness did not moderate a relationship between the two variables.

For women, there was no significant relationship between entitlement types and satisfaction moderated by perceived partner responsiveness. Self-disclosure, the other variable of the study, was found to have a positive relationship with relationship satisfaction for men (Candel & Turliuc, 2021). The relationship between self-disclo-

sure and well-being was also investigated in an individual-level study (Doğruyol, 2023) and it was found that the individual's own self-disclosure level was positively related to his/her well-being via perceived partner responsiveness.

Pagani et al. (2019) conducted another dyadic study examining the relationship between satisfaction and perceived partner responsiveness. In the study involving 55 married couples, explicit communication in times of stress, perceived partner responsiveness, and satisfaction variables were examined. As a result of the study, it was shown that openly discussing stressful events with the partner, regardless of gender, is associated with an increase in perceived partner responsiveness in the dyadic coping framework and this may increase relationship satisfaction. In 2020, Sasaki and Overall carried out daily and longitudinal studies with two samples: 161 couples in one sample and 152 couples in the other. They investigated the relationship between the negative direct behavior of the actors and the partner's withdrawal as a response, the perceived responsiveness of the partner, and relationship satisfaction. The study found that the partner's withdrawal from communication in response to the actor's hostile, critical behavior is linked to a decline in relationship satisfaction and a decrease in the perception of the partner's responsiveness. A similar picture emerges when partner withdrawal is low and negative direct behavior is high: low relationship satisfaction and low perceived partner responsiveness. The negative association between the actor's negative direct behavior and partner withdrawal with perceived partner responsiveness was found both at the level of daily interactions and in repeated measures every three months for a year.

Another research regarding partner communication presented the findings of three studies, of which the second (127 couples, including one same-sex couple) and the third (200 heterosexual couples) involved couples. The first study was at the individual level, conducted with 340 individuals (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021). According to all studies conducted at the individual and dyadic levels, experiencing powerlessness increases the amount of emotional repression and decreases the emotional expression during interactions, with perceived partner responsiveness' acting as a moderator. As a result, individuals who believe their partners are responsive do not exhibit the associ-

ation between power and emotional suppression. The third study, however, went beyond this finding and demonstrated that, when faced with communication issues, those who felt powerless reacted to their partners by being loyal and quieter. Similarly, when partners are perceived as responsive, this relationship does not emerge.

Ruan et al. also published a study on emotions and emotion expression in 2020. 146 participants were split into three groups for this individual-level, experimental study: high-responsive, low-responsive, and control. The control group was asked relationship-related questions without any connection to responsiveness, the low-responsive group was asked questions leading to they would not view their partners as that responsive, and the high-responsive group was asked questions that reinforced their perceived responsiveness. They were then placed in a stressful scenario and instructed to give a presentation in order for experts to evaluate it. Among the participants who sent an email expressing their feelings to their partners, those in the high-responsive condition used more expressions of anxiety and were more open to asking for support; this was less in the low-responsive and control groups and there was no significant difference between the last two. It can be concluded from this study that when partners are thought to be responsive, there is a greater likelihood of emotional expression.

As previously stated, individual differences should be taken into consideration when it comes to perceptions. Support-seeking and expressive behaviors were examined alongside attachment styles in a study (Simpson et al., 1992) on personal variables related to emotional expression, requesting support, and demonstrating support. It was found that in securely attached women, support-seeking behaviors increased as anxiety increased.

On the other hand, a contrary pattern was shown among avoidant women: support-seeking behaviors declined as anxiety arose. It was shown that men who were securely attached provided greater support and men who were avoidantly attached provided less help when their partner's anxiety increased. Men's support for their partners may be attributed to the partner's emotional condition rather than the actions or attempts of

the female partner to seek support. In other words, men were more likely to exhibit helpful behaviors when they were aware of their partner's emotional state rather than behavioral efforts to solicit support. Avoidant attachment was also shown to be associated with a decrease in perceived responsiveness from one's partner, regardless of gender.

The relationship between this attachment style and perceived intimacy was also significant and negative. Conversely, anxious attachment is positively related to both perceived partner responsiveness and perceived intimacy (van Lankveld et al., 2021).

Self-esteem is another personal variable that is addressed together with perceived partner responsiveness in the literature. A dyadic study conducted in 2016 (Knapp et al., 2016), which was mentioned above, showed that self-esteem and perceived responsiveness of men and women were positively correlated based on data obtained from 6385 couples. This was explained in the study by the effect of self-esteem on how one perceives caregiving from the partner, the ability to exhibit care-seeking behaviors, and the ability to interpret positive perceptions about oneself.

Richter and Schoebi similarly carried out a study on rejection sensitivity in 2021. This study involved 75 heterosexual couples and focused on how perceived partner responsiveness related to the idea of rejection sensitivity—which is defined as the propensity for expecting to be rejected and overreacting to it. According to the study, feeling rejected led to the perception that one's partner is less responsive, and rejection experiences were found to be negatively associated with perceived partner responsiveness regardless of gender. However, higher rejection sensitivity of women results in their partners feeling more rejection on a daily basis. Men do not have a partner effect on women at this point.

The aforementioned study findings make it clear that perceived partner responsiveness has a significant relationship with relationship dynamics, the capacity for self-expression, notably emotional expression, and factors concerning internal dynamics in the literature.

The next section addresses the mediator of the study, emotion regulation difficulties, focusing on emotion regulation, the problems encountered, and how this issue has been treated in the literature within the framework of romantic relationships.

2.5. Emotion Regulation

The function and significance of perceptions of equity and partner responsiveness in romantic relationships are covered in the preceding sections. Among the studies in the literature was also an investigation into how these perceptions may be related to emotions and how they are expressed. Along with this, perceptions and expectations also have a role in the regulation of emotions, which includes both experiencing and expressing them (Gross, 2015). For this reason, emotion regulation and the difficulties encountered in this process were taken as the mediator of the current research.

Although the definition and analysis of the word emotion can be quite confusing (Averill, 1980), many attempts have been made to define it, as it is often used casually in the daily lives of individuals (Averill, 1980) and seems to be very much intertwined with everyday life (Matthews et al., 2021). In its broadest sense, emotion is an individual's primal reaction to circumstances they are exposed to (Strasser, 1970). It is a combination of either conscious or unconscious thoughts along with pleasant or unpleasant sensations (Brenner, 1974) that form as a result of the individuals' assessments of their own internal states or different environmental stimuli (Bowlby, 1983). They serve to provoke a response from the individual (Strasser, 1970) and guide them toward adaptive responses to their subjective experiences (Lazarus, 1975). The fundamental effect of emotions, which are actually a product of the internal processes of the individual, on human communication is related to the way they are expressed through behaviors (Shariff & Tracy, 2011). The concept of regulation appears to be crucial at this point.

Emotion regulation is the process of managing an individual's emotions and the manner in which they experience and express them (Gross, 2001). It is characterized by an activation intended to change one's emotional state (Gross et al., 2011) and co-

vers every step involved in the creation, maintenance, and modification of this state as well as the incidence, severity, and duration of the connected reactions (Eisenberg et al., 2000). The entire process is frequently tailored to the goals and desires of the individual (Eisenberg et al., 2000) and influences feelings in a direction that one believes will be beneficial to oneself (Gross, 2015). One of the most widely accepted approaches concerning the regulation of emotions is Gross's model, which claims that emotions highly involve a person's assessments of what is good and bad for them and that the regulation is closely linked to it (2015). Prior to the regulation, Gross (2007) proposed a view of how emotions arise and considered people's appraisals of their environment as part of the emotion generation process. According to this model named the “modal model of emotion”, emotions are formed through the steps and cycle of “situation- attention- appraisal- response”.

Therefore, emotion emerges when a circumstance in the outside world or in one's internal representations catches one's attention and makes it through one's evaluations. The things that catch someone's attention, their interpretation of what happened, and their values and perceptions set the stage for the construction of a response. One's responses, which stem from their internal filters, may alter and impact the "situation" the people around them are faced with (Gross, 2007). In this sense, people's mechanisms for generating emotions have an impact on one another and how they interact.

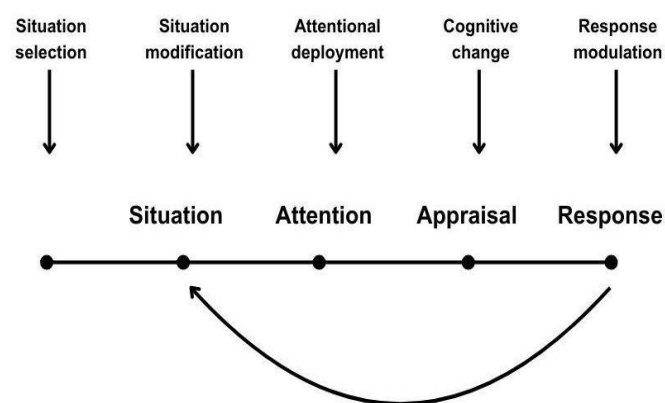


Figure 2.1. *Emotion Regulation Process Model of Gross*

Note. Adapted from the Gross, J. J. (2007). *Handbook of Emotion Regulation* (p. 10). The Guilford Press.

In the “process model”, which is the model of regulation that he put forward in line with the generation process (Gross, 2007), it is suggested that emotion regulation can be achieved in each generation step and a regulation strategy is defined for each.

Figure 2.1 displays the related diagram. Accordingly, situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation appear to be the five main strategy families. The first four are classified as antecedent-focused, while the last one is response-focused. Antecedent-focuses involve regulation of one's assessments before they lead to a response, whereas the last one is aimed at regulating the response after it has occurred (Webb et al., 2012).

To explain concisely, *situation selection* is when a person chooses the situations he/she will be in, decides whether to be present or not according to the emotional impact, and acts accordingly. *Situation modification* is making adjustments to the situation one is exposed to. Both involve the process' first step, which is to attempt to modify the "situation", that is, the environment in which they are in. In situations where this is not an option, the individual might have control over how they focus their attention (Gross, 2007).

Attentional deployment, or refocusing attention in a different way within the context of the moment, occurs in this instance (Gross & Barrett, 2011). Distraction and concentration are the two fundamental strategies in this group of many methods: Distraction is an attempt to focus on other aspects of the circumstance and emotional state, whereas concentration is an overemphasis on the felt emotion. It should be mentioned that rumination—which is defined as centered, recurrent concentration on the felt emotion—increases and carries the detrimental effect of the experienced emotion when it is related to negative emotions. Similar to this, concentrating on pleasant emotions boosts positive affect (Thompson & Calkins, 1996).

Thus, it can be stated that emotion regulation may be accomplished not only with the intention of decreasing negative affect but also with the aim of decreasing and increasing both positives and negatives (Gross, 2015).

Cognitive change refers to altering one's perception of something in order to modify the emotional impact that it has (Gross, 2007). The strategy most frequently employed is cognitive reappraisal, which involves reassessing the events and is regarded as one of the most effective as it was demonstrated in a meta-analysis study (Webb et al., 2012) and showed that this finding was also consistent with previous studies. Lastly, in *response modulation*, the individual makes an effort to directly influence the reactions to the event (physiological, behavioral, etc.) after they have occurred (Gross, 2007). Suppression is the most widely recognised strategy in this area and it refers to restricting continuous expression of emotion. Each of these strategies can consist of conscious attempts on the part of the individual, or they can be applied unconsciously and automatically (Gross, 2001).

The effectiveness and adaptiveness of the use of these strategies may vary according to the situation, the individual's purpose, the time, and the amount of use. For example, although distraction is a strategy to disengage the person from the emotional experience, using this strategy in situations of intense emotions can be helpful in terms of better functioning in the long term (Sheppes et al., 2011). In addition, although concentration assists in helping focus on and comprehend the experience, excessive concentration of negative emotion is maladaptive (Thompson & Calkins, 1996) and has been linked to depression (Sheppes et al., 2011).

Although some theorists who have addressed the concept of emotion regulation have previously focused on the control of emotions and the suppression component (Garner & Spears, 2000), the process model addresses various steps involved with the generation of emotions as well as various strategies, as briefly mentioned above. These strategies can be applied in multiple manners during the process and may be utilized as beneficial or detrimental to the individual. There is no labeling of any strategy as automatically good or automatically bad (Thompson & Calkins, 1996). In contrast to the preceding viewpoint, it allows the individual to "choose" the strategies based on the current situation and context (Sheppes et al., 2011) and it necessitates not just controlling and repressing them but also comprehending and evaluating emotions, and formulating reactions accordingly.

The individual is therefore responsible for monitoring his or her experiences and reacting in a manner that is aligned with his or her goals. This also requires the ability to assess and make changes to the self and the surrounding environment (Thompson & Calkins, 1996). Assuming this responsibility and acquiring the ability to regulate actually starts when the individual forms their initial bond with the caregiver as an infant. Through emotional signaling, the child learns to let the caregiver know what they need. At this moment, the caregiver has a bigger and more significant part in helping the child control their emotions, but over time, it is anticipated that the child will learn self-regulation skills with the help of the provided assistance. Thus, although self-regulation is essential, relationships with other people matter considerably, starting with the very beginning of a person's relationships (Luginbuehl & Schoebi, 2018).

This is discussed as both intrinsic and extrinsic regulatory systems by Gross (2007). Extrinsic processes, which are more prominent in close interactions like those between caregivers and children, entail the emotional regulation of others while intrinsic processes deal with self-regulation. People in the person's immediate circle continue to be important in relieving, comforting, and calming them as they grow. A significant component of this support also comes from romantic partners (Luginbuehl & Schoebi, 2018).

Romantic relationship partners not merely promote the regulation processes of the person through extrinsic processes, but they are also influenced by the person's self-regulation. Considering that intimate relationships are constructed as emotional systems between people (Butler, 2011), one's own emotional skills have the power to influence one's ability to build healthy relationships with others. Apart from comprehending, expressing, and managing one's own emotions, possessing self-regulation abilities enables an individual to assist in the exchange of emotional systems with their partner, develop empathy for them, and participate in their emotional process (Cordova, 2005). Moreover, as previously stated, a person's emotional response determines the "situation" the others around them encounter (Gross, 2007). This results in the individual's ability to regulate their emotions and impacts the inner

processes of their romantic partners, who are involved in the relationship with their own expectations, capabilities, and limitations (Fávero et al., 2021).

In the current context, it can be argued that relationships might suffer when at least one partner has difficulty in recognizing, being aware of, and accepting what they feel, having appropriate strategy resources at convenient times, being able to control inappropriate impulses and being able to act in accordance with the situation and their goals (Tani et al., 2015). Difficulties can be exemplified by excessively expecting emotional support from the partner or, conversely, withholding from problem communication through a high level of distractions and they hold the potential to cause harm to oneself, one's partner, and the relationship (Estévez et al., 2018; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019).

This framework posits that intrapersonal experiences and interpersonal interactions can be influenced by a person's emotion regulation and that this influence might extend beyond the individual by potentially affecting partner outcomes.

2.5.1. Emotion Regulation in Romantic Relationship Literature

Reviewing the literature on romantic relationships reveals that emotion regulation is discussed along with a variety of factors. Regulation skills, which also interact with the internal dynamics of the person (e.g., attachment patterns; Brandão et al., 2019; Lewczuk et al., 2018), also have a decisive role in the person's romantic relationship experience. Feeling intimate and committed to the partner (Jitaru & Turliuc, 2022), satisfaction with the relationship (Bradburry & Shaffer, 2012), conflict resolution, partners' evaluations, and criticisms of each other are among the factors investigated. Relationship satisfaction has also been studied together with emotion regulation. For instance, In 2017, Rick et al. conducted a correlational study between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction in 104 clinical couples. In the study where men reported higher satisfaction compared to women, they also had a higher ability to act in a goal-oriented manner during negative emotional experiences. Goal-oriented behavior and emotional clarity were not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction. Interestingly, emotion awareness and emotion acceptance were reported

to be associated with lower relationship satisfaction. In addition to the importance of this study examining the direct relationship between dimensions of emotion regulation and romantic relationship satisfaction, the unexpected results were explained by sample characteristics (clinical couples). The researchers suggested that this relationship should be investigated with more representative samples for the population.

Examining mainly the employment of reappraisal and suppression strategies of the regulation process as well as actor-partner effects was the topic of another study investigating regulation and satisfaction (Kardum et al., 2021). Relationship satisfaction and self-reports of reappraisal were shown to be significantly positively correlated. Regarding the partner effect, men's actor effects were not significant when their partners' perceptions of their reappraisal use were taken into consideration, however, women's reappraisal use was significantly related to satisfaction regardless of their partners' perceptions on this matter. Put another way, although a man's perception of his partner matters, a woman's perception of themselves is crucial. In the case of suppression, which has a weaker effect on satisfaction than reappraisal, the women's use of it was found to be negatively related to their satisfaction.

Vater and Schröder-Abé (2015) also revealed that emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction are related and argued suppression constitutes a risk factor for relationships. They also used dyadic data and collected information from 137 couples and found that suppressing and aggressively externalizing emotions is negatively related to exhibiting functional interactions, especially during conflicts. Relationship satisfaction is lowered by this dysfunction. The reason for the impact of suppression in particular is explained by the fact that it prevents the individual from communicating to their partners what they think, want, and desire and damages the transfer of information to the partner (English et al., 2012).

In contrast to the above findings, a study conducted with 117 couples who were still in adolescence (Todorov et al., 2023) failed to show any evidence of a correlation between emotion regulation, difficulties related to it, and relationship satisfaction. This

was explained by the researchers that the self-regulation skills of adolescent couples may still be maturing and that they may have problems in making internal judgments and reporting the difficulties they experience in regulation. These studies lead to the conclusion that the association between relationship satisfaction and emotional regulation skills, as well as the challenges associated with applying them and their sub-dimensions, have been studied in the field of research.

Research also consistently demonstrates that perceived equity and inequity in romantic relationships lead to a range of feelings, positive and negative, as was discussed in previous sections. To provide a concise overview, individuals experience increased happiness (Utne et al., 1984), satisfaction (Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990), and joy (Sprecher, 1986) when they believe that the equity in their relationships is maintained; inversely, they experience increased stress (Utne et al., 1984), anger (for men), and frustration and depression (for women) (Sprecher, 1986). It was also shown that relational equity was significantly related for women in terms of expressing their feelings to their partners (Larson et al., 1998). In light of these findings, it has been observed that the concept of equity, which is found related to emotions and emotional expression, has not been directly addressed together with emotion regulation in the romantic relationship literature. However, in various research fields, studies in which they were investigated together were found. In their 2016 study, Martínez-Íñigo and Totterdell examined the role of the perceived cost-benefit balance between employees and customers, i.e. distributive justice, in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and emotion regulation. It was found that distributive justice mediates this relationship. The finding of this study implies that the sense of equity is a factor that helps employees manage their emotions, lessens their emotional exhaustion, and helps to explain how emotion regulation affects their well-being.

In the literature, there are also studies examining the relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and the individual's emotional interaction. The importance of perceiving the partner as responsive, especially at the points of expressing, disclosing, or suppressing emotions, is emphasized. Accordingly, as the perceived partner responsiveness increases, emotional expressions to the partner increase, and suppres-

sion is used less (Ruan et al., 2020). It has also been observed that when a person expresses his/her own negative emotions through hostility and his/her partner responds with withdrawal behavior, the person's perception of the partner's responsiveness decreases (Sasaki, Overall, 2020). This demonstrates how regulation affects the partner and, in turn, the relationship. Self-regulation issues led to a negative response from the partner, which harmed the individual's own perception of their connection.

Another investigation (Todorov et al., 2023) also found an association between withdrawal behavior and difficulty regulating emotions. According to the findings of this study, which involved 117 adolescent couples, the individual who struggles with regulating their emotions tends to withdraw more when resolving conflicts, which is also related to a decline in relationship satisfaction. Open expressions with the partner during times of stressful conflict have also been shown to be related to perceived partner responsiveness and, conversely, to increase relationship satisfaction (Pagani et al., 2019). It is also indicated that feeling supported leads to less use of emotion suppression strategies for regulation, which in turn has a more positive impact on overall health. In other words, perceived support may serve as an antecedent for the adaptive use of emotion regulation strategies (Lopez et al., 2024).

In light of the above-described findings, it is also worthwhile to investigate the potential association between emotion regulation processes and an individual's perception of support in the romantic relationship domain of their life, as well as the potential impact of this correlation on relationship satisfaction.

2.6. Summary of the Literature Review

Satisfaction, as a desired feature in romantic relationships (Jitaru & Turliuc, 2022), has been extensively researched using a variety of factors, and numerous theories for how to provide it have been proposed. Exchange and communal relationship notions are two of them.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between satisfaction in relationships and two important characteristics described within the framework of these theories: equity and perceived partner responsiveness.

It is anticipated that it will also help to disclose the mechanisms influencing the romantic relationships of emerging adults. Since it is a time when people develop relationships with substantial potential for endurance while acquiring abilities that might last (Douglass, 2007; Shelley et al., 2020), this stage of life might be considered crucial for investigating the dynamics of satisfaction. Future experiences may be influenced by the connections made during emerging adulthood or by the insights acquired. The literature shows that romantic competence, which is seen as an important acquisition for the functioning of relationships, begins to be shaped in this period (Davila et al., 2017).

Developing healthy relationships also appears to rely on emotions and being able to self-regulate them. According to Gross' perspective (2007), the process of emotion generation and regulation, which is influenced by the events in one's environment, the attention one pays to these events and the way one perceives them, affects the way the individual establishes and maintains relationships. Therefore, and as far as studies have shown, satisfaction with a romantic relationship is also influenced by one's own emotion regulation skills.

Perceived relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness were also found to be consistently related to satisfaction. The extent to which a person is satisfied with his/her relationship was found to be related to perceiving the relationship as fair (Sprecher, 2001) and the partner as responsive (Candel & Turliuc, 2021; Pagani et al., 2019). These variables were likewise consistently related to the occurrence of various positive and negative emotions and the expression or suppression of them (Ruan et al., 2020; Sasaki & Overall, 2020; Sprecher, 1986; Utne et al., 1984). A research model was presented in response to the question of how the ability/disability to regulate these emotions plays a role in the relationship between relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness with satisfaction. Furthermore, it was noted that the majority of the studies concentrated on the main strategies of regulation, such as suppression (e.g., Pagani et al., 2019; Ruan et al., 2020). In theory, on the other hand, in addition to possessing the aforementioned strategic resources, a considerable amount of emphasis has been placed on aspects like identifying, clarifying, and accepting emoti-

ons; controlling the impulses that occur from them, and acting purposefully (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). So, regulation was investigated broadly in this study to be able to encompass these aspects.

Existing research on all the variables included in the model provides evidence that although the concepts are based on the subjective experiences of individuals, they have the power to influence their partners as well as themselves. In terms of methodology, a considerable amount of literature has acknowledged this matter and carried out studies at the dyad level rather than the individual level (e.g., Candel & Turliuc, 2021; Joyner, 2009; Pagani et al., 2019; Sprecher, 2001). It was deemed reasonable to conduct the current study using dyadic data as well.

In conclusion, following a review of pertinent theories, research findings, and methodology, the purpose of this study was to investigate how difficulties regulating emotions function as a mediator in the association between perceived partner responsiveness and relational equity with relationship satisfaction of emerging adult couples' romantic relationships.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter includes the methodology of the research. Under this heading, the research design, information about the participants, the instruments used with their psychometric features, the details of the data collection process, the operational descriptions of the variables, how the analytic process was carried out, and the limitations of the study in all relevant subheadings are presented respectively.

3.1. Design of the Study

Before explaining the research design, it is first worth mentioning the purpose of the study. The study aims to investigate the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties in the association of relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness to romantic relationship satisfaction at a dyadic level. To assess how partners of heterosexual couples influence themselves and each other as well as the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties, the Actor Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM; Kenny & Ledermann, 2010) was implemented. All the parameters and the corresponding associations were combined into a single model. Without manipulating any, the primary goal of the developed model was to demonstrate the relationships among the dependent, independent, and mediator variables. This makes the study a correlational study, which is a type of quantitative research methodology (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

3.2. Participants

It was intended to reach couples in emerging adulthood in line with the aim of the study. The inclusion criteria were to be between the ages of 18-29, in a heterosexual

romantic relationship for at least six months, and not being married. After excluding individuals who did not meet these conditions or whose partners did not participate in the study, 146 couples ($N = 292$) who were reached through the convenience sampling method and an online survey participated in the study.

Participants' responses to the initial study questions about age, gender, education, work status, and length of relationship are presented below. As shown in Table 3.1, the ages of the participants ranged between 19-29 and the mean age was 25.54 ($SD = 2.18$). The mean age for women was 25 ($SD = 2.08$) while 26.1 for men ($SD = 2.15$).

Among women, 19 (13%) were high school, 7 (4.8%) were two-year, 99 (67.8%) were bachelor's, 19 (13%) were master's, and 2 (1.4%) were doctoral graduates. For men, 20 (13.7%) were high school, 14 (9.6%) were two-year, 91 (62.3%) were bachelor's, 20 (13.7%) were master's, and 1 (.7%) were doctoral graduates. 87 women and 58 men were continuing their education, 10 women (11.5%) were two-year degree, 26 (29.9%) were bachelor's, 48 (55.2%) were master's, and 3 (3.4%) were doctoral students.

Also, 6 (10.3%) men were two-year, 24 (41.%) were bachelor's, 21 (36.2%) were master's, and 7 (12.1%) were doctoral students.

Regarding working status, 95 women (65.1%) were working and 51 (34.9) were not. Of men, 120 (82.2%) were working while 26 (17.8%) were not.

Table 3.1. *Demographic and Relation Characteristics of the Participants*

		Women (N = 146)		Men (N = 146)	
		f	%	f	%
Age	19	1	.7	-	-
	20	1	.7	1	.7
	21	6	4.1	5	3.4
	22	9	6.2	3	2.1
	23	14	9.6	6	4.1
	24	28	19.2	14	9.6
	25	29	19.9	31	21.2

Table 3.1. (continued)

Age	26	24	16.4	21	14.4
	27	19	13	22	15.1
	28	5	3.4	18	12.3
	29	10	6.8	25	17.1
Education	High school graduate	19	13	20	13.7
	Two-Year degree	7	4.8	14	9.6
	Bachelor degree	99	67.8	91	62.3
	Master's degree	19	13	20	13.7
	Ph.D.	2	1.4	1	.7
Status of those still in education	Two-Year degree	10	11.5	6	10.3
	Bachelor degree	26	29.9	24	41.4
	Master's degree	48	55.2	21	36.2
	Ph.D.	3	3.4	7	12.1
Work status	Working	95	65.1	120	82.2
	Not working	51	34.9	26	17.8
Relationship type	Flirting	18	12.3	17	11.6
	Committed long-term relationship	125	85.6	124	84.9
	Engaged	3	2.1	5	3.4
Distance	Long distance	38	26	37	25.3
	Close-distance	108	74	109	74.7

Regarding the relational characteristics, questions about relationship type, distance, and frequency of partner meetings were asked. Instances have been observed where women and men gave different answers to these questions. Among women, 125 of them (85.6%) answered as they were flirting, while it was flirting for 18 (12.3%) and engaged for 3 (2.1%). Most of the women ($n = 108$, 74%) and men ($n = 109$, 74.7%) indicated they were living close distances with their partner, while 38 women (26%) and 37 men (25.3%) indicated they were long-distance. For frequency of meetings, 34 women (23.3%) reported they were seeing their partner every day, 63 (43.2%) every few days, 18 (12.3%) once a week, 8 (5.5%) every few weeks, 9 (6.2%) once a month, and 14 (9.6%) less frequently. For men, 40 of them (27.4%) reported they were seeing their partner every day, 59 (40.4%) every few days, 15 (10.3%) once a week, 9 (6.2%) every few weeks, 11 (7.5%) once a month, and 12 (8.2%) less frequently.

In addition, questions that would aid in understanding the degree of sharing in the partnership were also included as relevant since the study was associated with factors such as responsiveness, equity in the relationship, and satisfaction.

Data were collected on how often they see each other, how one share happy or negative feelings with a partner, how often one needs support from a partner, and how often one share this need (Table 3.2).

As a result, 47.3% of women (n = 69) shared their unpleasant emotions with their partner almost every time while 41.1% of them (n = 60) shared it occasionally, 7.5% (n = 11) sometimes, 3.4% of them (n = 5) rarely, and 0.7% of them (n = 1) never. Of men, 27.4% (n = 40) reported sharing unpleasant feelings almost every time, 47.9 (n = 70) occasionally, 17.1% (n = 25) sometimes, 6.8% (n = 10) rarely, and 0.7% (n = 1) never.

In terms of positive emotion-sharing, 67.1% of women (n = 98) reported almost every time, 31.5% of women (n = 46) occasionally, and 1.4% (n = 2) sometimes. Of men, 55.5% (n = 81) reported that they share almost every time, 35.6 (n = 52) occasionally, 7.5% (n = 11) sometimes, and 1.4% (n = 2) rarely.

Table 3.2. *Sharing in Relationship*

		Women (N=146)		Men (N=146)	
		f	%	f	%
Negative emotions' sharing	Almost every time	69	47.3	40	27.4
	Occasionally	60	41.1	70	47.9
	Sometimes	11	7.5	25	17.1
	Rarely	5	3.4	10	6.8
	Never	1	.7	1	.7
Positive emotions' sharing	Almost every time	98	67.1	81	55.5
	Occasionally	46	31.5	52	35.6
	Sometimes	2	1.4	11	7.5
	Rarely	-	-	2	1.4
	Never	-	-	-	-
Needing a partner's emotional support	Almost every time	44	30.1	22	15.1
	Occasionally	84	57.5	67	45.9
	Sometimes	18	30.1	46	31.5
	Rarely	-	-	11	7.5
	Never	-	-	-	-
Expressing the need for emotional support to the partner	Almost every time	54	37	26	17.8
	Occasionally	71	48.6	63	43.2
	Sometimes	20	13.7	31	21.2
	Rarely	1	.7	23	15.8
	Never	-	-	3	2.1

Furthermore, 57.5% of women (n = 84) needed their partner's emotional support occasionally, while 30.1% (n = 44) almost in every instance, and 12.4% (n = 18) sometimes. Of men, 45.9% (n = 67) needed occasionally, 15.1% (n = 22) almost every time, 31.5% (n = 46) sometimes, and 7.5% (n = 11) rarely. Regarding expressing this need, 37% of women (n = 54) stated that they express it almost every time, 48.6% (n = 71) occasionally, 13.7% (n = 20) sometimes, and 0.7% (n = 1) rarely. Of men, 17.8% (n = 26) expressed almost every time, 43.2% (n = 63) occasionally, 21.2% (n = 31) sometimes, 15.8% (n = 23) rarely, and 2.1% (n = 3) never. Overall, the participant profile comprises individuals in partnerships where the sharing of positive and negative emotions occurs often, individuals who perceive a need for emotional support from their partners, and individuals who express this need on a pretty regular basis.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

For the purpose of assessing the four variables included in the model, five scales were employed, including the Personal Information Form (Appendix- B). The other four scales and their characteristics are explained in this section: Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988; Curun, 2001; Appendix- C), Relational Equity Scale (Sabatelli, Cecil-Pigo, 1985; Akçabozan-Kayabol, & Sümer, 2017; Appendix- D); Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (Reis, & Carmichael, 2006; Taşfiliz et al., 2020; Appendix- E); and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (Gratz, & Roemer, 2004; Rugancı, & Gençöz, 2010; Appendix- F).

To verify the factor structure and assess their reliability for the current study, all of the study's scales were also re-evaluated among the study sample ($N = 292$). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to investigate their factor structure while Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to evaluate their reliability.

CFA is a statistical method that examines how effectively the scale items measure the desired construct and it includes many indices to examine the fit (Collier, 2020). The indices to be considered in this study were χ^2 (Chi-Square), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index), and RMSEA (Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation). Firstly, *the Model Chi-Square Test* quantifies the degree to which the

observed covariance matrix and the model's generated structure diverge. Although reporting is valued highly, it might provide challenges due to the high sample size sensitivity and difficulty of evaluating complex models. Following this, it has been recommended to use the less sensitive *relative chi-square test* (χ^2/df) instead (Collier, 2020); and this value was taken into account in the present study. The value should be at least 3 (Kline, 2011) or 5 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004) for an adequate fit.

The other most widely used index is the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). Here, the fit of the proposed model is compared with the null/independent model, and as the value approaches 1, the fit increases (Collier, 2020). Values above .90 are considered acceptable (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) also compares the hypothesized model with a null or independent baseline model and a value above .90 is an indicator of acceptable fit.

Finally, the Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), unlike the others, measures "badness of fit" rather than "goodness", and targets the discrepancy between the hypothesized model and the observed one. Therefore, as the value approaches 0, the fit improves (Collier, 2020).

3.3.1. Data Screening and Preparation for CFA

Before proceeding to the CFA and reliability analyses, the data were checked for all scales separately using preliminary analyses in terms of sample size, missing data, outliers, and normality (Brown, 2006). No missing data was found since the scales were completed using Google Forms, which allowed the researcher to remove the non-response option. Furthermore, as the suggested sample size should include at least 200 people, the sample size of 146 pairs ($N = 292$) was sufficient.

Z-scores were used to detect univariate outliers and Mahalanobis distances were used for multivariate outliers. The data set had univariate and multivariate outliers for all scales (Table 3.3). Therefore, all analyses were repeated with and without outliers, and since the results did not change for any scale, it was decided to include the data of 292 participants in the analyses.

For univariate and multivariate normality, skewness and kurtosis values, histograms, and Mardia's coefficient were employed. Skewness values less than 3 and kurtosis values less than 20 are indicators of normality (Kline, 2011). Scoring of all scales was found to be within this range when the current study's data were examined for each scale separately. After examining Mardia's coefficient for each scale to check for multivariate normality, it was found to be considerably different from the suggested value of 3.00 (Ullman, 2007), indicating multivariate non-normality. As the Maximum Likelihood method is inappropriate in this case, alternative approaches are suggested. An effective substitute appears to be the bootstrapping estimation method (Kline, 2011). It was deemed appropriate to use this method in the analysis of the current data set, which has non-normality.

Table 3.3. *Outliers and Normality Information for the Scales*

	Relationship Assessment Scale	Relational Equity Scale	Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale	Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale
Number of Univariate Outliers	18	0	18	3
Number of Multivariate Outliers	35	24	46	43
Skewness	-1.28	-1.21	-1.96	.32
Kurtosis	1.3	.93	4.71	-2.24
Mardia's Coefficient	70.61	47.32	258.5	243.6

3.3.2. Personal Information Form

In the Personal Information Form, information about the gender, age, education, and occupation of the respondent was collected, as well as the duration of the relationship, the status of being in a close/long-distance relationship, and the frequency of contact with the partner. Finally, questions were asked about the emotions that the respondent conveys to his/her partner, the behavior of asking for support, and the frequency of doing so (e.g., "How often do you need emotional support from your partner?").

3.3.3. Relationship Assessment Scale

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), developed by Hendrick in 1988, is a brief self-report measure to assess the degree of relationship satisfaction. It consists of 7 items that rate the satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 7 (where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 7 indicates strongly agree). "How well does your partner meet your needs?" and "How good is your relationship compared to most?" are two examples of the questions included in the scale. Items 4 and 7 are reverse-scored and the highest score that can be obtained is 49 while the lowest is 7. Higher scores indicated greater satisfaction in the relationship. Two studies were conducted during the development of the scale: one for undergraduate students and the other for partners in ongoing relationships. In both studies, it was found that the scale was single-factor and the single factor explained 46% of the variance in the first study when it explained 57% of the second. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha value was calculated as .86 in the second study, which means a high internal consistency.

The scale was also positively correlated with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale ($r = .80, p < .05$). In addition, the relationship between the RAS and various other variables was examined with the Love Attitudes Scale (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986), The Sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick et al., 1985), a sexual attitudes instrument, two items to measure self-confidence, the Self Disclosure Index and Opener Scale (Miller et al., 1983), four items to measure commitment (Lund, 1985), and four items to assess partner investments.

The RAS was found to be positively correlated with variables such as passionate ($r = .60, p < .05$ for study 1 and $r = .50, p < .05$ for study 2) and altruistic love ($r = .36, p < .05$ for study 1 and $r = .21, p < .05$ for study 2), self-confidence ($r = .24, p < .05$ for study 1 and $r = .27, p < .05$ for study 2) and self-disclosure to the partner ($r = .45, p < .05$ in study 1); while negatively correlated with game-playing love ($r = -.30, p < .05$ for study 1 and $r = -.53, p < .05$ for study 2), one of the love attitude styles.

Curun adapted the scale to Turkish (2001) in the study consisted of 70 dating couples who were also university students, with a mean age of 21.9. Construct validity

evidence demonstrated that the adapted scale also has a unifactorial structure like the original scale and one factor accounted for 52% of the variance. To measure internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .86.

3.3.3.1. RAS Within the Scope of the Current Study

The 7-question Relationship Assessment Scale was used to measure relationship satisfaction in this study and confirmatory factor analysis was performed using AMOS (AMOS, 2024) to confirm its one-factor structure. Since the data were not normally distributed, the analysis was performed with the Bollen-Stine bootstrapping method, and the bootstrap sample number was set to 1000 (Bollen & Stine, 1992; Cheung & Lau, 2007). As a result of the finding that some values (CFI, RMR) were within the appropriate ranges while others (χ^2/df , RMSEA) were not (Figure 3.1), modification indices were examined and additional covariates were added as appropriate to strengthen the fit.

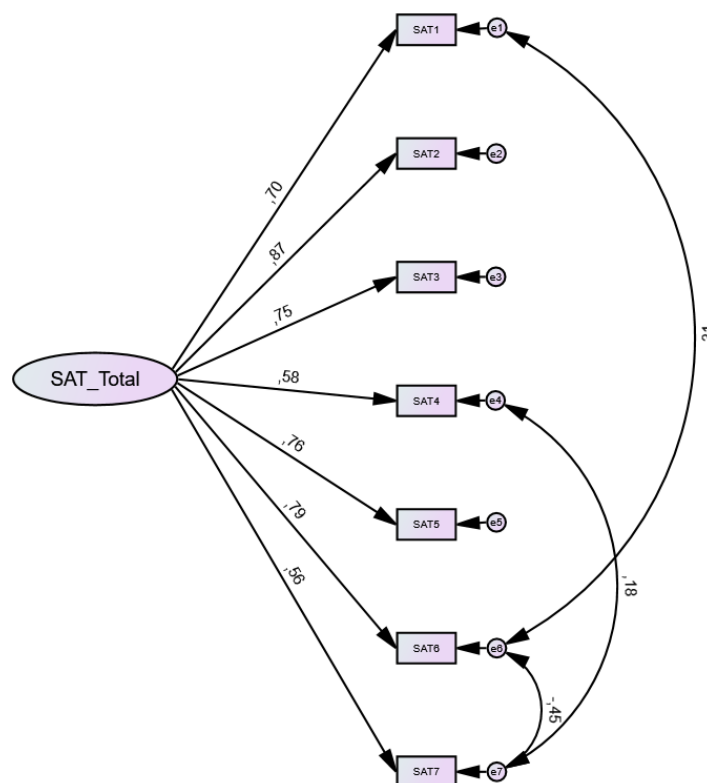


Figure 3.1. *Confirmatory Factor Analysis for RAS*

The goodness of fit indices resulting from the added covariates are shown in Table 3.4. Accordingly, it is seen that the scale has an acceptable fit with $\chi^2/df = 2.93$, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .08, and TLI = .96. Furthermore, all standardized estimates were considered sufficient since they were above .30 and ranged between .56 and .87 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Table 3.4. Model Fit for RAS

	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	TLI
Model Fit for RAS	2.932	.978	.081	.959

To test the reliability of the scale for the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed and calculated as .88. In other words, the scale gives reliable results for the current study.

3.3.4. Relational Equity Scale

Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985) developed the 10-item, 5-point Likert scale (with 1 indicating strongly agree and 5 indicating strongly disagree) to measure the fairness of the relationship for the people in the relationship by evaluating their inputs and outputs. Examples of scale items include "All things considered, my partner and I contribute equally to our relationship." and "I often feel that I put more into our relationship than I get out.". The maximum score that can be obtained is 50 and the minimum score is 5, while the items 2, 5, 7, and 9 are reverse scored.

Higher scores indicate greater perceived equity in the relationship. In the factor analysis, it was found that the scale consisted of a single factor. As a measure of reliability, the internal consistency coefficient of the original scale was calculated as .85.

The Turkish version of the scale was adapted by Akçaboza-Kayabol and Sümer (2017) and a study was conducted with 418 married couples aged 22-68 years. The unidimensional structure was maintained in the adaptation study. Cronbach alpha coefficient was found to be .87. For concurrent validity, the correlation of the scale

with the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) was examined and a positive significant relationship was revealed with a coefficient of .77 ($p < .01$).

3.3.4.1. Relational Equity Scale within the Scope of the Current Study

While the original and adaptation scale studies were conducted with married couples, Akçabozan-Kayabol and Sümer (2017), who conducted the adaptation study, stated that it would be important to work with different types of marriages and romantic relationships in order to provide new evidence for the validity and reliability of the scale.

As the Relational Equity Scale's one-factor structure was examined for the current study using Bollen-Stine (Bollen & Stine, 1992) bootstrapping due to the non-normal distribution of the data, a poor fit was initially discovered ($\chi^2/df = 11.01$, CFI = .08, RMSEA = .19, TLI = .74). To strengthen the fit, it was judged appropriate to utilize the item parceling approach by grouping the items because the scale had ten items and the modification indices had been examined.

So, the items were randomly parceled into five groups of two items each, and the CFA was reassessed. The random parceling method is feasible due to the scale's single-component structure.

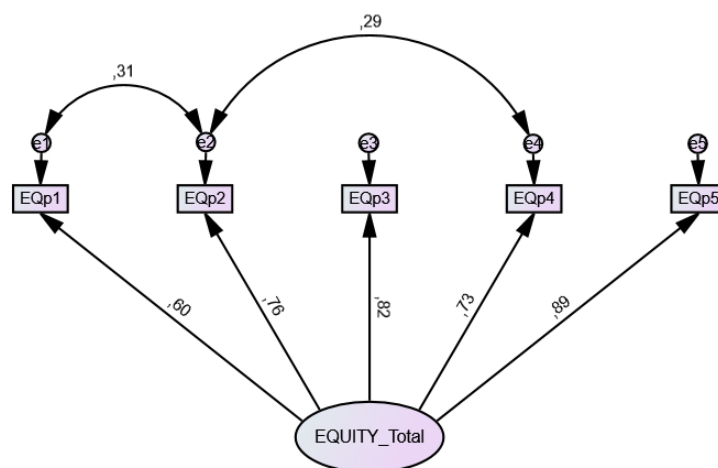


Figure 3.2. *Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Relational Equity Scale*

Based on the new values shown in Table 3.5 ($\chi^2/df = 2$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .06, TLI = .99), it can be said that each of the values is within the desired ranges and the model fit is almost perfect. Also, the standardized estimates were all above .30 and fell between .60 and .89, which is acceptable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Table 3.5. *Model Fit for Relational Equity Scale*

	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	TLI
Model Fit for Relational Equity Scale	1.995	.996	.058	.988

In order to evaluate the internal consistency of the scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed, and the result was .90. As a result, it may be concluded that the scale yields reliable scores for the current study sample.

3.3.5. Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale

Reis et al. (2017) developed the scale as an 18-item self-report measure and a 9-point Likert-type scale where 1 means “not at all true” and 9 means “completely true”, with a focus on romantic partners. It aims to measure how people perceive their partners in terms of validating and understanding their needs. These relationships include family, friendship, and romantic relationships and the scale is applicable to close relationships and partners in each of the domains.

While high scores indicate that partners in relationships are perceived to be more sensitive to one's needs, the highest possible score is 162 and the lowest score is 18. Although there is evidence of a two-factor structure, the scale was initially proposed as having a two-factor structure: validity and understanding. However, according to online research involving 2000 participants, the subscales have a very strong correlation ($r = .94$) Consequently, it was acknowledged as having a single-factor structure. The 18-item version of the scale was first presented by Reis and Carmichael in an unpublished study in 2006, followed by 12 (Reis et al., 2011) and 3-item versions (Gable et al., 2012). The internal consistency of the 12- and 18-item versions ranged between .91 and .98 (Reis et al., 2018). The 18-item romantic partner version of the scale was used in this study. "My partner sees the real me." and "My partner values

my abilities and opinions." are examples of some items in the scale. The convergent validity of the scale has been assessed in several studies. The correlations revealed significant relationships with satisfaction ($r=.82$, Reis et al., 2017), trust ($r=.67$, Reis et al., 2017), empathy ($r=.49$, Reis et al., 2017), emotional support ($r=.49$, Reis et al., 2017) and compassionate behaviors exhibited by the partner on a daily basis ($r=.33$, Reis et al., 2014). The adaptation study of the scale was conducted by Taşfiliz et al. (2020). In that study with two samples, exploratory factor analysis was conducted in the first sample (695 individuals between the ages of 20-82) and confirmatory factor analysis in the second (478 individuals between the ages of 20-87). Factor analyses were conducted separately for family, friends, and romantic relationships. In the romantic partner version, a single-factor structure similar to the original one emerged and this factor explained 63.57% of the variance. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the combined data set was .91.

3.3.5.1. Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale Within the Scope of the Current Study

The scale consisting of a single dimension and 18 items was analyzed within the scope of the study. The Bollen-Stine (Bollen & Stine, 1992) bootstrapping method was utilized and the values found in the first analysis were outside the threshold and insufficient for compliance ($\chi^2/df = 7.87$, CFI = .83, RMSEA = .15, TLI = .80). As the number of items of the scale was more than 5, the item parceling method was applied and the scale was divided into five parcels via random parceling.

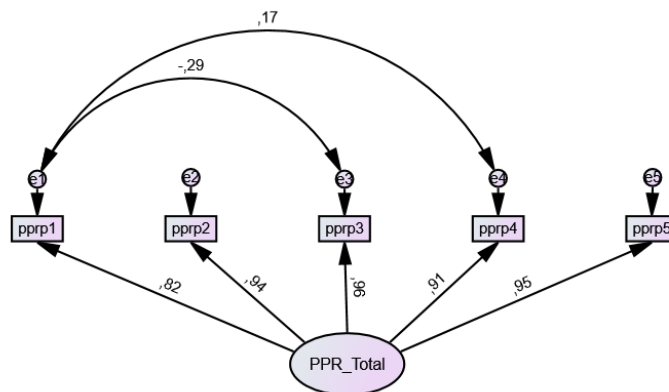


Figure 3.3. *Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale*

When the modification indices between parcels were examined, covariances were created between the first parcel and the third and fourth parcels to maximize fit (Figure 3.3). Following the modifications, the goodness of fit indices were found to be in line with the thresholds ($\chi^2/df = 2.97$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .08, TLI = .99; Table 3.6.), and the model's fit was assessed as adequate. Standardized estimates ranging between .82 and .96 are considerably higher than the cutoff value, .30 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Table 3.6. *Model Fit for Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale*

	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	TLI
Model Fit for RAS	2.971	.997	.082	.989

Lastly, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was utilized to assess the scale's reliability for the study and it was found .97, which means the scores provided by the scale are reliable.

3.3.6. Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)

Developed by Gratz and Roemer (2004), the scale consists of 36 items measuring emotion dysregulation that have to be ranked on a 5-point Likert-type scale ("1" means almost never and "5" means almost always) and higher scores mean more difficulties experienced in emotion regulation processes. Items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 17, 20, 22, 24 and 34 reverse scored. The highest score might be obtained is 180 and the lowest is 36.

Gratz and Roemer (2004) revealed that the scale has a six-factor structure measuring six domains: lack of awareness, lack of clarity, nonacceptance, lack of strategies, lack of impulse control, and lack of ability to behave according to goals. Each of these dimensions covers the difficulties experienced by the person in this domain. For lack of awareness subscale, "I care about what I am feeling", for lack of clarity subscale, "I know exactly how I'm feeling", for nonacceptance "When I am upset, I feel ashamed with myself for feeling that way", for lack of strategies subscale, "When I am upset, my emotions feel overwhelming.", for lack of impulse control subscale, "When I am

upset, I become out of control." and for lack of ability to behave according to goals subscale "When I'm upset, I have difficulty focusing on other things." can be given as sample items. The six factors explained 55.68% of the total variance. While the internal consistency of the entire scale was declared as .93, this value for each subscale was greater than .80. All subscales are included in this study.

For the construct validity study of the scale, the Generalized Expectancy for Negative Mood Regulation Scale (NMR; Catanzaro & Mearns, 1990), which measures the person's expectations for self-regulation skills in negative mood situations, the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ; Hayes et al., 2004), which measures emotional avoidance, and the Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES; Kring et al., 1994), which measures expressivity, were examined. While there were significant negative relationships with NMR ($r = -.69, p < .01$) and EES ($r = -.23$), the relationship was positively significant with AAQ ($r = .60, p < .01$). The association between DERS and the frequency of intimate partner abuse and self-harm was investigated as part of the predictive validity study. Gender disparities became apparent at this point. While self-harm frequency along with difficulties regulating emotions was significantly correlated for males ($r = .26, p < .05$) as well as females ($r = .20, p < .01$), only men ($r = .34, p < .01$) demonstrated a significant correlation between intimate partner abuse frequency and emotion regulation difficulties. Test-retest reliability was examined to check the reliability of the scale, and high ($r = .88, p < .01$) scale reliability was found following measurements performed 4–8 weeks following the initial application.

The adaptation study of the scale was conducted by Rugancı and Gençöz (2010) with a sample of 338 university students between the ages of 19-31 ($M = 22.6$). It was observed that the six-factor structure was also preserved in adaptation, and the total variance explained by the factors was 62.4%. It was decided to remove the tenth item, which had a very low correlation with the overall scale ($r = .06$), from the Turkish version of the scale and to continue the analyses with 35 items.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated for the overall scale was .94. The internal consistency explained for each subscale was also high, with coefficients ranging from

.75 to .90. The maximum score and the minimum score that can be obtained from the measure range between 175 and 35.

A concurrent validity study was carried out using the Brief Symptom Inventory and a significant correlation was detected between the two scales ($r = .58, p < .001$). For the criterion validity study, the Brief Symptom Inventory was used again, and the people in the highest and lowest thirty percent groups with the scores obtained from this scale were split into two groups: high and low psychological distress. Based on the DERS reviews of individuals in these groups, it was shown that those in the high psychological distress group had more difficulties with emotion regulation. Test-retest and split-half methods were utilized to assess reliability. In test-retest reliability, the correlation between the two application scores was found to be .83 and the Guttman split-half reliability was declared as .95.

3.3.4.1. DERS Within the Scope of the Current Study

The six-factor structure of the DERS was initially intended to be observed in this study and the overall score was employed. Hence, it was regarded as a second-order variable, a higher-order latent variable formed by six lower-order latent variables. Thus, second-order confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to demonstrate the structure of latent constructs (Thakkar, 2020). The first analysis using Bollen-Stine (Bollen & Stine, 1992) bootstrapping showed that the structure was not appropriate ($\chi^2/df = 3.5$, CFI = .78, RMSEA = .09, TLI = .77).

Item parceling method was used and the items of each subscale were parceled randomly. The fit was again not within the desired ranges and the standardized factor loading of the awareness subscale was .24, which was well below the cut-off value .30 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Upon reviewing additional research on the scale's structure, it was discovered that in certain studies (Bardeen et al., 2012; Demir, 2019; Hallion et al., 2018), the five-factor structure without awareness subscale was deemed more suitable than the six-factor. Thus, the awareness subscale was eliminated from the model and the fit was re-evaluated. Due to the finding that the model fits the data

better, the awareness subscale was not included in the current study. In the final model (Figure 3.4), the values indicated a mediocre fit ($\chi^2/df = 3.2$, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .087, TLI = .93).

The loadings of the DERS factors were found as follows: .47 for clarity, .89 for impulse, .82 for nonacceptance, .75 for goals and .97 for strategies. Consequently, all remaining factor values are higher than the cutoff threshold.

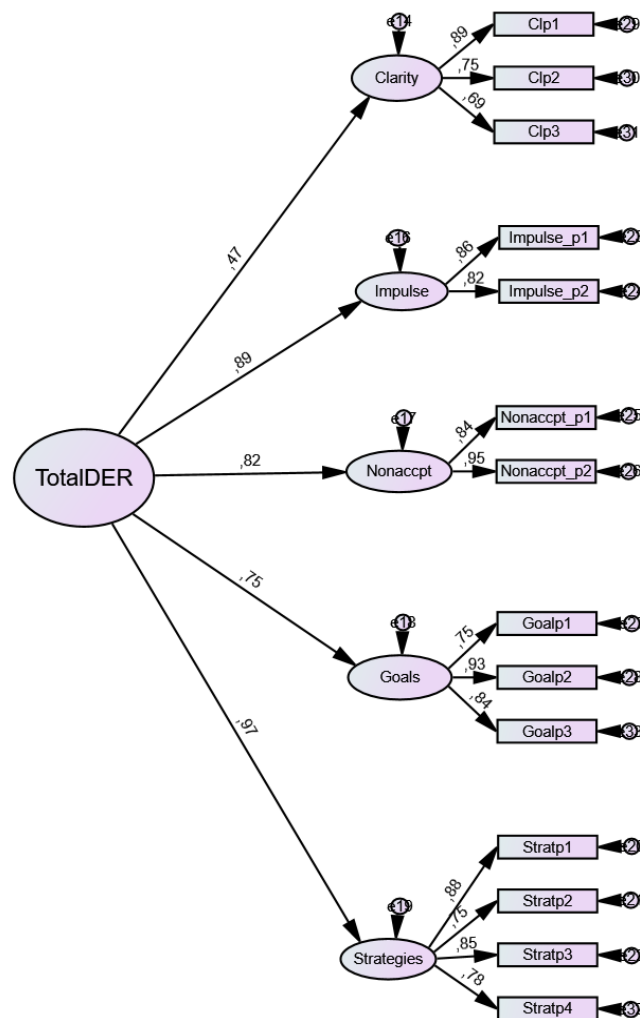


Figure 3.4. *Confirmatory Factor Analysis for DERS*

Table 3.7. Model Fit for DERS

	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	TLI
Model Fit for RAS	3.199	.943	.087	.928

Subsequently, the internal consistency of the entire scale and subscales were examined. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .95 for the overall scale, .80 for the clarity subscale, .85 for the impulse subscale, .89 for the non-acceptance subscale, .88 for the goals subscale, and .88 for the strategies subscale. Considering these values, it can be said that each subscale and the scale overall provide reliable results.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The required consent forms and documents were submitted to the Middle East Technical University Human Subjects Ethics Committee and the data collection process was initiated after obtaining the necessary ethical approval. The condition for participation in the study was to be a heterosexual couple between the ages of 18-29, unmarried and together for more than 6 months. Voluntary couples were asked to complete the Google Forms questionnaire under a shared pseudonym in order to match partners; however, they needed to complete it separately from one another in order to maintain confidentiality and avoid influencing each other.

It is believed that by conducting the data collection online, participants will be able to participate in flexible time slots and the process will be more efficient in terms of management of time. Potential issues with face-to-face application also include difficulties in finding both partners together and preventing them from seeing each other's responses.

Google Forms link shared via Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp channels to reach the participants who fit the relevant requirements. After obtaining the participant's consent and a shared pseudonym, the instruments were answered by the participants. This took approximately 15 minutes. The data collection process was completed in approximately 10 months, from July 2023 to May 2024.

3.5. Description of the Variables

In this section, the variables used in the study are defined operationally. The predictor variables of the study were relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness while the outcome variable was romantic relationship satisfaction. The mediator variable of the study was the emotion regulation difficulties.

Relational equity was measured by the total score of the Relationship Equity Scale which consists of 10 questions and has a score range of 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree). The highest score that can be obtained is 50 while the lowest score is 10. High scores indicate that the person in the relationship has high perceptions of equity within the relationship.

Perceived partner responsiveness was measured by the total score of the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale. The scale is composed of 18 9-point Likert-type items. The highest score that can be obtained is 162 and the lowest is 18. High scores obtained indicate that the person views their partner as more responsive toward themselves.

Emotion regulation difficulties was measured by the total score of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale, which consists of six subscales: difficulties in the areas of emotion awareness, clarity, acceptance, regulation strategies, impulse control, and acting purposefully during negative emotional experiences. The Turkish adaptation of the scale consists of 35 items that have a score range of 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost usually).

The maximum possible score is 175, and the lowest possible score is 35. Since the questions belonging to the awareness subscale were removed for the current study, the minimum score that can be obtained is 30 and the maximum score is 155. High scores indicate an increase in the degree of difficulty experienced by people regarding emotion regulation.

Lastly, romantic relationship satisfaction was measured by the total score obtained from the Relationship Assessment Scale. From the 7-point Likert-type scale consisting

of 7 questions, the highest score that can be obtained is 49 and the lowest score is 7. High scores indicate greater satisfaction with one's relationship.

3.6. Data Analysis

The main purpose of the study was to examine relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness as factors related to romantic relationship satisfaction and to consider the mediator role of emotion regulation difficulties in this relationship. Furthermore, the research was intended to be conducted with heterosexual couples while accounting for the effects that partners have on one another. AMOS 26 was used to assess the actor-partner interdependence mediation model (APIMeM) that was conducted in this regard (Arbuckle, 2019).

The Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) offers a statistical structure for dyadic relationships, which depends on their interdependent nature. The phenomenon known as interdependence occurs when one partner's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors impact the other partner's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Predictions about one partner can therefore be made based on information about a variable pertaining to the other (Cook & Kenny, 2005). Since this case is highly relevant when it comes to close relationships, APIM is used effectively in this setting (Campbell & Kashy, 2002).

The model's primary goal is to make sense of the ways in which one's own characteristics affect oneself (actor effect) and one's partner's outcomes (partner effect) (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010). Throughout the current study, this model was employed to evaluate the effect that partners have on one another. Additionally, the mediation effect was integrated into the model to investigate potential explanations for the associations (APIMeM; Ledermann et al., 2011).

Prior to analysis, the data were screened, and only the couples that satisfied the conditions were added to the study. Following that, the sample size was assessed and any missing data were examined. The assumptions of outliers, normal distribution, linearity, and multicollinearity were examined. Following the demographic characteristics of the participants, confirmatory factor analyses and reliability tests of

the Relational Equity Scale, Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale, and Relationship Assessment Scale were conducted separately. The means, standard deviations, and maximum-minimum values in terms of genders were computed and how the variables differed for genders was analyzed. After that, bivariate correlations were conducted.

Finally, in order to test the main hypotheses, relevant paths were created and path analysis was performed. SPSS Version 28 (IBM Corp., 2021) was used for reliability testing, descriptive analyses, and bivariate correlations; AMOS 26 (Arbuckle, 2019) was used for confirmatory factor analyses, and dyadic path analysis.

3.7. Limitations of the Study

The study has a few limitations. First, the use of convenience sampling together with online data collection can be seen as a limitation since it restricts the results' generalizability. The study involved couples who were reachable by the researcher, had access to the internet, and had the time to click on the link. Consequently, there was barely any variation in the participants' characteristics such as employment status and educational background, which further lowers generalizability. Another problem with collecting data online was that it was not possible to track the context in which partners participated and whether their answers were independent of each other.

Moreover, despite the fact that the study made an effort to explain the underlying mechanisms of relationships by considering the mediation effect since it is a correlational research, no causal relationship could have been established.

The fact that the findings are based on self-reports was an additional limitation. Results may be skewed if assessments are based on an individual's subjective judgments without knowing whether the concepts discussed have the same meaning for each participant. The distortion can also be increased by the fact that the study was carried out with ongoing partnerships. In an ongoing relationship, there may be a tendency to perceive the partner as more sensitive, and the relationship as more satisfying and equal.

This constraint explains the accumulation of high scores in the normality check. Furthermore, the relational equity scale's questions simply highlight the imbalances in the connection, if any. On the other hand, it is recognized that experiencing injustice from both an advantageous and disadvantageous perspective elicits distinct emotional responses (Sprecher, 1986; Utne et al., 1984). The fact that it is unknown whether the participants believe they are in a better or worse situation when the connection is not viewed as equal presents a barrier to the interpretation of the data. Interpretations of the results should be evaluated within the mentioned limitations.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter provides the study's analysis process and findings. First, the procedure for screening the data, conducting preliminary analyses, and preparing the data set for testing the hypotheses are explained. Afterward, results regarding gender differences in study variables are presented. Following the presentation of bivariate correlations, the results pertaining to the main research question and hypotheses are explained through the structural model analysis. An overview of the findings is presented at the end of the chapter.

4.1. Assumptions and Preliminary Analyses

Prior to the main analysis, the data was checked for compliance with the minimum and maximum values. The application via Google Forms prevents the generation of a score out of the possible range and the minimum and maximum values as a result of the analysis confirm that there is no out-of-range data entry. After this, items that needed to be reverse coded were reverse coded and the assumptions related to path and dyadic data analyses were examined. Then, the data set was assessed for appropriateness of sample size, lack of missing data, outliers, normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and lastly nonindependence and distinguishability.

To begin with, one of the requirements that needs to be assessed initially is sample size. A common view regarding the appropriate sample size is that 200 represents the critical value (Hoelter, 1983; Collier, 2020).

For the current study, data were collected from 292 individuals (146 heterosexual couples) and the requirement was met. In addition, there was no missing data since the

participants were reached via Google Forms and the researcher was able to ensure that the participants did not proceed without answering.

An additional requirement for conducting a robust analysis is ensuring that the data set is normally distributed and free of outliers that do not accurately reflect the population. For this reason, univariate and multivariate outliers were initially investigated. Z-scores were employed to detect univariate outliers, while Mahalanobis distances were evaluated for multivariate outliers.

Standardized z-scores for each scale were calculated and the scores outside the +3.29 and -3.29 range (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) were considered outliers. As a result, 9 univariate outliers were found in the study. Mahalanobis distances were calculated via AMOS and it was seen that 21 observations appeared to be multivariate outliers. 8 observations were both univariate and multivariate outliers. Both including and excluding them, the analyses were conducted twice. Since the two datasets did not significantly differ, outliers were kept in the dataset to preserve sample variation.

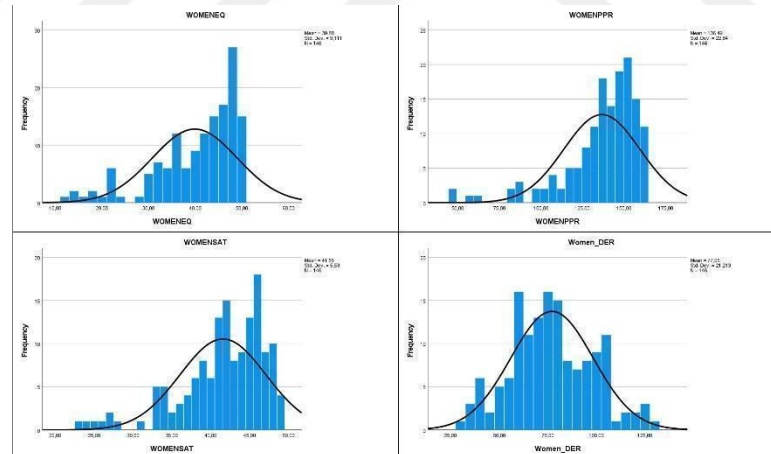


Figure 4.1. *Histograms for Women*

Univariate and multivariate normality tests were performed through skewness and kurtosis values, histograms, and Mardia's coefficient value. As the skewness value expresses the symmetry of the distribution and the kurtosis value indicates the peakedness approached zero, the distribution is considered normal (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Non-normality in data, according to Kline (2011), is indicated by skew-

ness values larger than 3 and kurtosis values greater than 20. For relationship satisfaction, skewness was -1.28 and kurtosis was 1.3 in the current study; for relational equity, skewness was -1.21 and kurtosis was .93; for perceived partner responsiveness, skewness was -1.96 and kurtosis was 4.71; and for emotion regulation difficulties, skewness was .28 and kurtosis was -.41 (see Table 3.2). So, univariate normality was indicated by all values. Non-normality was noted when Mardia's (1970) coefficient was assessed for multivariate normality. The reported value of 36 exceeds the 3.00 cut-off value (Ullman, 2007) by a considerable margin. Furthermore, an analysis of the histograms (see Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 for histogram graphs of genders) reveals that the participants are mostly clustered around high scores except DERS and that non-normality is present. The bootstrapping estimation method is recommended in this case (Kline, 2011). The analyses of the study were conducted using the bootstrapping method in line with the suggestions of Kline (2011) and Collier (2020).

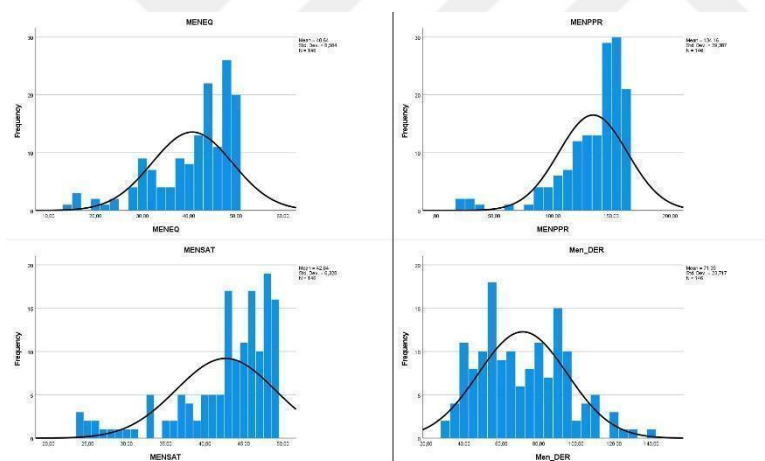


Figure 4.2. Histograms for Men

Linearity and multicollinearity were checked to test the straight-line connection between variables and to check for excessively high correlations that may cause problems. Residual plots were utilized for the linearity test and lacked a distinctive trend. So, it was found to be satisfied (Figure 4.3). Accordingly, it is possible to address a linear relationship (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) between the study's independent variables and the dependent variable, relationship satisfaction for both genders.

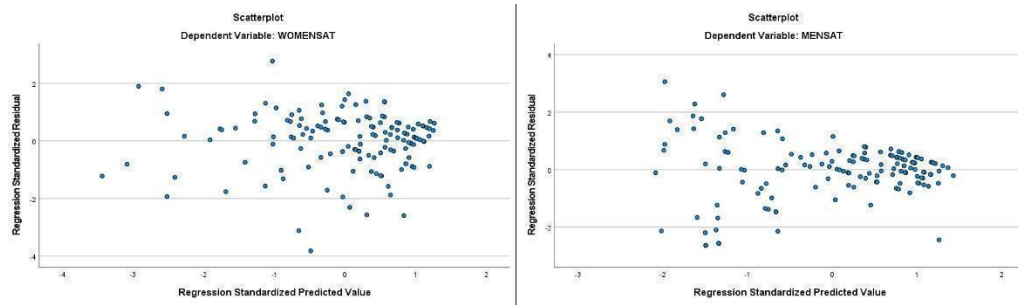


Figure 4.3. *Residual Plots*

Multicollinearity, which is a problem that arises when the correlations among variables are too high (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), was tested through variance inflation factor (VIF) and bivariate correlations. To detect the presence of this issue, the VIF values were first evaluated. When this value is greater than 10, it indicates a problem (Kline, 2011). For the variables of this study, the highest VIF value was found to be 1.18. When the bivariate correlations were evaluated, it was seen that the values ranged between .03 and .68. Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) state that a value of .90 and above indicates a problem. In this case, it is seen that multicollinearity is not a problem for the current study.

Lastly, since the data unit consists of dyads, the assumption that observations are independent of each other cannot be fulfilled. Being in a relationship gives both individuals the power to affect one another, thus it is impossible to say that their outcomes will not establish a predictable relationship.

How to assess this situation, which is defined as nonindependence (Kenny, 2006), varies depending on the characteristics of the dyad members. If there is distinguishability between dyad members, Pearson product-moment correlation should be used to assess nonindependence (Kenny, 2006). In this study, this method was utilized since the dyads consisted of heterosexual couples and could be distinguished by two different genders: men and women. In this study, variables except self-emotion regulation difficulties ($r = .08, p > .05$) were considered non-independent. For the remaining variables, perceived partner responsiveness ($r = .25, p < .01$), relational equity ($r = .27, p < .01$), and relationship satisfaction ($r = .47, p < .01$), significant

relationships were found between men and women. It means that these variables are considered to be non-independent.

4.2. Gender Differences

The study's dependent, independent, and mediator variables are presented in Table 4.1 in terms of mean, minimum, and maximum values. To evaluate whether the study variables differed with respect to gender, t-tests were utilized. For emotion regulation difficulties, an independent samples t-test was utilized. The mean score of women on the emotion regulation difficulties scale was 77.05 ($SD = 21.21$), while the mean score of men was 71.35 ($SD = 23.71$), and a significant difference was observed. Women's score was significantly higher than the men's ($t(286.464) = 2.17, p < .05$). Thus, women have more difficulties regulating their emotions. For the other variables, related samples t-tests were conducted. Regarding relationship satisfaction, there was a significant difference between men ($M = 42.64, SD = .52$) and women ($M = 41.55, SD = 5.53; t(145) = -2.14, p < .05$). Women reported less satisfaction than men. The mean score for perceived partner responsiveness was 136.5 ($SD = 22.85$) for women and 134.16 ($SD = 2.43$) for men. No gender difference was observed for this variable ($t(145) = .87, p > .05$). There was also no significant difference between genders for relational equity ($t(145) = -.85, p > .05$), with women's mean of 39.88 ($SD = 9.11$) and men's mean of 40.64 ($SD = .71$).

Table 4.1. *Gender Differences*

	<u>Women</u>				<u>Men</u>			
	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
PPR	136.5	22.85	47	162	134.16	2.43	20	162
EQ	39.88	9.11	12	50	40.64	.71	14	50
DER	77.05	21.21	30	131	71.35	23.72	30	142
SAT	41.55	5.53	23	49	42.64	.52	24	49

Note. EQ = Relational Equity; PPR = Perceived Partner Responsiveness; DER = Emotion Regulation Difficulties; SAT = Romantic Relationship Satisfaction.

In addition to gender differences regarding the study variables, the participants were also asked how often they share their positive/negative feelings and needs with their partners. Moreover, the frequency of their emotional need for their partners was also obtained (see Table 3.2.). To evaluate whether sharing positive/negative feelings, needing a partner's emotional support, and expressing the need for emotional support to a partner differed with respect to gender, Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests were computed. The results indicated significant differences in regard to negative emotion sharing ($Z = -3.87, p < .001$), positive emotion sharing ($Z = -3, p < .01$), needing a partner's emotional support ($Z = -5.6, p < .001$), and expressing the need of emotional support to partner ($Z = -5.49, p < .001$). Women reported higher sharing and emotional needs than men in all of the dimensions.

4.3. Bivariate Correlations

In order to identify direct relationships between variables, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed (Table 4.2). The degree of consistency and strength of the relationship between the variables is determined by how near the coefficient is to 1, which can range from ± 1 to 0 (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2017). Correlations between variables were evaluated separately. For women, relationship satisfaction was positively correlated with perceived partner responsiveness ($r = .68, p < .01$) and relational equity ($r = .45, p < .01$) whereas it was negatively correlated with emotion regulation difficulties ($r = -.20, p < .05$). Similarly, there was a significant negative relationship between relational equity and emotion regulation difficulties ($r = -.21, p < .01$). The relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and emotion regulation difficulties was also significantly negative ($r = -.32, p < .01$). Relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness were significantly and positively correlated ($r = .30, p < .01$). For men, relational equity ($r = .57, p < .01$) and perceived partner responsiveness ($r = .53, p < .01$) were significantly and positively correlated with relationship satisfaction. Nevertheless, as in women, there was a significant negative correlation between emotion regulation difficulties and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.35, p < .01$). Emotion regulation difficulties were also significantly negatively correlated with relational equity ($r = -.32, p < .01$) and perceived partner responsiveness ($r = -.28, p < .01$). When equity and perceived partner

responsiveness were examined within each other, a positive significant relationship was found ($r = .28, p < .01$).

Table 4.2. *Bivariate Correlations*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Relationship Satisfaction (Women)	1							
2. Relationship Satisfaction (Men)	.47**	1						
3. Emotion Regulation Difficulties (Women)	-.20*	-.13	1					
4. Emotion Regulation Difficulties (Men)	-.18*	-.35**	.08	1				
5. Relational Equity (Women)	.45**	.31**	-.21**	-.12	1			
6. Relational Equity (Men)	.29**	.57**	-.03	-.32**	.27**	1		
7. Perceived Partner Responsiveness (Women)	.68**	.35**	-.32**	-.09	.30**	.26**	1	
8. Perceived Partner Responsiveness (Men)	.31**	.53**	-.10	-.28**	.21**	.28**	.25**	1

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Furthermore, men's and women's romantic relationship satisfaction ($r = .47, p < .01$), relational equity ($r = .27, p < .01$), and perceived partner responsiveness ($r = .25, p < .01$) were positively correlated with each other. Men's perceived partner responsiveness and women's relational equity were positively correlated ($r = .21, p < .01$).

.01). Women's perceived partner responsiveness and men's relational equity were also found to be positively correlated ($r = .26, p < .01$). Besides, women's perceived partner responsiveness ($r = -.09, p > .05$) and relational equity ($r = -.12, p > .05$) were not significantly related to men's emotion regulation difficulties. Similarly, men's perceived partner responsiveness ($r = -.10, p > .05$) and relational equity ($r = -.03, p > .05$) were not significantly related to women's emotion regulation difficulties. Men's emotion regulation difficulties had a significant negative relationship with women's relationship satisfaction ($r = -.18, p < .05$) but there is no significant relationship between women's emotion regulation difficulties and men's relationship satisfaction ($r = -.13, p > .05$).

4.4. The Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation Difficulties on Romantic Relationship Satisfaction of Emerging Adult Couples

In the study where heterosexual couples were considered as the data unit, actor and partner effects in the relationship were also included. For this reason, the actor-partner interdependence mediation model (APIMeM) was used. Since the principle of normal distribution was violated, the structural model was tested using the bootstrapping method. Relational equity and perceived partner responsiveness were considered as predictor variables, emotion regulation difficulties as mediator variable, and relationship satisfaction as outcome variable. Direct actor and partner effects along with indirect actor and partner effects were investigated. For this purpose, firstly, the saturated model was evaluated and all paths that were not significant in the first stage were removed from the model.

Afterward, the fit indices of the final model (Figure 4.1) formed with the remaining significant paths were examined. To briefly restate the previously described optimal values, CFI and TLI values of .90 and above are considered acceptable (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Collier, 2020). The fit gets better as the RMSEA value gets closer to 0, and values between .05 and .10 denote a mediocre fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Kline, 2011). A χ^2 / df value less than 3 is acceptable (Kline, 2011). Considering all of the values, the model showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 / df = 1.032$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .02, TLI = 1.00).

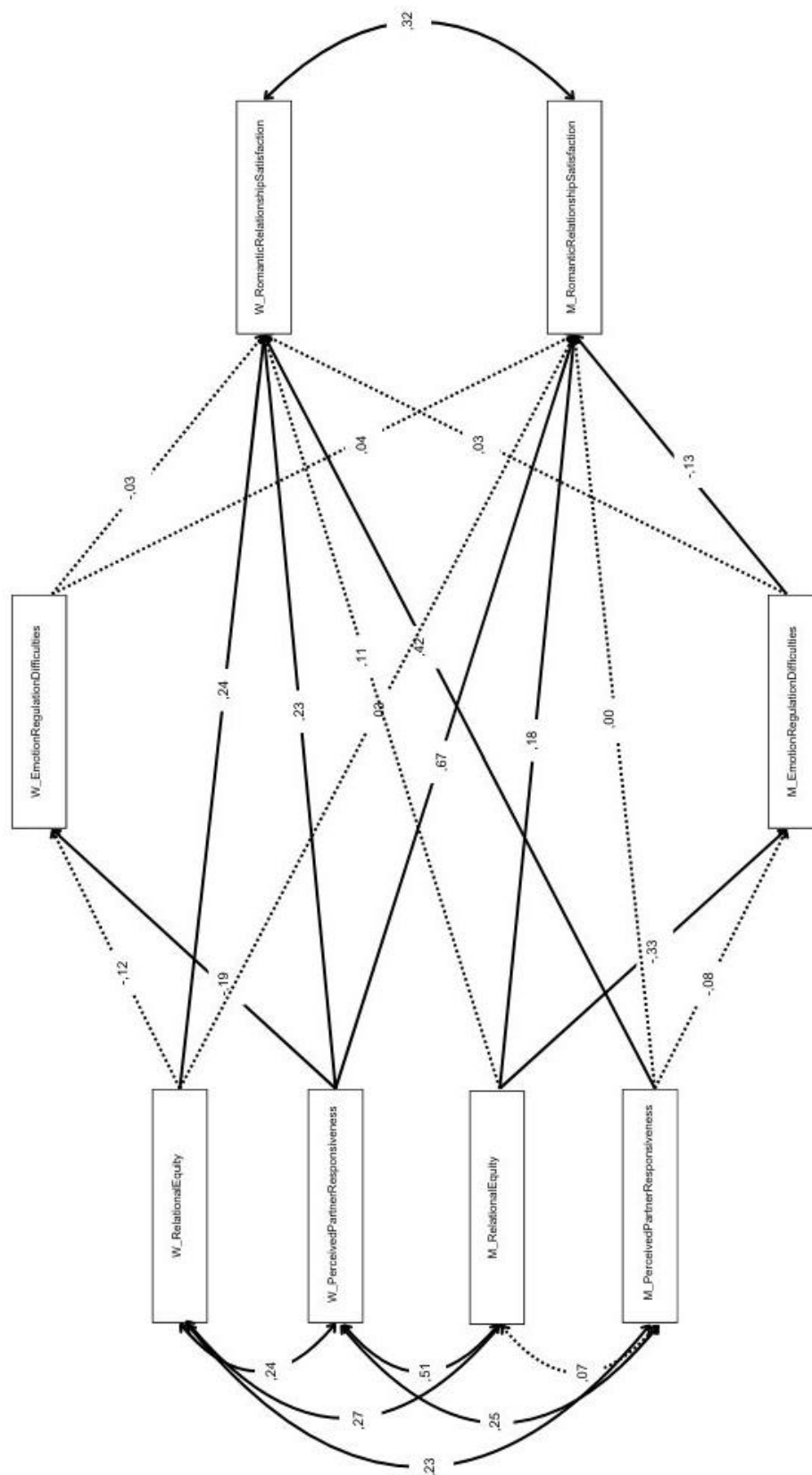


Figure 4.1. Structural Model of the Study

Bold arrows represent significant relationships, dashed arrows represent non-significant relationships. *W = Women; M = Men.

Upon analyzing the final model through squared multiple correlations (R^2), it was seen that while men's and women's perceptions of relational equity and partner responsiveness account for 11% of the variance in men's difficulties regulating their emotions, they explain 4% of the variance in women's emotion regulation difficulties. The overall hypothesized model explained 41% of the variance in women's relationship satisfaction and 66% of the variance in men's relationship satisfaction. To explain the findings of the hypothesized analyses, direct and indirect actor-partner effects were presented.

The proposed model was conducted with ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$ for men's relational equity and $\beta = .23$, $p < .001$ for women's relational equity; $\beta = .00$, $p > .05$ for men's perceived partner responsiveness and $\beta = .18$, $p < .05$ for women's perceived partner responsiveness) and without mediator ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$ for men's relational equity and $\beta = .23$, $p < .001$ for women's relational equity; $\beta = .004$, $p > .05$ for men's perceived partner responsiveness and $\beta = .17$, $p < .05$ for women's perceived partner responsiveness). During the evaluation of relationships, coefficients between .10 and .29 were considered small, between .30 and .49 were considered medium, and between .50 and 1.00 were considered large effects (Cohen, 1988).

Following the analyses to test the mediating effect of emotion regulation difficulties in the final model, only one mediation effect was observed in the study: Emotion regulation difficulties mediated the relationship between men's relational equity and their own relationship satisfaction. The kind of mediation was examined since there are two types of mediation: complete and partial. Complete mediation occurs when the relationship between the variables can be established indirectly through the mediator; partial mediation occurs when the relationship may be observed both directly and indirectly through the mediator (Hayes, 2013). Difficulties with regulating emotions significantly mediated the association between men's relational equity and relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .04$, $p < .01$, [CI .01, .09]). Additionally, there was a direct relationship found ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) between men's relational equity with relationship satisfaction. Consequently, it might be said that emotion regulation difficulties mediated the association partially. Actor and partner effects among predictor (relational equity and

perceived partner responsiveness), mediator (emotion regulation difficulties) and outcome (romantic relationship satisfaction) variables are presented below.

4.4.1. Actor Effects

According to the results, significant direct actor effects were identified among variables. Firstly, men's relational equity had a significant actor effect on their relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .18, p < .01$). Likewise, women's relational equity had a significant actor effect on their own satisfaction ($\beta = .24, p < .001$). Both genders were found more satisfied in relationships when they feel that the connection is more equitable and fair. There was also a significant relationship for women ($\beta = .23, p < .001$) when the actor effect of perceived partner responsiveness on relationship satisfaction was analyzed. Women are therefore more satisfied in their relationships when they believe their partners are responsive. For men, there was no such actor effect. Men's relationship satisfaction was significantly associated with their difficulties regulating their emotions ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$) in a negative way. Men who have difficulties in managing their emotions tend to be less satisfied in relationships. In addition, it was shown that women's emotion regulation difficulties had no relationship with how happy they were in relationships.

Upon examining the relationship between a person's perception of equity and their own emotion regulation difficulties, it was observed that men's greater perception of equity had actor effect on these difficulties ($\beta = -.33, p < .001$), while women did not experience the same consequence. On the contrary, the association of perceived partner responsiveness with emotion regulation difficulties was only significant for women ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$).

4.4.2. Partner Effects

No partner effect was identified except the effect of perceived partner responsiveness on romantic relationship satisfaction. Accordingly, men's relationship satisfaction is in accordance with women's perception of their partner's responsiveness ($\beta = .67, p < .001$). Similarly, men's perception of their partners as responsive has a positive

relationship with women's relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .42, p < .001$). All actor and partner effects analyzed in the study and related values are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. *Standardized Model Results Regarding Actor and Partner Effects*

	β	SE	p	t
ACTOR EFFECTS				
<u>Direct effects</u>				
<i>EQ</i> → <i>SAT</i>				
Women Actor Effect	.24	.04	<.001***	3.72
Men Actor Effect	.18	.04	.002**	3.15
<i>PPR</i> → <i>SAT</i>				
Women Actor Effect	.23	.23	<.001***	3.48
Men Actor Effect	-	-	-	-
<i>DER</i> → <i>SAT</i>				
Women Actor Effect	-	-	-	-
Men Actor Effect	-.13	.05	.007*	-2.71
<i>EQ</i> → <i>DER</i>				
Women Actor Effect	-	-	-	-
Men Actor Effect	-.33	.06	<.001***	-4.14
<i>PPR</i> → <i>DER</i>				
Women Actor Effect	-.19	.01	.03*	-2.32
Men Actor Effect	-	-	-	-
<u>Indirect effects</u>				
<i>EQ</i> → <i>SAT</i>				
Women Actor Effect	-	-	-	-
Men Actor Effect	.04	.02	.004**	2.27
<i>PPR</i> → <i>SAT</i>				
Women Actor Effect	-	-	-	-
Men Actor Effect	-	-	-	-
PARTNER EFFECTS				
<u>Direct effects</u>				
<i>EQ</i> → <i>SAT</i>				
Women Partner Effect	-	-	-	-
Men Partner Effect	-	-	-	-
<i>PPR</i> → <i>SAT</i>				
Women Partner Effect	.67	.01	<.001***	11.95
Men Partner Effect	.42	.01	<.001***	6.56
<i>DER</i> → <i>SAT</i>				
Women Partner Effect	-	-	-	-
Men Partner Effect	-	-	-	-

Note. EQ = Relational Equity; PPR = Perceived Partner Responsiveness; DER = Emotion Regulation Difficulties; SAT = Romantic Relationship Satisfaction.

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

4.5. Reporting Results Based on Study Hypotheses

In line with the findings presented so far, the assessment of the hypotheses related to the research question is presented in this section.

H1 discusses the association of relationship satisfaction and relational equity: *Women's and men's relational equity will be positively associated with their own and their partners' romantic relationship satisfaction.* Analysis of the data reveals that the part of this hypothesis pertaining to actor effects was supported. Relationship satisfaction was found to be correlated with both women's ($\beta = .24, p < .001$) and men's ($\beta = .18, p < .01$) own relational equity with a small effect, but not with their partners.

H2 included actor effects pertaining to people's relational equity and difficulties with emotion regulation: *Women's and men's relational equity will be negatively associated with their own emotion regulation difficulties.* It could only be validated with regard to men's direct actor effects ($\beta = -.33, p < .001$), with medium effect.

H4 discusses the association between relationship satisfaction and perceived partner responsiveness: *Women's and men's perceived partner responsiveness will be positively associated with their own and their partners' romantic relationship satisfaction.*

It was found that there was a partner effect of perceived partner responsiveness on both women's ($\beta = .42, p < .001$) and men's ($\beta = .67, p < .001$) relationship satisfaction, indicating a medium effect on women and a large effect on men. However, only women's perceived partner responsiveness had a relationship with their own relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .23, p < .001$), with a small effect. Thus, H4 was partially confirmed.

H5 addressed the relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and emotion regulation difficulties. *Women's and men's perceived partner responsiveness will be negatively associated with their own emotion regulation difficulties.* It was confirmed only for women's direct actor effects ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$), with a small effect.

The mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties was assessed through H3 (*Emotion regulation difficulties of both women and men will mediate the relationship between relational equity and romantic relationship satisfaction.*) and H6 (*Emotion regulation difficulties of both women and men will mediate the relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and romantic relationship satisfaction.*). According to the findings, men's own relational equity and relationship satisfaction were partially mediated by emotion regulation difficulties ($\beta = .04$, $p < .01$). As a result, H3 was only partially supported whereas H6 was rejected.

4.6. Summary of Results

The findings provided several ideas regarding men's and women's relationship satisfaction. Firstly, perceived partner responsiveness of both themselves and their partners was associated with women's relationship satisfaction. Accordingly, (a) women's perception of their partners as responsive and (b) their partners' perception of them as responsive were related to an increase in their relationship satisfaction. Men's relationship satisfaction was also related to partner responsiveness perceived by their partners. In other words, men were found to be more satisfied in their relationships when their partners find them responsive.

Analyzing the impact of equity on satisfaction reveals that both women and men's views on equity have significant actor effects on how satisfied they are in the relationship. In addition to the direct relationship, there was a mediation effect for men as well: men who feel that the relationship is equal report less difficulty controlling their emotions, which in turn is associated with higher relationship satisfaction. Although women's emotion regulation difficulties were negatively related to their perception of their partners as responsive, it did not have any mediating role on their relationship satisfaction.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter is devoted to the discussion and evaluation of the research results. In the first section, the research question's results are interpreted by following the literature and related findings. Then, practical implications, and suggestions for future researchers are given respectively.

5.1. Discussion of the Findings

The current study mainly focused on how emerging adults' perceived partner responsiveness and relationship equity are associated with their level of satisfaction in their romantic relationships, via examining the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties in this association. It was crucial to discover how the partners affect one another since the results rely on each individual's subjective experiences and perceptions regarding the partnership. Thus, the Actor Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM) was used.

The current study represents the first attempt to elucidate how the mentioned variables are associated with mediation. Although relationship satisfaction has been examined separately with the research variables or related variables in many studies in romantic relationship literature as a comprehensive and encompassing concept (Reis et al., 2004), it is expected that the prior investigations would shed light on how the study's findings should be interpreted.

The findings regarding mediation, actor, and partner effects were discussed in the following three subsections.

5.1.1. Mediating Effects

The main focus of this study was to examine the association of relational equity (H3) and perceived partner responsiveness (H6) with emerging adults' romantic relationship satisfaction via the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties. Emotion regulation difficulties played a partial mediator role only in the effect of men's perception of equity on relationship satisfaction.

Accordingly, men's perception of the relationship as equal helps them to have less difficulty in emotion regulation, which in turn, increases their relationship satisfaction. This result can be justified by the findings showing that men attach importance to preserving equilibrium and their desired position within the relationship. In particular, emerging adults explore and reevaluate their roles in life (Arnett, 2015). During this time, building equal partnerships and developing their emotional awareness and regulation skills might lead to more fulfilling relationships. By providing a secure space for men to express themselves, equity in relationships may have encouraged them to attempt to understand their roles with greater confidence and enabled them to have more fulfilling relationships by making it less challenging to regulate their emotions.

This mediating effect was not observed in women. It has been shown by the studies that women express emotions more than men. At this point, their tendency to express their emotions and difficulties more may have caused this to be more on the agenda and resolved as an issue in the relationship. Thus, women's regulation difficulties did not mediate between relational variables. On the contrary, since men are less prone to express their emotional difficulties, they may be more affected by relationship characteristics and mediate the associations.

A similar situation may be the case in terms of perceived partner responsiveness for women. Emotion regulation difficulties of women could predict perceived partner responsiveness but did not mediate the relationship with satisfaction. The findings that women are more relational and sharing-oriented may cause their internal dynamics to

be evaluated by them together with the responses they receive from their partners, rather than alone. Thus, their own emotion regulation difficulties alone may not be sufficient to mediate relational dynamics. For men, the relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and relationship outcomes was quite weak. It was not found to be related to emotion regulation difficulties and relationship satisfaction, and no mediation effect was found. The findings that men are less likely to ask for help, show vulnerable emotions, and also prioritize their own individual well-being (Broverman et al., 1972; Tannen, 1990) in relationship satisfaction may have led to this result. Further discussion of this result was presented within the framework of actor and partner effects in detail.

5.1.2. Actor Effects

The study includes hypotheses regarding romantic relationship satisfaction's potential relationships with relational equity, perceived partner responsiveness, and difficulties regulating emotions. Firstly, whether an individual's degree of relationship satisfaction was related to their own perception of relational equity was examined (H1). It was found that such an association exists for both men and women. This finding was supported by the literature as it was pertinent to earlier research. A more satisfying relationship can be maintained when both partners communicate in a way that upholds their views of equity and mutuality. Similar findings were also expressed by researchers such as Utne et al. (1984) and Van Yperen and Buunk (1990). Furthermore, it makes sense that a relationship that is viewed as fair would be more fulfilling given the correlation between equity and pleasant emotions, and inequity and negative emotions (Sprecher, 1986, 2001).

It was also hypothesized that perceived partner responsiveness has an actor effect on relationship satisfaction (H4) and was confirmed only for women. There was no such effect of perceived partner responsiveness on relationship satisfaction for men. Although studies on perceived partner responsiveness have found a relationship between relationship satisfaction regardless of gender (Candel & Turliuc, 2021; Pagani et al., 2019), the current study revealed a difference. This finding can be con-

sistent with the views that women have higher values of closeness and intimacy, while men have higher values of independence (Broverman et al., 1972; Tannen, 1990). Men's relationship satisfaction may not be impacted by their partners' support in the same way that women's is. It can be explained by the idea that the support women receive from their partners, enhances their intimacy beliefs and thus, increases the satisfaction they derive from the relationship. This outcome is especially noteworthy in light of the study's other finding that men's perceptions of equity were in a positive relationship with their relationship satisfaction: Having a balanced relationship, where power, accountability, and support are all weighed equally, is significant for men rather than feeling a partner's support alone. The evidence might be evaluated as a picture that is in line with restrictive gender roles: women evaluate relationship outcomes based on partner behaviors and relational dynamics more, whereas men evaluate relationships in a more individualistic frame. In addition, for the study sample, it was observed that women's sharing of emotion and support needs were higher than that of men. Higher need sharing may be related to more effective responsiveness. Since this was lower in men, responsiveness may have been less related to relationship outcomes.

The normalization and reinforcement of beliefs within society may contribute to the perpetuation of such gender disparities (Chrisler & Smith, 2004; LaFrance & Banaji, 1992). It can also be interpreted as a sign of how socially acquired biases affect intimate interactions. Furthermore, since women's and men's expectations from a relationship might differ, women's responsiveness might not be at the dimension expected by their partner (Candel & Turliuc, 2021). Moreover, there could be additional factors contributing to the findings, such as men's self-disclosure behaviors, partners' own expression styles during conflicts, and attachment style-related alterations in perception (Doğruyol, 2023; Sasaki & Overall, 2020, van Lankveld et al., 2021).

The actor effect of relational equity (H2) and perceived partner responsiveness (H5) on emotion regulation difficulties was also evaluated within the scope of the study. To address the second hypothesis, it was found that women's perceptions of equity had no

actor effect on their difficulty with emotion regulation; however, men's difficulties with emotion regulation was associated with an increase in their relational equity. The interpretation of this finding should consider the research that states women have a more expressive attitude toward their emotions and employ emotion regulation techniques more frequently. Strategies centered on sharing and the support they receive are especially emphasized (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012). It is suggested that a variety of factors, including gender norms and widely held prejudices, may make it more difficult for men to get in touch with and express their emotions genuinely (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009). However, being in an equal partnership -where the benefits of the connection are neither greater nor lesser than the partner- can create a safer atmosphere. Thus, men in such interactions can recognize, accept, express, and regulate their emotions with the help of this safe space by using a variety of coping mechanisms like asking for help.

On the other hand, the fifth hypothesis investigated how emotion regulation difficulties were related to perceived partner responsiveness, and a relation was noted to be present in women but not in men. The literature states that receiving more support at this point helps by reducing the use of dysfunctional regulation strategies (Lopez et al., 2024), and the finding for women can be considered to be supported by the literature. The importance women attach to closeness and emotional support (Tannen, 1990) may also make a difference. It was also observed in this study that women had higher rates of sharing and emotional support needs. Feeling that they are supported by the person they value romantically and with whom they are in a close relationship has the potential to effectively support women's general emotion regulation skills.

The two other findings of the current study can be discussed concurrently: For women, having an equity-based relationship with their partners does not affect their difficulties in emotion regulation, whereas for men, an equity-based relationship is more important and the support of their partners does not have a significant relationship with their emotion regulation difficulties. The findings are consistent with several other studies indicating that relational dynamics are more prominent for women while men make more self-oriented evaluations of their emotions (Broverman et al., 1972; Tannen, 1990).

Two values mentioned in the equity research section might also help to explain the prominence of these aspects of men: survival and self-expression values. Yum et al. (2015), in their research on these values, evaluated equity as a "Western standard" and argued that it is more decisive in countries where self-expression values are at the forefront. In terms of gender differences, when more traditional roles are dominant, women make more effort to maintain the relationship in case of an inequity. The two values that form the basis of this study are analyzed in line with the views of political scientists Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2005).

Survival values express the importance given to economic and physical security, while self-expression values emphasize freedoms such as equality, human rights, greater participation in politics, and subjective well-being. Researchers who divided the world map into quadrants according to these values stated that Türkiye is among the survival value-oriented countries (Lin & Mancik, 2020). Traditional gender norms in nations that prioritize survival values may lessen the significance and impact of inequity for women as they adjust by restoring their perceptions of inequity and concentrating on maintaining their relationships. Men may place a higher value on their own status and well-being, and their perception of their relationships as equal may have a stronger link to their internal dynamics, such as emotion regulation. Despite the fact that gender norms were not measured in the current study, it can be speculated that in this process, traditional gender roles, their normalization, and internalization appear effective.

Notably, only men's emotion regulation difficulties were associated with their own relationship satisfaction and there was no other actor effect for men. It is possible that men's dynamics in this area are more mirrored in relationship satisfaction as they are socially less expressive than women when it comes to expressing their feelings (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009).

Compared to men, women's relationship satisfaction may be more correlated with the responses they receive from their partners rather than the challenges they face: In light of previous studies and literature (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012), what women experience with their partner in this regard may be more important

in determining relationship satisfaction, even though having emotion regulation difficulties influences their life's overall flow.

5.1.3. Partner Effects

Regarding the association between individuals' level of satisfaction in their relationships and their partners' perceptions of relational equity (H1), there was no partner effect for either gender. How an individual's opinions regarding equity are represented in their relationships with their partners may be crucial when interpreting this finding. Even though there is no other study in the literature that directly investigates this association, it is explained in the theory that people attempt to psychologically or actually restore the equity they perceive (Hatfield & Rapson, 2011). Such efforts may protect the partner from the effects of the other person's equity/inequity perceptions. As a result, individuals' perceptions might not have much impact on how satisfied the partner is in the relationship.

The connection between partners' perceptions of an individual's responsiveness and the individual's level of relationship satisfaction was also investigated (H4). The hypothesis was validated for partner effects: Male partners' relationship satisfaction rises as women consider them to be more responsive, while women's relationship satisfaction also rises as men perceive their partners to be more responsive. There is no research in the literature that can be considered directly related to this finding. Nevertheless, it can be evaluated within the scope of prosocial behaviors in the relationship. Although prosocial behaviors have the function of showing that the person thinks and cares about the other person and making his/her life easier, it is also stated that they have a self-serving dimension (Batson, 1987). Making the partner happy and making him/her feel supported can reinforce the perception that he/she is a "good partner" and increase his/her own relationship satisfaction. In addition, making the partners feel supported may improve the relationship traits in general and have a positive effect on the relationship satisfaction of the person. A satisfied perception of the relationship may also lead to a responsive and caring perception of the partner. In addition, it is also thought that perceiving the partner as responsive has the potential

to increase communication between partners. This increased sharing may also positively affect satisfaction.

Notably, there was no partner effect of emotion regulation difficulties on relationship satisfaction. In light of the fact that emotions are communicated through behaviors and expressions (Shariff & Tracy, 2011), it is possible to evaluate how people are influenced by their partners' difficulties with emotion regulation. It is conceivable that a strong connection between emotional regulation difficulties and the other partner's relationship satisfaction was not observed since the sample had a high sharing rate overall.

5.2. Implications for Practice

Mainly based on the equity theory that attempts to explain relationship dynamics and satisfaction, the study developed a hypothetical model that allowed for the drawing of specific findings. The study's findings are believed to have significant implications for couple counseling. It, therefore, has considerable implications for mental health professionals who work with emerging adult individuals and couples.

In a broader sense, couple communication encompasses the effects and changes that partners bring about in each other in a variety of ways, as well as the sharing of resources and information, displays of emotions, and support (Wiley, 2007). While attempting to enhance couple communication, it is fundamental to comprehend how each partner perceives those particular components and their influence on the relationship. Even though each partnership is unique, it is yet important for mental health professionals to have a general understanding of the dynamics. The results of the current study show how different variables interplay with relationship satisfaction and can serve as a guide.

Actor and partner effect differences among women and men should also be taken into account in couple interventions, as they offer insight into how relationships might be shaped within the context of the norms of society. Supposing that "they are naturally the way they are" can, however, result in rigidity. Therefore, during interventions, it

would be more effective to try to identify the dynamics that give rise to the differences for each couple. It might be argued that it is essential to acknowledge and communicate individual needs and expectations. Afterward, their perspectives on their partners' help with responsiveness, equity, and emotion regulation, as well as how these perceptions influence their present issues, can be included. Furthermore, it has been noted that, though in different ways, one's own regulatory abilities and satisfaction in relationships might be in relationship with equity and perceived partner responsiveness. In this sense, it would be advantageous to bring up these topics in relevant group sessions and relationship-strengthening activities.

Apart from enhancing the communication and bond between currently dating couples, the research offers valuable insights into the significance of interventions like disclosing pre-relationship expectations, understanding and communicating needs, identifying resources for emotion regulation, and addressing the role of romantic relationships in an individual's life.

5.3. Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research can be effectively derived from the constraints of the current study. The first thing that can be recommended to be taken into account in future research is variability, which was always considered in the interpretation of the current results. The sample consists of couples who are educated, employed, have a high emotional and experience-based sharing rate, and have relatively high scores, especially for relational equity, perceived partner responsiveness, and relationship satisfaction. Convenience sampling and online data collection techniques may have created such circumstances, which could make it difficult to generalize the findings. It is strongly advised that future research be done by gathering data in person from individuals of varying ages, occupations, and educational backgrounds, and at different stages in their relationships. Conducting longitudinal research might also be valuable to observe changes throughout the relationship at various phases. It is important to remain aware that the factors depend on people's subjective evaluations of their relationships and the actions of their partners. Expressions of expectations and barriers encountered, the extent of them, and the quality of the established

communication all play a crucial role in this regard. While APIMeM is an effective tool for observing how partners might affect one another, addressing partner experiences more thoroughly in qualitative research may uncover commonalities and lead to more thorough conclusions. Furthermore, investigations using mixed methodologies can be carried out to provide the support of quantitative data with qualitative data.

To deepen the theoretical understanding, it is valuable to incorporate additional factors pertaining to social exchange theory, which is a broader perspective that has several other sub-theories, into related research. Investments in the relationship and evaluation of alternatives are variables related to the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980) that can be covered. Turkish couples between 18 and 30, who had been dating for at least six months were included in the current study. Thus, it is important to consider the impact of developmental characteristics and culture. Given time frame is characterized by choosing individuals' "life partners" (Arnett, 2000) and also can be called the age of marriage in Turkish culture. The expectations for the future, how well each individual's expectations and their partners' align, and the impact of their immediate surroundings' perceptions can also influence how they view a romantic relationship. Due to the individual's expectations for the relationship and their investments in it, perceptions of certain relational factors, like equity and partner responsiveness, may differ from reality (Lemay & Clark, 2015).

As a result, factors like future expectations, investments, and perception of alternative possibilities can be taken into account while evaluating these variables. Hence, it is possible to develop a working model that combines the theories to evaluate alternatives and existing romantic partnerships in terms of individuals' expectations that evolve with the influence of society.

Even though much research has examined investment model factors thus far (e.g., Young & Furman, 2013; Lemay, 2016; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017), a more comprehensive view might be obtained by more effectively incorporating the impact of perceived partner efforts and relationship equity perceptions. A person's past

attachment experiences (Brandão et al., 2019; Lewczuk et al., 2018), degree of self-disclosure (Doğruyol, 2023), amount of commitment to the relationship (Sprecher, 2001), and utilization of conflict resolution strategies (Todorov et al., 2023) are other variables that may impact the connection between the variables in addition to these potential social and personal impacts. They can be addressed inside the context of forthcoming studies.

In order to investigate the effects of the views of individuals in the relationship on their internal processes, the study additionally utilized emotion regulation difficulties into account as a mediator. The association between men's views of equity and relationship satisfaction was partially mediated by this variable. Even if this finding again sheds light on the importance of gender disparities and an individual's priorities in a relationship, emotion regulation is assumed to have a greater influence on the relationship between the variables. The impacts of individuals on their own and their partners' emotion regulation processes are referred to as interpersonal emotion regulation (Lemay et al. 2024), a concept that has gained attention recently. It is suggested that this kind of emotion regulation be included in studies involving couples.

In conclusion, additional variables and alternative approaches could be used to build upon this study, which offers insightful viewpoints on relationship dynamics. The importance of conducting research in several variants is undeniable, as romantic relationships merge with many other aspects of life and possess an abundance of components that might impact an individual's subjective perspective.

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APPENDICES

A. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Bu araştırma, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü, Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık programı yüksek lisans öğrencisi Çağla Berrak Yıldız tarafından Prof. Dr. Zeynep Hatipoğlu Sümer'in danışmanlığında yürütülen bir tez çalışmasıdır. Bu form size araştırma koşulları hakkında bilgi vermek için hazırlanmıştır.

Araştırmanın amacı, beliren yetişkinlikteki bireylerin romantik ilişki deneyimlerinde eşitlik, algılanan partner duyarlılığı ve duygu düzenlemenin rollerini incelemektir.

Çalışmaya katılabilmeniz için

- 18-29 yaşları arasında olmanız,
- en az 6 aydır devam eden heteroseksüel romantik bir ilişki içinde bulunmanız ve
- partnerinizle evli olmamanız önemlidir.

İlişkideki her iki partnerin de çalışmaya katılmayı kabul etmesi gerekmektedir. Katılımı kabul ettiğiniz takdirde sizden beklenen, çalışma kapsamındaki soruları derecelendirme ölçeği üzerinde yanıtlamanız ve kendinizle ilgili birkaç açık uçlu soruya kısaca yanıt vermenizdir. Romantik ilişkideki her bir partnerin çalışmaya bireysel olarak katılması, sorulara verdikleri yanıtları partneriyle paylaşmaması gerekmektedir. Partnerlerin yanıtlarını eşleştirebilmek için anket başlangıcında sizden partnerinizle birlikte ortak bir rumuz belirlemeniz ve ilgili alana bu rumuzu yazmanız istenecektir. Çalışmaya katılım ortalama 5-10 dakika sürmektedir.

Araştırmaya katılımınız tamamen gönüllülük temelinde olmalıdır. Ankette, sizden kimlik veya kurum belirleyici hiçbir bilgi istenmemektedir. Cevaplarınız tamamıyla gizli tutulacak, partnerinizle paylaşılmayacak ve sadece araştırmacılar tarafından değerlendirilecektir. Katılımcılardan elde edilecek bilgiler toplu halde değerlendirilecek ve bilimsel yayımlarda kullanılacaktır. Sağladığınız veriler gönüllü katılım formlarında toplanan kimlik bilgileri ile eşleştirilmeyecektir.

Anket, genel olarak kişisel rahatsızlık verecek sorular içermemektedir. Ancak, katılım sırasında sorulardan ya da herhangi başka bir nedenden ötürü kendinizi rahatsız hissederseniz cevaplama işini yarıda bırakmakta serbestsiniz. Bu çalışmaya katıldığınız için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz.

Çalışma hakkında daha fazla bilgi almak için Çağla Berrak Yıldız ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz (e-posta:).

O Araştırmaya katılmaya onay veriyorum.

Lütfen partnerinizle ortak belirlediğiniz rumuzu aşağıya yazınız. Yanıtlarınız romantik partnerinizin yanıtlarıyla eşleştirileceği için ortak bir rumuz belirlemeniz önemlidir.



B. PERSONAL INFORMATION FORM

Lütfen kendinizle ve romantik ilişkinizle ilgili aşağıdaki soruları cevaplayınız..

Yaşınız: _____

Cinsiyetiniz: _____

En son bitirdiğiniz okul:

- ☐ İlkokul
- ☐ Ortaokul
- ☐ Lise
- ☐ Yüksek okul/Ön lisans
- ☐ Lisans/ Üniversite
- ☐ Yüksek lisans
- ☐ Doktora

Öğrenciliğiniz devam ediyor mu?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır

Öğrenciyseniz şu anda devam ettiğiniz program:

- ☐ Lisans
- ☐ Yüksek lisans
- ☐ Doktora

Çalışıyor musunuz?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır

Mevcut romantik ilişkiniz kaç aydır devam etmekte? (ay-yıl olarak giriniz). _____

Mevcut ilişkiniz bir uzak mesafe ilişkisi mi? Romantik partneriniz coğrafi olarak uzakta (40 km ve daha uzakta), görüşmeyi güçleştiren bir konumda yaşıyorsa buna uzak mesafe ilişkisi denir.

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır

Partnerinizle görüşme sıklığınız nedir? Size en yakın cevabı işaretleyiniz.

- ☐ Her gün
- ☐ 2-3 günde bir

- ☐ Her hafta 1 kez
- ☐ 2-3 haftada bir
- ☐ Ayda bir kez
- ☐ Daha az

Sonucunda üzüntü/öfke/kaygı gibi olumsuz duygular deneyimlediğiniz olayları partnerinizle ne sıklıkla paylaşırsınız?

- ☐ Neredeyse her olayda, her zaman
- ☐ Çoğunlukla
- ☐ Bazen
- ☐ Nadiren
- ☐ Hiçbir zaman

Sonucunda sevinç/huzur/coşku gibi olumlu duygular deneyimlediğiniz olayları partnerinizle ne sıklıkla paylaşırsınız?

- ☐ Neredeyse her olayda, her zaman
- ☐ Çoğunlukla
- ☐ Bazen
- ☐ Nadiren
- ☐ Hiçbir zaman

Ne sıklıkla partnerinizin duygusal desteğine ihtiyaç duyarsınız?

- ☐ Neredeyse her olayda, her zaman
- ☐ Çoğunlukla
- ☐ Bazen
- ☐ Nadiren
- ☐ Hiçbir zaman

Partnerinizin duygusal desteğine ihtiyaç duyduğunuz zamanlarda bunu ne sıklıkla ifade edersiniz?

- ☐ Neredeyse her olayda, her zaman
- ☐ Çoğunlukla
- ☐ Bazen
- ☐ Nadiren
- ☐ Hiçbir zaman

C. SAMPLE ITEMS RELATIONSHIP ASSESSMENT SCALE

Lütfen romantik partnerinizle olan ilişkinizi düşünerek her bir ifadenin size uygunluğunu 7 dereceli ölçek üzerinde değerlendirip uygun sayıyı işaretleyiniz.

Sevgiliniz ihtiyaçlarınızı ne kadar iyi karşılıyor?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hiç						Çok iyi
karşılamıyor						karşılıyor

Genel olarak ilişkinizden ne kadar memnunsunuz?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hiç						Çok
memnun						memnunum
değilim						

Diğerleri ile karşılaştırdığınızda ilişkiniz ne kadar iyi?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Çok daha						Çok daha
kötü						iyi

Ne sıklıkla ilişkinize hiç başlamamış olmayı diliyorsunuz?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hiçbir						Her zaman
zaman						

D. SAMPLE ITEMS FOR RELATIONAL EQUITY SCALE

Lütfen romantik partnerinizle olan ilişkinizi düşünerek aşağıda verilen cümlelerin sizin için ne kadar doğru olduğunu belirtiniz. (1 = Kesinlikle Katılıyorum, 5 = Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum).

	1	2	3	4	5
Genellikle ilişkimize verdiklerimin aldıklarımın daha fazla olduğunu hissedirim.					
Eşimle eşit derecede birbirimize bağlı olduğumuzu söyleyebilirim.					
Genellikle eşim tarafından kullanıldığımı hissedirim.					
Eşimin ilişkimize olan ilgisi, benim ilişkimize olan ilgimden daha az gibidir.					
Eşim ve ben ilişkimizdeki gücü eşit olarak paylaşıyoruz.					

**E. SAMPLE ITEMS FOR PERCEIVED PARTNER RESPONSIVENESS
SCALE**

Lütfen şu anki romantik partnerinizle (yani sevgiliniz ya da eşinizle) ilgili aşağıdaki soruları cevaplayınız. (1: Hiç Doğru Değil, 9: Tamamen Doğru)

Partnerim çoğu zaman...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
... nasıl biri olduğumu çok iyi bilir.									
... “gerçek ben”i görür.									
.... iyi yönlerimi ve kusurlarımı, benim kendimde gördüğüm gibi görür.									
... söz konusu bensem yanılmaz.									
... zayıf yönlerim de dahil her şeyimi takdir eder.									

**F. SAMPLE ITEMS FOR DIFFICULTIES IN EMOTION REGULATION
SCALE**

Lütfen aşağıda verilen cümlelerin sizin için ne kadar doğru olduğunu belirtiniz. 1: Hemen hemen hiç (%0-%10) 2: Bazen (%11-%35) 3: Yaklaşık yarı yarıya (%36-%65) 4: Çoğu zaman (%66-%90) 5: Hemen hemen her zaman (%91-%100)

	1	2	3	4	5
Ne hissettiğim konusunda netimdir.					
Ne hissettiğimi dikkate alırım.					
Duygularım bana dayanılmaz ve kontrolsüz gelir.					
Ne hissettiğim konusunda net bir fikrim vardır.					
Duygularıma bir anlam vermekte zorlanırım.					

**G. APPROVAL FORM OF THE MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY
HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE**

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



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28 ŞUBAT 2023

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Prof.dr. Zeynep Hatipoğlu SÜMER

Danışmanlığımı yürüttüğünüz Çağla Berrak YILDIZ'ın "Beliren Yetişkinlik Döneminde Yaşanan Romantik İlişkilerde İlişkisel Eşitlik ve Algılanan Partner Duyarlılığının İlişki Doyumuna Etkisinde Duygu Regülasyonunda Yaşanan Zorlukların Aracı Rolü" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek 0107-ODTÜİAEK-2023 protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

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H. TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET

BELİREN YETİŞKİNLİKTE ROMANTİK İLİŞKİ DOYUMU, İLİŞKİSEL EŞİTLİK, ALGILANAN PARTNER DUYARLILIĞI VE DUYGU DÜZENLEME GÜÇLÜKLERİ: İKİLİ BİR ANALİZ

1. GİRİŞ

Sevgi dolu, cesaretlendirici ve destekleyici ilişkiler içinde olmak ruh sağlığı için gereklidir (Kane vd., 2007). Çevresini ve kendisini düzenleme yoluyla ihtiyaçlarını belirleyip karşılamaya yönelik doğuştan bir yeteneğe sahip olan insanların (Daş, 2020), romantik ilişkilerini kurarken de ihtiyaçlarını göz önünde bulundurması ve buna göre hareket etmesi ise oldukça beklendiktir (Alonso-Ferres vd., 2021).

Akademisyenler uzun bir süredir, bir bireyin içsel veya dışsal düzenlemelerinin ilişkilerinde kendini nasıl gösterebileceğini ve yakın ilişkilerin hangi mekanizmalar aracılığıyla kurulup sürdürülebileceğini araştırmaktadır. Partnerlerin doyumları, ilişkinin çeşitli yönlerine ilişkin öznel değerlendirmeleriyle belirlenir. İlişki istikrarı (Rusbult vd., 1998), partnerlerin bağlılık düzeyi gibi önemli faktörlerle ilişkilidir (Rusbult vd., 1998). Doyumla ilgili mekanizmaların araştırılması, ilişkinin devamlılığına da etki etmesi sebebiyle, temel öneme sahiptir.

Bu konuda her yaş grubu dikkate alınmaya değer olsa da kimlik keşfi girişiminde bulunan ve kendileri, yaşamları ve ilişkileri için beklentilerini şekillendiriyor olan (Arnett ve Mitra, 2018) beliren yetişkinler özellikle dikkat gerektirmektedir. Bir keşif ve geçiş dönemi olarak nitelendirilen (Douglass, 2007) bu yaşam evresinde insanlar, keşfetme ve denemenin yanı sıra aile üyeleri dışındaki kişilerle de kalıcı ilişkiler kurmanın yollarını aramaktadır (Arnett, 2015). Beliren yetişkinlerin kimlik algılarına

katkıda bulunması sebebiyle (Shelley vd., 2020), bu dönemde kurulan ilişkiler ve deneyimlerden alınan dersler, hayatın diğer dönemlerine de etki edebilir. Bu nedenle, bu dönem ilişkilerinin özelliklerini anlamak, onları tatmin edici kılan faktörleri göz önünde bulundurmak, yalnızca bireyin mevcut durumunu anlamaya yardımcı olmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda geleceğe dair fikir oluşmasına da yardımcı olur.

Beliren yetişkinlik dönemindeki kişinin odağını kendine çevirmiş olması nedeniyle, birey sadece samimi ve uzun süreli ilişkiler kurmaya değil (Arnett, 2000), aynı zamanda dünyadaki ve ilişkilerdeki konumunu anlamaya, onlardan ne beklediğine, neleri tolere etme eğiliminde olduğuna, nelere karşı sınır koyacağına, olaylarla nasıl başa çıkacağına, hangi ilkelere sahip olduğuna ve bunlarla ilgili becerileri olgunlaştırmaya odaklanır (Shulman ve Connolly, 2013). Uzun süre onlara eşlik edebilecek önemli kişiler tarafından desteklendiklerini hissetmek de bu stresli kimlik inşası ve cevap arayışı sürecinden geçen bireyler için özellikle önemlidir (Zimmermann ve Iwanski, 2014). Tüm bunlar, romantik bir ilişkiden elde edilen doyumun yalnızca romantik yakınlık ve destek ihtiyacına dayanmaması gerektiğini göstermektedir.

Ancak ilişkiler, potansiyel çatışmalar nedeniyle her zaman tutarlı bir şekilde tatmin edici değildir (Flynn vd., 2017). Bireyin önceki deneyimlerinden taşıdığı işlevsiz kalıplar (McCarthy ve Maughan, 2010), kendisi hakkındaki inançlarıyla çelişen deneyimler yaşaması (Letzring ve Nofle, 2010), beklentilerinin karşılanmaması (Vannier ve O'Sullivan, 2017), çevresinden yatıştırıcı destek alamaması tatmin edici olmayan ilişkilerle sonuçlanabilir (Candel ve Turliuc, 2021). Bununla ilgili uygun açıklamaları sunabilmek için farklı teoriler ortaya atılmıştır.

İlişki dinamiklerini açıklamaya yönelik bir girişim olarak sosyal mübadele kuramı, ilişkideki çeşitli bileşenlerin partnerler arasında adil dağıtılmasına odaklanır ve birçok alt-kuram barındırır. Bunlardan biri olan eşitlik kuramı, kişinin partneriyle olan ilişkisindeki adalet/eşitlik algısına odaklanır ve doyumu bu kapsamda anlamlandırmaya çalışır. İlişkilerde tatminsizliğin, partnerlerin algıladıkları verme-alma dengesinin bozulmasıyla ortaya çıkan eşitsizliklerle açıklanabileceğini iddia eder (Van Yperen ve Buunk, 1990). Buna göre birey, ilişkide hak ettiğine inandığı şeyi almayı bekler ve kendisini partnerinden daha avantajlı ya da dezavantajlı bir konumda

algıladığında doyum düzeyi olumsuz etkilenir (Hatfield ve Rapson, 2011). Sosyal mübadele kuramına yönelik bazı eleştiriler ve zıt teoriler de bulunmaktadır. Aslına bakılırsa, romantik ilişkilere uyarlandığında, eşitlik teorisinin kendisi bile, beklenen ödüllerin ekonomik olmaktan ziyade duygusal ve ilişkisel bakış açısıyla değerlendirildiğini vurgulamakta ve verme-alma arasındaki dengeyi sevgi ve bağlılık duygularını hesaba katarak gözetmeye öncelik vermektedir (Hatfield vd., 1979).

Ayrıca, Clark ve Mills (1979) mübadele fikrine karşı “ortak/paylaşımlı ilişki” kavramını ortaya atarak kişinin partnerinin refahına yönelik arzusunun ve bu arzuyu yerine getirme dürtüsünün yakın ilişkilerde pragmatik düşüncelerin önüne geçtiğini vurgulamışlardır. Bu bakış açısına göre, yakın bir ilişkide diğer kişinin ihtiyaçlarını göz önünde bulundurmak ve ilişkinin doğal bir parçası olarak bu ihtiyaçlara karşı duyarlı olmak bireyin sorumluluğudur (Clark ve ark., 1998). Partner tarafından anlaşıldığını, onaylandığını ve desteklendiğini hissetme bileşenlerini kapsayan algılanan partner duyarlılığı kavramı (Reis vd., 2004), bu doğrultuda ilişki içinde beklenen, istendik bir durumu yansıtmaktadır (Feeney ve Collins, 2015).

Bu çalışma, ilişki doyumunu bu iki önemli kavram çerçevesinde açıklamaya çalışmaktadır: ilişkisel eşitlik ve algılanan partner duyarlılığı. Önceki çalışmalarda, bu iki değişken bağımsız olarak doyumla ilişkilendirilmiştir. Örneğin, çeşitli çalışmalar, ilişki doyumunu ile ilişkisel eşitlik arasında doğrudan bir ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir (Utne vd., 1984; Van Yperen ve Buunk, 1990). Van Yperen ve Buunk (1990) ayrıca cinsiyet farklılıklarını da araştırmış ve kadınların kendilerini ilişkide daha dezavantajlı konumda gördüklerini tespit etmiştir. Başka bir araştırmada ise tam tersi bir sonuç kaydedilmiş (Michaels vd., 1984), çalışmanın bulguları, kadınların ilişkilerde daha avantajlı bir konuma sahip olduğunu göstermektedir.

Romantik ilişkilerde eşitliği inceleyen araştırmaların çoğunda cinsiyet eşitsizlikleri de araştırılmış ve bunun kadınlar için daha büyük bir sorun olarak ortaya çıktığı gösterilmiştir. Örneğin, Bellani ve arkadaşları (2018) tarafından yapılan bir çalışma, kendilerini diğerlerinden daha dezavantajlı hisseden kadınların istikrarlı ilişkiler sürdürmek için daha fazla çaba gösterdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Benzer bir sonuç, Yum ve arkadaşları (2015) tarafından dezavantajlı bir konumda olduklarına inanan kadınların bunu iyileştirmek için daha fazla çaba gösterdikleri şeklinde ortaya

konmuştur. Geleneksel rolleri benimsemiş kadınlar için ise bu durum gözlenmemiştir. Eşitlik bu nedenle araştırmacılar tarafından bir “Batı ideali” olarak tanımlanmıştır. Dolayısıyla, genel olarak eşitlik algısının romantik ilişkilerde kadınlar için daha büyük bir sorun olduğu ve kadınlar arasında bulguların daha fazla değişkenlik gösterdiği sonucuna varılabilir.

Cinsiyet farklılıkları ve geleneksel rollerin sadece bir ilişkide partnerler arasındaki eşitlikte değil, aynı zamanda sosyal desteğe dayalı iletişimde de ön planda olduğu ise araştırmalar tarafından gösterilmiştir (Matud vd., 2003). Romantik ilişkilerin de bu etkinin kendini göstereceği kaçınılmaz bir alan olduğu söylenebilir. Örneğin, kadınların eşlerinden destek alma konusunda daha proaktif oldukları, özellikle güvenli bağlananların kaygılandıklarında destek arama davranışları sergileyebildikleri görülmüştür (Simpson vd., 1992). Sağlanan asıl destek kadar önemli olan “algılanan” desteğin önemi üzerine yapılan araştırmalar (Lemay ve Clark, 2015) ise, algılanan partner duyarlılığı kavramını ele almış ve cinsiyetten bağımsız olarak bu kavramın ilişki doyumuyla bağlantılı olduğunu göstermiştir (Candel ve Turliuc, 2021; Pagani vd., 2019; Sasaki ve Overall, 2020).

Partnerin duyarlı olarak algılanmaması ya da ilişkinin dengesinin bozulduğu algısının partnerleri olumsuz etkilediği düşünüldüğünde, bunun altında yatan mekanizmalar araştırılmaya değer bulunmuştur. Araştırmalar, bu durumların ilişki sırasında ortaya çıkan olumlu ve olumsuz diğer duygularla veya bireylerin bunları ifade etme biçimleriyle tutarlı bir şekilde bağlantılı olduğunu göstermektedir.

Öznel deneyimlere ve bilişe dayalı olarak ortaya çıkan, bireyin ilkel tepki biçimleri (Strasser, 1970) olarak nitelendirilebilecek duygu kavramı (Brenner, 1974), durumlara verilen tepkileri şekillendirmekte ve bireyleri harekete geçirmekte (Brown, 1976), sosyal davranışları ve karar alma süreçlerini etkilemektedir (Averill, 1980). Dolayısıyla, insanların romantik deneyimlerini ve bu deneyime ait doyumlarını incelerken, ilişki dinamikleriyle ilgili duygularını göz ardı etmemek önemli görünmektedir. Buna göre, insanlar eşitliğin sağlandığı ilişkilerde daha mutlu ve tatmin olurken (Utne vd., 1984; Van Yperen ve Buunk, 1990), bunun olmadığı ilişkilere stres, öfke ve depresif duygular eşlik etmektedir (Sprecher, 1986; Utne ve ark., 1984). Ayrıca, ilişki eşitliğin kadınların duygularını açığa vurmasıyla da

ilişkili olduğu ve cinsiyet farklılıklarının bu noktada belirginleştiği görülmüştür (Larson vd., 1998).

Buna ek olarak, duyguların ifade edilmesi ya da bastırılması algılanan partner duyarlılığı ile ilişkili olarak da incelenmiştir. Partnerlerini daha duyarlı olarak algılayan kişiler, duygularını onlara daha fazla açıklama eğilimindeyken, daha az duyarlı algılanması duyguların bastırılmasıyla ilişkilendirilmiştir (Ruan vd., 2019). Kişinin duygularını düzenlemekte zorlanması, ilişkide düşmancıl veya içe kapanık davranışlara yol açabilir ve bu da doyumunu azaltır. Buna karşılık, açık iletişim ve duyguların ifade edilmesi, kişinin partnerini daha duyarlı algılamasını ve doyumun artmasını sağlar (Pagani vd., 2019). Bu noktada, duyguları düzenleme becerisine sahip olmanın, ilişkilerin zorlu koşullarında bir dayanıklılık kaynağı olarak etkili bir rol oynayabileceği ileri sürülebilir (Troy ve Mauss, 2011). Gratz ve Roemer'e (2004) göre duygu düzenleme; duyguyu anlama ve kabul etme becerisine sahip olma, netlik, dürtüsel eylemleri yönetebilme, amaca uygun hareket etme ve tüm bunları yapabilmek için stratejik kaynaklara sahip olma anlamına gelmektedir. Bu bileşenlerden herhangi birindeki zorlanma, iletişim sorunları, partnerle ilgili sorunlar ve nihayetinde ilişki doyumunu üzerinde olumsuz etkilerle bağlantılı olabilir (Bradburry ve Shaffer, 2012).

Bu nedenle, kişilerin algıladıkları ilişkisel eşitlik ve partner duyarlılığının ilişki doyumuyla nasıl ilişkili olabileceğini araştırırken, yaşanan duyguları düzenleme becerisinin veya bununla ilgili zorlukların bu ilişkide nasıl bir rol oynayabileceğini araştırmak da önemli görünmektedir. İlişkilerin doğasındaki karşılıklı etkileşim, değişkenlere ilişkin ortaya çıkabilecek cinsiyet farklılıkları ve kişinin dinamiklere ilişkin algılarının partner deneyimi üzerindeki etkisini incelemenin değerli görülmesi nedeniyle mevcut çalışmanın ikili veriler kullanılarak yürütülmesi kararlaştırılmıştır.

1.1. Çalışmanın Amacı

Bu çalışma, beliren yetişkinlerde ilişkisel eşitlik ve algılanan partner duyarlılığının romantik ilişki doyumunu ile ilişkisinde duygu düzenleme güçlüklerinin aracı rolünü ikili düzeyde araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda belirtilen araştırma sorusu incelenmiştir: “Beliren yetişkinlikte ilişkisel eşitlik ve algılanan partner duyarlılığının ilişki doyumunu ile ilişkisinde duygu düzenleme güçlüklerinin aracı rolü nedir?”

1.2. Çalışmanın Önemi

İlişkilerin doğasında her bir partnerin duygusal ihtiyaçlarının karşılanması önemli bir yeri olduğu kabul edilmekte ve bu durum, pragmatik bir görüş olarak ortaya çıkan sosyal mübadele kuramlarının romantik ilişkilere uyarlanması da dikkate alınmaktadır. Literatürde, romantik partnerin duyarlı olarak algılanmasının, kişilerin ilişkiden ne kadar tatmin olduklarının yanı sıra duygularını nasıl ifade ettikleri ve birbirleriyle nasıl iletişim kurdukları üzerinde etkisi olan bir durum olduğu açıktır. Ancak, bu ilişkinin ne şekilde gerçekleşebileceğini anlamak için yeterince çalışma yapılmamıştır. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, algılanan partner duyarlılığının duygu düzenleme becerileri aracılığıyla doyumla nasıl bağlantılı olduğunu araştırmayı amaçlamıştır.

Temel destek ihtiyacının yanı sıra, günümüzde bireylerin kendi kişisel tatminlerine öncelik verdikleri de kabul edilmekte ve bireyselleşme giderek daha belirgin hale gelmektedir. Bireylerin ilişkiye yaptıkları bireysel yatırımların, alternatif seçeneklerin ve mevcut ilişkilerinden sağladıkları doyumun ilişki devamlılığını nasıl etkilediği fikri, günümüzde daha çok mübadele kuramları içerisinde gündeme gelmektedir.

Öte yandan, aslında mübadele fikrinin özünü oluşturan, bireyin ilişkideki adalet ve eşitlik duygusu, teorinin genişlemesi sırasında göz ardı edilmiştir. Çalışmalar güncelliğini yitirmiş, çoğunlukla evli çiftlerle yapılmış ya da sadece güç eşitliği ile ilgilidir (örneğin, Aydın, 2017; Felmlee, 1994). Bu araştırma, özellikle bağımsızlığı ve kendini keşfetmeyi benimsemenin ilişkiler kadar önemli olduğu beliren yetişkinlik döneminde, bireylerin ilişkilerini ve kendilerini gözetme dengelerinin önemli olduğu düşüncesiyle yürütülmüştür.

Duyguların ilişkisel eşitlik algısıyla da tutarlı şekilde ilişkili olduğu tespit edildiğinden, doyum ve eşitlik arasındaki ilişkinin bu duyguların düzenlenmesi yoluyla nasıl ilişkilendirilebileceği sorusunun da yanıtlanması amaçlanmıştır.

Sonuçların, ilişki doyumunu artırma çalışmalarında, sadece teorik katkıda bulunmakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda dinamiklerle bağlantısına yeni bir bakış açısı sunarak ilişkilerde öz düzenleme yeteneklerini geliştirme odaklı müdahaleleri de geliştirmesi beklenmektedir.

Ayrıca aktör-partner karşılıklı bağımlılık modeli kullanılarak, partnerlerin birbirlerini nasıl etkiledikleri, birbirlerinin başa çıkma ve düzenleme yeteneklerini geliştirmelerine nasıl yardımcı oldukları ve bunun birbirlerinin doyum düzeyini nasıl etkilediğinin ortaya konması amaçlanmakta ve böylece ilişki doyumu hakkındaki kuramsal birikime katkıda bulunması beklenmektedir.

2. YÖNTEM

2.1. Örneklem

Çalışma, 18-29 yaş arasında, en az altı aydır romantik bir ilişki içinde olan ve evli olmayan 146 (N=292) heteroseksüel çiftle yürütülmüştür. Katılımcıların yaş ortalaması 25.53 (SD=2.18) olup çoğu lisans derecesine sahiptir (n=190, %65.07). 21'i ön lisans (%7,19), 39'u yüksek lisans (%13,37) ve 3'ü ise doktora (%1,03) mezunudur. 215 kişinin çalıştığı örneklemde (%73.63), 77 kişi (%26.37) ise şu anda çalışmamaktadır. Ayrıca kişilerin %85.27'si (n=249) içinde bulundukları ilişkiyi uzun süreli bağlı bir ilişki olarak tanımlarken 2.74'ü (8) flört olarak tanımlamaktadır. 35 kişi (%11.99) ise nişanlı olduklarını ifade etmiştir.

2.2. Veri Toplama Araçları

Modelde yer alan dört değişkeni ölçmek amacıyla, Kişisel Bilgi Formu (Ek-B) da dahil olmak üzere beş ölçek kullanılmıştır: İlişki Değerlendirme Ölçeği (Hendrick, 1988; Curun, 2001) (Ek- C), İlişkisel Eşitlik Ölçeği (Sabatelli, Cecil-Pigo, 1985; Akçabozan-Kayabol ve Sümer, 2017) (Ek- D); Algılanan Partner Duyarlılığı Ölçeği (Reis ve Carmichael, 2006; Taşfiliz vd, 2020) (Ek- E); ve Duygu Düzenleme Güçlüğü Ölçeği (Gratz ve Roemer, 2004; Rugancı ve Gençöz, 2010) (Ek- F).

Hendrick tarafından 1988 yılında geliştirilen İlişki Değerlendirme Ölçeği, ilişki doyumunu değerlendirmek için kullanılan bir ölçektir. 1 ve 7 arasında derecelendirilen

7 maddeden oluşur (1 kesinlikle katılmıyorum ve 7 kesinlikle katılıyorum anlamına gelir). 4. ve 7. maddeler ters puanlanmakta olup alınabilecek en yüksek puan 49, en düşük puan ise 7'dir. Yüksek puanlar ilişkide daha fazla doyuma işaret etmektedir. Tek faktörlü ölçeğin geliştirme çalışmasında ölçeğin içgeçerlilik katsayısı .86 olarak he-

saplanmıştır. Ölçeğin Türkçe çevirisi ise Curun tarafından (2001) üniversite öğrencisi olan ve flört eden 70 çift ile yapılmıştır. Yapı geçerliliği kanıtları, uyarlanan ölçeğin de orijinal ölçek gibi tek faktörlü bir yapıya sahip olduğunu ve tek faktörün varyansın %52'sini açıkladığını göstermiştir. İç tutarlılığı ölçmek için Cronbach's alpha .86 olarak hesaplanmıştır.

İlişkisel Eşitlik Ölçeği, Sabatelli ve Cecil-Pigo (1985) tarafından ilişkideki kişilerin alma-verme dengesini değerlendirerek ilişkinin eşitliğini ölçmek için geliştirilmiş 10 maddeli, 5'li Likert tipi (1 kesinlikle katılıyorum ve 5 kesinlikle katılmıyorum anlamına gelmektedir) bir ölçektir. 2, 5, 7 ve 9. maddeler ters puanlanmaktadır. Yapılan faktör analizinde ölçeğin tek faktörden oluştuğu tespit edilmiş ve güvenilirlik katsayısı .85 olarak hesaplanmıştır. Türkçe uyarlaması Akçabozan-Kayabol ve Sümer (2017) tarafından 22-68 yaş arası 418 evli çift ile yürütülen bir çalışmada yapılmış ve tek boyutlu yapı korunmuştur. Cronbach alfa katsayısı ise .87 olarak bulunmuştur. İlişki Değerlendirme Ölçeği (Hendrick, 1988) ile korelasyonuna bakılmış ve .77 katsayısı ile pozitif yönde anlamlı bir ilişki ortaya çıkmıştır ($p < .01$).

2017 yılında geliştirilen Algılanan Partner Duyarlılığı Ölçeği (Reis vd., 2017), 18 maddelik 9'lu Likert tipi (1: hiç doğru değil, 9: tamamen doğru) bir ölçektir. Kişilerin romantik ilişkilerindeki onaylama ve anlama ihtiyaçlarının ne kadar karşılandığına yönelik sorular içermektedir. Ölçeğin doyum ($r=.82$, Reis vd., 2017), empati ($r=.49$, Reis vd., 2017), duygusal destek ($r=.49$, Reis vd., 2017) gibi değişkenlerle anlamlı ilişkide olduğu ortaya konmuştur. Ölçeğin uyarlama çalışması Taşfiliz vd. (2020) tarafından aile, arkadaş ve romantik ilişkiler için yapılmış olup orijinaline benzer tek faktörlü bir yapı ortaya çıkmış ve bu faktör varyansın %63,57'sini açıklamıştır. Birleştirilmiş veri seti için Cronbach alfa katsayısı .91'dir.

Duygu Düzenleme Güçlükleri Ölçeği, Gratz ve Roemer (2004) tarafından, 36 maddelik ve 5'li Likert tipi olarak geliştirilmiştir. Yüksek puanlar duygu düzenleme süreçlerinde daha fazla zorluk yaşandığı anlamına gelmektedir. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 17, 20, 22, 24 ve 34. maddeler ters puanlanmaktadır. Ölçek farkındalık, netlik, kabullenmeme, stratejiler, dürtü ve hedefler olmak üzere altı faktörden oluşmaktadır. Altı faktör toplam varyansın %55,68'ini açıklamaktadır. Ölçeğin tamamının iç tutarlılığı .93 olarak açıklanırken, her bir alt ölçek için bu değer .80'den büyüktür.

Ölçeğin uyarlama çalışması Rugancı ve Gençöz (2010) tarafından gerçekleştirilmiştir. Altı faktörlü yapının uyarlamada da korunduğu ve faktörler tarafından açıklanan toplam varyansın %62,4 olduğu görülmüştür. Ölçeğin geneli ile korelasyonu çok düşük olan ($r=.06$) onuncu maddenin ölçeğin Türkçe versiyonundan çıkarılmasına ve analizlere 35 madde ile devam edilmesine karar verilmiştir. Ölçeğin geneli için hesaplanan Cronbach alfa katsayısı .94'tür.

2.3. İşlem

Gerekli belgeler Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu'na sunulup onay alındıktan sonra veri toplama süreci başlatılmıştır. Çalışma şartlarını sağlayan gönüllü çiftlerden Google Forms anketini, partnerleri eşleştirmek amacıyla ortak bir takma isim altında birbirlerinden bağımsız doldurmaları istenmiştir. Katılım yaklaşık 15 dakika sürmüştür. Veri toplama süreci Temmuz 2023'ten Mayıs 2024'e kadar yaklaşık 10 ayda tamamlanmıştır.

2.4. Verilerin Analizi

Analiz öncesinde örneklem büyüklüğü değerlendirilmiş ve kayıp veriler incelenmiştir. Aykırı değerler, normal dağılım, doğrusallık ve çoklu doğrusallık varsayımları incelenmiştir. Katılımcıların demografik özelliklerinin açıklanmasının ardından, ölçeklerin doğrulayıcı faktör analizleri ve güvenilirlik testleri yapılmıştır. Cinsiyetlere göre ortalama değerler, standart sapmalar, maksimum-minimum değerler hesaplanmış ve değişkenlerin cinsiyetler açısından nasıl farklılaştığı analiz edilmiştir. Daha sonra ikili korelasyonlar yapılmıştır. Son olarak araştırma sorusunu test etmek için yol analizi yapılmıştır. Güvenilirlik testi, betimleyici analizler, ikili korelasyonlar için SPSS Sürüm 28 (IBM Corp., 2021); doğrulayıcı faktör analizleri ve ikili yol analizi için AMOS 26 (Arbuckle, 2019) kullanılmıştır.

2.5. Çalışmanın Sınırlılıkları

İlk olarak, çevrimiçi veri toplamayla birlikte elverişli örneklemenin kullanılması, sonuçların genellenebilirliğini kısıtladığı için bir sınırlama olarak görülebilir. Ayrıca partnerlerin nasıl bir ortamda katıldıkları ve cevaplarının birbirinden bağımsız olup

olmadığı takip edilememiştir. Çalışma aracılık etkisini göz önünde bulundurarak ilişkilerin altında yatan mekanizmaları açıklamaya çalışmış olsa da korelasyonel bir araştırma olduğu için, nedensel bir ilişki kurulamamıştır. Bulguların subjektif bildirimlere dayalı olması da bir sınırlamadır.

Değerlendirmeler, tartışılan kavramların her katılımcı için aynı anlama gelip gelmediğini bilmeden bir bireyin öznel yargılarına dayanıyorsa sonuçlar çarpıtılabilir, özellikle süregelen bir ilişkiyi daha olumlu algılama eğilimi söz konusu olabilir. Son olarak, ilişkisel eşitlik ölçeğinin soruları, eğer varsa, ilişkideki eşitsizlikleri vurgulamaktadır. Öte yandan, eşitsizliğin avantajlı ya da dezavantajlı bir perspektiften deneyimlenmesinin farklı duygusal tepkilere yol açtığı bilinmektedir (Sprecher, 1986; Utne vd., 1984). Bunun ölçülememesi verilerin yorumlanmasının önünde bir engel teşkil etmektedir.

3. BULGULAR

Çalışmanın araştırma sorusu tek bir model aracılığıyla test edilmiştir. Heteroseksüel çiftlerin veri birimi olarak ele alındığı bu çalışmada, kadın ve erkeğin ilişkide kendileri ve birbirleri üzerindeki etkilerine de yer verilmesi sebebiyle aktör partner karşılıklı bağımlılık aracılık modeli (APIMeM) kullanılmıştır. Bu amaçla öncelikle doymuş model değerlendirilmiş ve ilk aşamada anlamlı olmayan tüm yollar modelden çıkarılmıştır. Daha sonra, kalan anlamlı yollarla oluşturulan nihai modelin uyum indeksleri incelenmiş ve uyumun iyi düzeyde olduğu bulunmuştur: ($\chi^2 / df = 1.032$, CFI = 0.999, RMSEA = .015, TLI = 1.00). Duygu düzenleme güçlüklerinin aracılık etkisini test etmek için yapılan analizlerin ardından, duygu düzenleme güçlüklerinin yalnızca erkeklerin ilişkisel eşitliği ile kendi ilişki doyumları arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık ettiği görülmüştür ($\beta = .04$, $p < .01$, [CI .01, .09]). Ayrıca, erkeklerin ilişkisel eşitliği ile ilişki memnuniyeti arasında doğrudan bir ilişki ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) bulunduğundan aracılık etkisinin kısmi olduğu söylenebilir (Hayes, 2013). Böylece H3 kısmen doğrulanabilirken H6 reddedilmiştir.

Diğer bulguları kısaca özetlemek gerekirse, ilişki doyumunun hem kadınların ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$) hem de erkeklerin ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) kendi ilişkisel eşitlikleri ile ilişkili olduğu, ancak partnerlerinininki ile ilişkili olmadığı bulunmuştur (H1). İlişkisel eşitlik ve duygu

düzenleme güçlüğü arasında sadece erkekler için doğrudan bir ilişki ($\beta = -.33, p < .001$) ortaya konmuştur (H2). Kadınların algıladıkları partner duyarlılığı kendi ilişki doyumları ($\beta = .23, p < .001$) ile ilişkiliyken erkeklerde böyle bir ilişki bulunmamaktadır. Partner etkilerine bakıldığında ise kadınların da ($\beta = .42, p < .001$) erkeklerin de ($\beta = .67, p < .001$) ilişki doyumları, partnerlerinin algıladıkları duyarlılık ile ilişkili bulunmuştur (H4). Kadınların algıladıkları partner duyarlılığı duygu düzenleme güçlüklerini yordayabiliyorken ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$) erkekler için böyle bir durum söz konusu değildir (H5).

4. TARTIŞMA

Bu çalışmanın ana odağı, ilişkisel eşitlik ve algılanan partner duyarlılığının duygu düzenleme güçlüklerinin aracılığıyla, beliren yetişkinlerin romantik ilişki doyumu ile ilişkisini incelemektir.

Araştırma sonucunda, kadınların eşitlik algılarının duygu düzenleme güçlükleri üzerinde bir aktör etkisi olmadığı, ancak erkeklerin eşitlik görüşleri arttıkça duygu düzenleme güçlüklerinin azaldığı bulunmuştur. Bu bulgunun yorumlanmasında, kadınların duygularına karşı daha dışavurumcu bir tutum sergilediklerini ve duygu düzenleme tekniklerini daha sık kullandıklarını belirten araştırmalar göz önünde bulundurulmalıdır (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012). Toplumsal cinsiyet normları ve yaygın önyargılar da dahil olmak üzere çeşitli faktörler ise erkeklerin duygularıyla temasa geçmelerini ve duygularını içtenlikle ifade etmelerini daha zor hale getirebilmektedir (Barrett ve Bliss-Moreau, 2009).

Bununla birlikte, eşit bir ilişki içinde olmak, erkekler için daha güvenli bir atmosfer yaratabilir ve böylece, erkekler, yardım istemek gibi çeşitli başa çıkma mekanizmalarını kullanarak bu güvenli alanın yardımıyla duygularını tanıyabilir, kabul edebilir, ifade edebilir ve düzenleyebilirler. Kadınların yakınlığa ve duygusal desteğe verdikleri önem, (Tannen, 1990), duygu düzenleme güçlüklerinin kadınlarda algılanan partner duyarlılığı ile ilişkili olması bulgusunu da destekleyebilir.

Bunlar dışında eşit bir ilişkide olmak iki cinsiyet için de doyumla pozitif ilişkili bulunmuştur. Benzer şekilde kişinin partneri tarafından duyarlı algılanıyor olması da kendi ilişki doyumuyla pozitif ilişkilidir. Bu noktada prososyal davranışların aslında

kişinin kendi yararını da gözeterek yaptığı davranışlar olduğu, partneri için yaptıklarının kişinin kendisine de doyum, mutluluk gibi olumlu duygular sağlayabildiği söylenebilir. Öte yandan, partneri duyarlı algılıyor olmak ise sadece kadınların ilişki doyumuyla ilişkilidir.

Araştırmanın asıl amacı olan duygu düzenlemenin aracı rolü incelendiğinde ise sadece erkeklerin kendi ilişki doyumları ve eşitlik algıları arasındaki ilişkiye kısmen aracılık ettiği görülmüştür. Kadınlar için herhangi bir aracılık etkisi söz konusu değildir. Özellikle beliren yetişkinlikteki erkeklerin ilişkide arzu ettikleri konumu korumaya önem verdikleri, bu durumun içsel süreçlerine ve bunun aracılığıyla ilişki çıktılarına etki ettiği bu bulgu ışığında söylenebilir.

Bulgular genel olarak incelendiğinde, kadınlar için partnerleriyle eşitlik temelli bir ilişkiye sahip olmak, desteklendiklerini hissetmek kadar belirleyici değilken, erkekler için eşitlik temelli bir ilişkinin daha önemli olduğu ifade edilebilir. Geleneksel cinsiyet rolleri, kadınların daha ilişkisel ve erkeklerin daha bağımsız görülmeleri, bu bulguları desteklemektedir. Toplum içindeki stereotipik inançların normalleştirilmesi ve pekiştirilmesi bu tür farklılıkların sürmesine katkıda bulunabilir (LaFrance ve Banaji, 1992; Chrisler ve Smith, 2004). Bununla birlikte, bulgular, sosyal olarak edinilmiş önyargıların yakın etkileşimleri nasıl etkilediğinin ve ilişkilerde kişilerin beklentilerini ve davranışlarını nasıl şekillendirebildiğinin bir işareti olarak yorumlanabilir.

4.1. Uygulamaya Yönelik Çıkarımlar

Çalışmanın sonuçlarının çift etkileşimi için önemli etkileri olduğuna inanılmaktadır. Çift iletişimini geliştirmeye çalışırken, her bir partnerin birbirleri üzerindeki etkileri, kaynak ve bilgi paylaşımları, duygu ifadeleri ve destek biçimleri gibi önemli bileşenleri (Wiley, 2007) nasıl algıladığını ve bunların ilişki üzerindeki etkilerini anlamak esastır. Her çift kendine özgü niteliklere sahip olsa da dinamikler hakkında genel bir anlayışa sahip olmak ruh sağlığı uzmanları için önemli görünmektedir. Çalışma sonuçları bu noktada fikir sağlaması sebebiyle önemlidir.

Toplumsal cinsiyet farklılıkları, ilişkilerin toplum normları bağlamında nasıl şekillendirilebileceğine dair fikir verdiği için çift müdahalelerinde de dikkate alınmalıdır. Bu gibi farklılıklara yol açan dinamikleri ve algıları fark etmek, bu

alguların mevcut sorunlarını nasıl etkilediğini ele almak uygulamalarda önemli olacaktır. Beklentiler, ayrıca kişilerin algılarını şekillendiren bir kavram olarak kendisini göstermektedir. Partnerlerin bunun hakkında iletişim kurmalarını desteklemek, duyarlılık, eşitlik ve duygu düzenleme konusunda ne kadar desteklendiklerine ilişkin bakış açılarını müdahalelere dahil etmek de doyumunu arttırmak adına önemlidir. Bu konuların ayrıca ilgili grup oturumlarında ve ilişki güçlendirme faaliyetlerinde gündeme getirilmesi faydalı olacaktır. Araştırma, hâlihazırda flört eden çiftler arasındaki iletişim ve bağı güçlendirmenin yanı sıra, ilişki öncesi beklentilerin açıklanması gibi müdahalelerin önemine dair değerli bilgiler sunmaktadır,

4.3. Gelecek Çalışmalar İçin Öneriler

Gelecekteki araştırmalarda dikkate alınması önerilebilecek öncelikli husus, çeşitliliğin sağlanmasıdır. Bu çalışmanın örneklemini, eğitilmiş, çalışan, duygusal ve deneyime dayalı paylaşım oranı yüksek çiftlerden oluşmaktadır. Elverişli örnekleme ve çevrimiçi veri toplama tekniklerinin bu duruma sebep olduğu düşünülmektedir. Gelecekteki araştırmaların farklı yaş, meslek ve eğitim geçmişine sahip ve ilişkilerinde farklı dönemlerde olan bireylerden yüz yüze veri toplanarak yapılması tavsiye edilmektedir.

Boylamsal araştırma yapmak da ilişkinin çeşitli aşamalarındaki değişimleri gözlemlemek açısından değerli olabilir. Ayrıca partner deneyimlerinin nitel araştırmalarda daha ayrıntılı bir şekilde ele alınması daha kapsamlı sonuçlara ulaşılmasını sağlayabilir. Nicel verilerin nitel verilerle desteklenmesini sağlamak için karma yöntemlerin kullanıldığı araştırmalar da gerçekleştirilebilir.

Kuramsal bilgiyi arttırabilmek için, sosyal mübadele teorisinin diğer alt-kuramlarına ait değişkenleri de eşitlik ve duyarlılık gibi kavramlarla araştırmak değerli görünmektedir. Geleceğe yönelik beklentiler, yatırımlar, alternatifler, yakın çevrenin etkileri gibi faktörler ileriki çalışmalara dahil edilebilir. Bugüne kadar pek çok araştırma ilişkiye yatırım ve alternatiflerin etkisi gibi değişkenleri ele almış olsa da (örneğin, Lemay, 2016; Young ve Furman, 2013; Vannier ve O'Sullivan, 2017), partnerin algılanan çabalarının ve ilişki eşitliği algılarının etkisinin daha etkin bir şe-

kilde dahil edilmesiyle daha kapsamlı bir görüş elde edilebilir. Bu çalışma bulgularına göre ayrıca, duygu düzenleme güçlükleri, erkeklerin eşitlik algıları ile ilişki doyumları arasındaki ilişkiye kısmen aracılık etmiştir. Bu bulgu, cinsiyet eşitsizliklerinin ve bireyin ilişkideki önceliklerinin önemine bir kez daha ışık tutsa da duygu düzenlemenin değişkenler arasındaki ilişki üzerinde daha büyük bir etkiye sahip olduğu varsayılmaktadır. Bireylerin kendilerinin ve partnerlerinin duygu düzenleme süreçleri üzerindeki etkileri, kişilerarası duygu düzenleme olarak adlandırılmaktadır (Lemay vd. 2024). Bu tür duygu düzenlemenin çiftleri içeren çalışmalara dahil edilmesi önerilmektedir.



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