

FEAR OF INTIMACY IN YOUNG WOMEN: THE ROLE OF ATTACHMENT
STYLES, REJECTION SENSITIVITY, AND EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE

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ATTACHMENT STYLES, REJECTION SENSITIVITY, AND
EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE**

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ABSTRACT

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The current study examined the role of attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance in predicting fear of intimacy among young adult women, after controlling for age and relationship status. A total of 385 Turkish women participated in the study. The Demographic and Romantic Relational Information Form, the Three-Dimensional Attachment Styles Scale, the Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale, and the Rejection Sensitivity Scale were used to collect data from the participants. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to analyse data in this correlational research design. Overall, the final model demonstrated significant explanatory power, accounting for a considerable proportion of variance in fear of intimacy and confirming the significance of the proposed predictors. Parallel to the empirical evidence obtained from past studies, it was found that anxious/ambivalent attachment style, two subdimensions of experiential avoidance (repression/denial and distress endurance), and rejection sensitivity, along with relationship status, were significant predictors of the fear of intimacy. It was also observed that age and relationship status became a predictive

factor along with other variables in the final stage of the analysis. The findings have been explicated by examining the existing empirical evidence. Based on the findings, theoretical and practical implications and recommendations for further research were presented.

Keywords: fear of intimacy, attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, experiential avoidance, young adulthood.



ÖZ

GENÇ KADINLARDA YAKINLIK KORKUSU: BAĞLANMA STİLLERİNİN, REDDEDİLME DUYARLILIĞININ VE DENEYİMSSEL KAÇINMANIN ROLÜ

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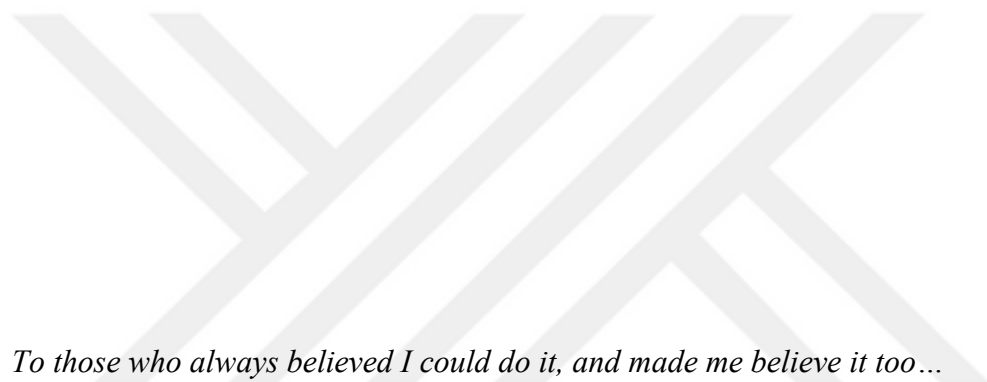
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Bu çalışmada, yaş ve ilişki durumu kontrol edildikten sonra, genç yetişkin kadınlarda yakınlık korkusunu yordamada bağlanma stillerinin, reddedilme duyarlılığının ve deneyimsel kaçınmanın rolü incelenmiştir. Çalışmaya toplam 385 Türk kadını katılmıştır. Katılımcılardan veri toplamak için Demografik ve Romantik İlişki Bilgi Formu, Üç Boyutlu Bağlanma Stilleri Ölçeği, Çok Boyutlu Deneyimsel Kaçınma Ölçeği ve Reddedilme Duyarlılığı Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Bu ilişkisel araştırma tasarımı, çalışmadaki verilerin analiz edilme sürecinde kullanılan yöntem hiyerarşik çoklu regresyon analizidir. Genel olarak, nihai model anlamlı bir açıklayıcı güce sahip olduğunu göstermiş, yakınlık korkusu varyansının kayda değer bir bölümünü açıklamış ve önerilen yordayıcıların anlamlılığını doğrulamıştır. Geçmiş çalışmalardan elde edilen ampirik bulgulara paralel olarak kaygılı/kararsız bağlanma stiline, deneyimsel kaçınmanın iki alt boyutu olan bastırma/inkâr ve sıkıntıya dayanıklılık ile reddedilme duyarlılığının, ilişki durumuyla birlikte, yakınlık korkusunun anlamlı yordayıcıları olduğu bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, yaşın ve ilişki durumunun da analizin son aşamasında diğer değişkenlerle birlikte yordayıcı faktör haline geldiği görülmüştür. Bulgular, mevcut ampirik bulgular göz önünde

bulundurularak açıklanmıştır. Bulgular ışığında, teorik ve pratik çıkarımlar ile daha sonraki araştırmalar için öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yakınlık korkusu, bağlanma stilleri, reddedilme duyarlılığı, deneyimsel kaçınma, genç yetişkinlik.





To those who always believed I could do it, and made me believe it too...

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Fear of intimacy refers to an individual's anxiety-driven difficulty in sharing personally meaningful thoughts and emotions with someone who is perceived as highly significant (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Descutner and Thelen (1991) conceptualized this construct through three interrelated dimensions: the content of self-disclosure, the emotional significance attributed to the shared material, and the perceived importance of the relationship partner. Genuine intimacy emerges from the interaction among these dimensions and is reflected in emotional openness, depth, and reciprocal respect. Disruptions in these processes may limit individuals' capacity to engage in close relationships and contribute to persistent fear of emotional closeness (Descutner & Thelen, 1991).

The experience of fear of intimacy does not emerge in isolation but is shaped by broader developmental and relational contexts. Age constitutes a fundamental background factor influencing individuals' capacity for intimacy. Drawing on Erikson's (1959) psychosocial framework, early and young adulthood represent a developmental period characterized by the central conflict between intimacy and isolation. Successful progression through this stage depends on the consolidation of identity, which enables individuals to form stable and enduring interpersonal bonds (Erikson, 1959). During this period, individuals navigate key psychosocial tasks such as establishing autonomy, pursuing educational and occupational goals, and cultivating intimate partnerships (Olsson et al., 2023). Emerging adulthood, generally spanning ages 18 to 29, is marked by heightened identity exploration, increased self-directed decision-making, and uncertainty regarding adult roles (Arnett & Mitra,

2020). Recent demographic trends further indicate that remaining single well into the thirties and forties has become increasingly common, reflecting broader societal shifts toward individual autonomy and delayed relational commitments (Apostolou & Tekeş, 2024; Beckmeyer & Jamison, 2023, 2024). These developmental dynamics suggest that age-related transitions may shape individuals' experiences of intimacy and vulnerability to fear of closeness.

Closely related to age, relationship status represents another contextual factor associated with fear of intimacy. Empirical evidence indicates that individuals' romantic relationship trajectories across early and middle adulthood are closely linked to later psychological well-being (Grundström et al., 2021). Patterns of partnership stability and change have been shown to predict depressive symptoms and self-esteem in midlife (Grundström et al., 2021). Moreover, individuals engaged in enduring and satisfying romantic relationships tend to report lower psychological distress, more positive self-concepts, enhanced emotion regulation capacities, and stronger self-esteem (Sagone & Commodari, 2023). In contrast, periods of relationship initiation, transition, or dissolution may be accompanied by heightened intimacy-related anxiety, particularly in dating or early partnership contexts (Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Montesi et al., 2013). Accordingly, age and relationship status constitute important control variables when examining psychological predictors of fear of intimacy.

Beyond these contextual influences, attachment theory provides a central framework for understanding individual differences in intimacy-related functioning. The extension of attachment theory to romantic relationships by Hazan and Shaver (1987), grounded in Bowlby's (1982) work, conceptualizes romantic love as involving not only positive emotional experiences but also defensive responses, including fear of intimacy. Empirical findings consistently indicate that individuals with insecure attachment styles exhibit ambivalent, demanding, or avoidant behaviors in close relationships, accompanied by heightened anxiety and apprehension regarding emotional closeness (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Thorberg & Lyvers, 2006). Mikulincer et al. (2016) identified attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance as two fundamental dimensions underlying these relational tendencies.

Securely attached individuals typically regulate stress by seeking emotional connection and expressing feelings openly, thereby fostering relational stability and adaptive coping (Bowlby, 1982; Clark & Beck, 2011). In contrast, insecure attachment orientations are characterized by fears of rejection, abandonment, or loss of autonomy, which interfere with the ability to initiate or sustain emotional closeness and increase vulnerability to fear of intimacy. Psychodynamic perspectives further conceptualize fear of intimacy as a defensive mechanism aimed at regulating unconscious anxiety (Freud, 1920). Individuals with histories of relational trauma may unconsciously distance themselves from emotional closeness to avoid re-experiencing psychological pain. Attachment theory complements this view by emphasizing the enduring impact of early caregiver–child interactions on internal working models of relationships that persist into adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020). In particular, individuals with avoidant attachment orientations are prone to perceive intimacy as threatening, leading to distancing behaviors that reinforce relational fears and maintain fear of intimacy (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, 2020).

Attachment-related vulnerabilities are further shaped by interpersonal-cognitive processes such as rejection sensitivity. Individuals high in rejection sensitivity tend to anxiously expect and readily perceive rejection, responding with heightened emotional reactivity in close relationships. Within romantic contexts, this sensitivity may intensify concerns about emotional closeness, particularly among individuals who desire intimacy but simultaneously fear rejection. Pepping et al. (2015) reported that some individuals actively pursue emotional closeness while remaining highly sensitive to rejection cues, whereas others deliberately maintain emotional distance to preserve autonomy. These patterns suggest that rejection sensitivity may amplify attachment-related fears and contribute to avoidance or withdrawal from intimacy, thereby reinforcing fear of emotional closeness.

From a cognitive-behavioral perspective, experiential avoidance represents an additional mechanism through which fear of intimacy may be maintained. Experiential avoidance refers to attempts to evade or alter unpleasant internal experiences, such as distressing emotions or thoughts (Hayes et al., 1996). Although

avoidance-based strategies may temporarily reduce relational anxiety, they often limit genuine emotional engagement and reinforce interpersonal distance over time (Clark & Beck, 2011). Empirical studies have identified experiential avoidance as a key factor restricting emotional closeness in romantic relationships (Boulanger et al., 2010; Kashdan et al., 2006). In this context, avoidance-based coping strategies, while providing short-term protection, may ultimately perpetuate fear of intimacy and reduce opportunities for satisfying, emotionally connected partnerships (Pepping et al., 2015).

Previous research has shown that women are more likely to report heightened relational sensitivity, greater responsiveness to rejection cues, and stronger emotional investment in close relationships, factors that may intensify the associations between attachment orientations and fear of intimacy (Fischer & Good, 1997; Tolmacz & Mikulincer, 2011). Women typically prioritize emotional disclosure and relational closeness to a greater extent than men (Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Fischer & Good, 1997). Nonetheless, these gender-related patterns are not uniform and can vary according to the relational context. Women undergoing marital strain, particularly those in the process of divorce, tend to experience higher levels of fear of intimacy compared to women in ongoing marriages, reflecting increased attachment insecurity and relational dissatisfaction (Koolaee et al., 2013).

Moreover, dependency-oriented attachment, defined by low self-esteem and excessive emotional reliance on partners, has been associated with interpersonal difficulties among both divorced and non-divorced women (Koolaee et al., 2013). Hence, focusing specifically on women provides a better understanding of their romantic relationship patterns. Moreover, evidence suggests that the psychological mechanisms linking attachment, rejection-related processes, and intimacy behaviors may operate differently for women and men (Cross & Madson, 1997; Rose & Rudolph, 2006).

Examining the fear of intimacy among young adult women, therefore, offers an opportunity to better understand how relational vulnerabilities and expectations converge during a developmentally salient life stage.

Despite extensive theoretical and empirical contributions, important gaps remain in the literature. Prior studies have often examined attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance as separate predictors of intimacy-related difficulties, with limited integration of these constructs within a single explanatory framework. Furthermore, much of the existing research has been conducted in Western contexts, predominantly with university student samples, limiting the generalizability of findings to non-Western populations. Consequently, little is known about how these psychological mechanisms collectively contribute to fear of intimacy among young women in Türkiye.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine the extent to which attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance predict fear of intimacy among Turkish young women aged 19 to 42, while controlling for age and relationship status. Consistent with prior evidence, it was hypothesized that anxious and avoidant attachment styles, heightened rejection sensitivity, and avoidance-based coping strategies would be positively associated with fear of intimacy, whereas secure attachment and more adaptive coping tendencies would be associated with lower levels of fear of intimacy. By integrating these variables within a hierarchical regression framework, the study seeks to provide a more coherent and comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying intimacy-related anxiety of women in emerging and young adulthood.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The current study aims to investigate the role of attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance in predicting fear of intimacy after controlling for age and relationship status among young women (19–42) in Türkiye. In line with this aim, the study seeks to determine the relative contribution of these psychological factors to intimacy-related difficulties and to clarify how they interact in shaping individuals' capacity for emotional closeness. By identifying which variables serve as the strongest predictors of fear of intimacy, the research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms underlying relational anxiety and avoidance.

1.3. Research Question

The research question of the current study was as follows:

To what extent do secure attachment style, avoidant attachment style, anxious/ambivalent attachment style, rejection sensitivity, avoidance, suppression/denial, procrastination, distress endurance, and repression/distraction predict fear of intimacy among young adult women after controlling for age and relationship status?

1.4. Significance of the Study

Understanding fear of intimacy carries both theoretical and practical importance, particularly within young adulthood, a developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, relational commitment, and the tension between autonomy and closeness (Erikson, 1959). Although intimacy, attachment, and related relational constructs have been widely examined, much of the existing literature has relied predominantly on Western university samples, limiting the cultural and developmental scope of these findings. As a result, how intimacy-related processes operate within different cultural contexts and among diverse young adult populations remain insufficiently understood. Within this body of research, psychological factors associated with fear of intimacy have often been examined in isolation. Attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance have each been shown to play an important role in intimacy-related difficulties, yet these constructs have typically been explored separately rather than within an integrated explanatory framework. By bringing together attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance into a single model, the present study aims to provide a more comprehensive account of how cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes jointly contribute to intimacy avoidance in women. This integrative perspective advances theoretical understanding of relational functioning by illustrating how attachment insecurity and difficulties in emotion regulation may converge to shape patterns of closeness, vulnerability, and withdrawal. Previous research has demonstrated that fear of intimacy is associated with a range of adverse psychological outcomes, including depressive symptoms,

anxiety, and dissatisfaction in close relationships (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Attachment insecurity, particularly anxious and avoidant orientations, has been consistently linked to heightened intimacy-related fears and difficulties in emotional closeness (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Similarly, rejection sensitivity has been shown to intensify concerns about intimacy by increasing vigilance toward interpersonal threat and anticipated rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). From a cognitive-behavioral perspective, experiential avoidance has also been implicated in the maintenance of emotional distancing and relational avoidance (Hayes et al., 1996). Together, these findings suggest that fear of intimacy is maintained through the interaction of attachment-related vulnerabilities, heightened sensitivity to rejection, and avoidance-based coping strategies.

Clarifying how specific attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance contribute to fear of intimacy has important practical implications. A clearer understanding of these mechanisms may assist psychological counselors and mental health practitioners in developing interventions that are better tailored to the relational needs of young adult women. Such knowledge is particularly relevant for premarital counseling, couples therapy, and individual psychotherapy in Türkiye, where changing social norms have diversified romantic relationship patterns. Examining intimacy-related difficulties within this cultural context may inform psychoeducational and therapeutic approaches aimed at fostering emotional openness, self-acceptance, and trust in close relationships. Ultimately, the significance of the present study lies in its potential to bridge theory and practice. By providing empirical evidence from a non-Western context, the study contributes to the broader literature on intimacy and attachment while offering clinically relevant insights for professionals working to support healthier relational development among young adult women.

1.5. Definition of Terms

To promote conceptual clarity and consistency, the key constructs employed in this study are defined as follows:

Fear of Intimacy: This describes an individual's limited ability to disclose personally "meaningful thoughts and emotions" to another person, often driven by concerns about closeness, rejection, or vulnerability (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). This construct highlights difficulties in both initiating and sustaining emotional closeness in interpersonal relationships.

Attachment Styles: It refers to enduring patterns of expectations, emotions, and behaviors that develop through early interactions with primary caregivers and continue to influence adult close relationships (Bowlby, 1982; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Within this framework, three primary attachment orientations are most relevant to the current study:

Secure attachment: Described by comfort with emotional closeness, trust in others, and the capability of reaching for and providing support effectively (Bowlby, 1982).

Anxious/Ambivalent attachment: Marked by fear of rejection, preoccupation with abandonment, and heightened sensitivity to relationship threats (Bowlby, 1982).

Avoidant attachment: Defined by discomfort with dependence, reluctance to self-disclose, and a preference for emotional distance in close relationships (Bowlby, 1982).

Rejection Sensitivity: This refers to an individual's heightened tendency to anxiously anticipate, detect, and respond strongly to actual or perceived instances of rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). This cognitive-emotional vulnerability is considered a key factor that can intensify fear of intimacy in close relationships.

Experiential Avoidance: It refers to an individual's reluctance to stay in contact with aversive internal experiences, such as distressing thoughts, emotions, or memories, and the tendency to modify, suppress, or escape these experiences, even when such efforts result in long-term psychological costs (Hayes et al., 1996). Within relational contexts, this avoidance often presents as a reluctance to express vulnerability or engage in emotional intimacy. The following five strategies were examined in the current study:

Avoidance: Avoidance was explained as trying not to face certain situations or feelings that may be upsetting, often by staying away from them altogether (Gámez et al., 2011).

Suppression/Distracton: It was explained as pushing down or diverting feelings or thoughts so they don't come to the surface, even when they are still there in the background (Gámez et al., 2011).

Distress Endurance: Distress endurance was explained as putting up with difficult emotions or stress without really dealing with them, almost like carrying a heavy load instead of finding a way to lighten it (Gámez et al., 2011).

Procrastination: It was explained as putting things off as a way to escape the discomfort or anxiety that comes with doing them (Gámez et al., 2011).

Repression/Denial: Denial was explained as keeping unwanted feelings or memories out of awareness, often without realizing them, so they do not have to be confronted directly (Gámez et al., 2011).

Young Adulthood: This developmental span includes the phase of emerging adulthood (approximately ages 18 to 29), which is typically marked by active identity exploration and experimentation across life domains (Arnett & Mitra, 2020). It further extends into early and middle adulthood (ages 20 to 40), a period often defined by the pursuit of career stability, enduring intimate partnerships, and the assumption of family or societal responsibilities within the stages of intimacy versus isolation and generativity versus stagnation (Erikson, 1959).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on study variables is presented in this chapter with the theoretical framework. The sections presented are as follows: the fear of intimacy, attachment styles and their relationship with the fear of intimacy, experiential avoidance and its relationship with the fear of intimacy, rejection sensitivity and its relationship with the fear of intimacy. The current chapter also provides information on previous studies regarding these concepts. Lastly, a summary of the literature review is presented with an explanation of the reasons for studying all the mentioned variables.

2.1. Intimacy

Intimacy has long been recognized as a fundamental human need essential to psychological, emotional, and social well-being (Erikson, 1959). Early theoretical perspectives identified intimacy not just as a social skill but as a developmental milestone critical for personal growth and relational functioning. Building on developmental theories, Erikson (1959) conceptualized intimacy as a developmental process that evolves alongside the formation of identity. According to their perspective, the capacity to establish genuine closeness with others emerges only after earlier developmental tasks have been successfully resolved. Intimacy, in this sense, involves the willingness to disclose one's inner world (i.e., emotions, thoughts, and vulnerabilities) within a relationship grounded in trust and mutual understanding (Erikson, 1959).

Empirical research indicates that early caregiving experiences play a crucial role in shaping adult intimacy processes (Bowlby, 1982; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Parental acceptance–rejection consistently predicts later patterns of relational

closeness (Ali et al., 2019). In a cross-cultural investigation including 3,483 young adults from 13 countries, Ali et al. (2019) found that childhood recollections of maternal rejection were associated with increased fear of intimacy in adulthood.

Individuals with heightened rejection sensitivity frequently experience unease during direct interpersonal interactions, demonstrate limited adaptive coping mechanisms, and struggle to establish secure relational bonds (Mikulincer et al., 2013). These cognitive and behavioral patterns are consistent with earlier frameworks that conceptualize intimacy as a dynamic process, wherein the capacity to navigate vulnerability and manage interpersonal anxiety is fundamental (Mikulincer et al., 2013).

In summary, intimacy represents a multidimensional construct including emotional, cognitive, and behavioral elements central to human connection. It develops through early relational experiences and influences an individual's capacity for closeness, vulnerability, and trust (Bowlby, 1982; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). When disrupted through rejection, trauma, or maladaptive coping, it contributes to the emergence of fear of intimacy and related psychological symptoms (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). The cumulative evidence suggests that intimacy difficulties are not isolated phenomena but rather interconnected with attachment insecurity, rejection sensitivity, and avoidance tendencies (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Hayes et al., 1996). This framework provides the theoretical foundation for the subsequent section, which focuses on the concept of fear of intimacy as a distinct yet developmentally related construct that significantly impacts relational and emotional well-being (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

2.1.1. Fear of Intimacy

The concept of fear of intimacy originated from early psychological research highlighting that difficulties in openness and emotional vulnerability can significantly disrupt relational functioning (Descutner and Thelen, 1991). Descutner and Thelen (1991) characterised fear of intimacy as a diminished capacity to share personally meaningful thoughts and experiences with close others. Their findings

indicated that individuals exhibiting high levels of fear of intimacy frequently experience social isolation, emotional withdrawal, and limited closeness, not only with romantic partners but also with family and friends. Moreover, fear of intimacy and social desirability, a trait closely related to rejection sensitivity, were found to be positively associated. This finding suggests that individuals who fear intimacy may simultaneously seek social approval while avoiding deep emotional engagement (Descutner & Thelen, 1991).

Extending previously mentioned research, a large-scale cross-cultural study conducted by Ali et al. (2019) across 13 countries identified childhood rejection as a consistent predictor of fear of intimacy in adulthood. The study revealed that recollections of any one of the parents' rejection were associated with increased fear of intimacy; however, the rejection of the mother had a stronger predictive effect. This finding underscores the significant role of early relational experiences in shaping adult intimacy fears (Ali et al., 2019). Building on earlier evidence regarding the influence of early parental behaviors, Aracı-İyiyaydin et al. (2023) observed that greater recollections of maternal and paternal rejection in childhood were associated with higher levels of psychological maladjustment, which in turn predicted increased fear of intimacy in adulthood. These results further emphasize that early experiences of parental rejection exert a lasting effect on adult relational patterns and highlight the critical role of childhood family dynamics in shaping intimacy-related anxiety.

Furthermore, Obeid et al. (2020) identified a relationship between fear of intimacy and early maladaptive schemas, including mistrust, emotional deprivation, and abandonment, which often emerge from inconsistent or neglectful caregiving. These schemas promote patterns of relational avoidance and self-protective withdrawal, hindering the capacity to form or sustain emotionally close relationships in adulthood. Beyond experiences of childhood rejection, challenges in forming intimacy have also been associated with broader interpersonal and personality factors. Faraji and Tezcan (2023) reported that individuals with borderline personality traits, who exhibit a pronounced need for approval and validation often rooted in early rejection, tend to display elevated fear of intimacy. This pattern, characterized by a random desire for closeness and fear of vulnerability, contributes

to relational instability and increased relational distress. In line with DSM-5 criteria (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013), borderline personality disorder involves emotional instability, heightened sensitivity to rejection, and fear of abandonment, reflecting the central components of fear of intimacy. These observations suggest that difficulties in intimacy frequently co-occur with maladaptive coping strategies and emotion regulation deficits, thereby reinforcing the connections between early rejection, avoidance behaviors, and psychological distress.

Theoretical models have provided insight into these meshed mechanisms. For example, the Multimotive Model presumes that perceived rejection reveals defensive responses, including avoidance, withdrawal, and occasionally aggression, that may support the fear of intimacy over time (Faraji & Tezcan, 2023). Furthermore, to create an understanding of the relationship between rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy, the multimotive model helps the researchers. This framework presumes that individuals' perceptions of rejection activate defensive strategies such as avoidance or hostility that reinforce both fear of intimacy and interpersonal anxiety. As Faraji and Tezcan (2023) stated, people with high rejection sensitivity, often limited in social coping and uncomfortable with direct social interactions, may adopt behaviors that pursue social withdrawal. Consequently, fear of intimacy reflects not just a personal vulnerability but a learned emotional regulation pattern that maintains avoidance and constrains opportunities for supportive relational engagement (Faraji & Tezcan, 2023).

Recent empirical studies have expanded the understanding of intimacy by linking it to broader mental health outcomes. Maitland and Neilson (2023) presented a conceptual model linking fear of intimacy to depressive symptoms through mechanisms such as behavioral activation and social support. Their findings indicated that individuals exhibiting high fear of intimacy levels tended to withdraw from meaningful social interactions, report lower perceived social support, and experience heightened depressive symptoms (Maitland & Neilson, 2023). Notably, while fear of intimacy was associated with decreased interpersonal engagement, it also correlated with increased perceived social support, suggesting that individuals

may maintain superficial social connections while avoiding deeper emotional involvement (Maitland & Neilson, 2023). The authors recommended integrating Functional Analytic Psychotherapy (FAP) with Behavioral Activation (BA) approaches to directly address fear of intimacy and enhance clients' emotional openness and relational functioning.

Research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) provides insight into the developmental origins of intimacy difficulties. Evidence suggests that early experiences of emotional neglect, abuse, or household dysfunction are significant predictors of fear of intimacy in young adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Specifically, Aggarwal and Dutt (2024) demonstrated that individuals reporting higher levels of ACEs experience higher fear of intimacy, highlighting the long-term impact of early relational adversity on the capacity to form close, trusting relationships. The need for preventive studies aimed at fostering healthy relational patterns during childhood and adolescence comes to light more with these findings. Maitland and Neilson (2023) also reported that fear of intimacy was inversely related to behavioral activation, with both variables independently and collectively predicting depressive outcomes. While individuals with elevated fear of intimacy tended to engage less in meaningful social activities, the construct also demonstrated a modest positive association with perceived social support (Maitland & Neilson, 2023). This pattern implies that such individuals may sustain superficial social interactions that mask an avoidance of genuine emotional closeness. Overall, the findings highlight that fear of intimacy constrains the *quality* rather than the *quantity* of social relationships (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Moreover, since fear of intimacy can act as an early barrier in BA treatment by inhibiting the initiation of new, reinforcing behaviors, targeting fear of intimacy directly may increase treatment efficacy and engagement.

Anxious and avoidant attachment styles have also been linked to depressive symptoms, especially among women in clinical settings. Empirical findings indicate that women experiencing major depressive disorder exhibit elevated levels of fearful attachment and diminished secure attachment compared to non-clinical counterparts. This pattern suggests that the tendency to withdraw from emotional closeness, often

driven by fear of rejection, may exacerbate depressive symptomatology (Reis & Grenyer, 2004). Because women tend to engage more frequently in ruminative processing of negative emotions, rumination has been proposed as one factor contributing to the higher prevalence of depressive symptoms observed among women compared to men (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 1999). Rumination involves repetitive and passive focus on distress and its causes and consequences, and is associated with greater severity and persistence of depressive symptoms (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 1999). Although this work does not directly test attachment processes, it highlights rumination as a cognitive vulnerability that may interact with interpersonal stress and maladaptive relational patterns to increase susceptibility to depressive symptoms. Mohan and Mathew (2024) investigated how attachment styles and gender relate to relationship satisfaction and reported that both attachment anxiety and avoidance were positively linked to fear of intimacy. Additionally, women exhibiting higher levels of fear of intimacy were more prone to initiating the end of relationships, indicating that mismatched intimacy needs can contribute to instability in romantic partnerships (Mohan & Mathew, 2024). Moreover, clinical findings underscore the emotional and relational consequences of fear of intimacy. In a comparative study, Koolae et al. (2013) observed that women who had initiated divorce proceedings exhibited significantly greater fear of intimacy, along with elevated attachment anxiety and avoidance, relative to women who remained married. These results point to the central role of intimacy difficulties in marital distress and dissolution (Koolae et al., 2013). In a similar vein, Sherman and Thelen (1996) found that individuals with high levels of fear of intimacy tended to report lower self-esteem, greater difficulties in regulating emotions, and increased depressive symptoms. These results underscore fear of intimacy as a notable obstacle to relationship satisfaction, as individuals may simultaneously seek closeness while fearing vulnerability, thereby perpetuating cycles of avoidance and relational instability (Sherman & Thelen, 1996).

Overall, the literature positions fear of intimacy as a multifaceted construct shaped by developmental, cognitive, and personality factors. It functions as both a consequence of early relational experiences and a mediator between attachment insecurity, rejection sensitivity, and emotional maladjustment. Fear of intimacy

restricts the capacity for emotional disclosure and mutual support, thereby perpetuating cycles of loneliness, avoidance, and interpersonal distress. Recognizing the developmental and cognitive underpinnings of fear of intimacy provides a foundation for understanding broader attachment processes. The next section will therefore examine attachment styles, which offer critical insight into how early caregiving experiences shape intimacy patterns, avoidance behaviors, and relational functioning across the lifespan.

2.2. Attachment Styles

Attachment theory provides a broader conceptual basis for explaining how early bonds with caregivers influence later intimacy and relationship patterns. Bowlby (1979, 1982) described attachment as a deep emotional connection between a child and their primary caregiver, emphasizing that the quality of these early interactions shapes enduring internal models of self and others that guide behavior across the lifespan. Secure attachment emerges from early caregiving characterized by warmth, consistency, and emotional responsiveness, which enables children to develop trust in others and confidence in their own worth. Conversely, when caregiving is inconsistent, rejecting, or emotionally unavailable, insecure attachment tends to form, fostering doubts about the dependability of others and one's lovability (Ainsworth, 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990).

The initial years of life constitute a pivotal phase of development marked by rapid growth in cognitive, emotional, and biological domains. Beyond the fulfilment of basic physical needs, infants rely on caregivers' emotional sensitivity and consistent responsiveness to support healthy psychological development (Bowlby, 1982). When caregivers respond sensitively to an infant's needs, they provide a secure emotional base that fosters confidence in the caregiver's reliability and support. In contrast, emotionally distant, inconsistent, or rejecting caregiving may foster feelings of insecurity, contributing to the emergence of anxious or avoidant attachment orientations (Finzi-Dottan & Abadi, 2024; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020). These early experiences form enduring internal models that shape how individuals view themselves and engage in relationships across the lifespan.

Green-Hennessy and Reis (1998) provided early empirical evidence indicating that individuals with secure attachment tend to demonstrate higher cognitive flexibility and openness than those exhibiting avoidant attachment. These findings suggest that attachment security not only promotes emotional stability but also enhances the capacity to process relational information with curiosity and adaptability. Building upon earlier attachment research, Mikulincer and Arad (1999) found that infants with secure attachment demonstrated confidence in their caregivers' reliability, which allowed them to explore their surroundings more freely. In contrast, those with insecure attachment tended to limit their exploration, reflecting doubts about the caregiver's emotional availability. These observations further substantiated Bowlby's (1982) proposition that attachment orientations are established in early development and tend to show relative stability over time. Bowlby (1982) highlighted that the quality of early attachment relationships not only shapes socioemotional development but also serves as a potential risk or protective factor for subsequent psychological outcomes.

As attachment theory evolved, researchers extended its principles to adult romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Adults with secure attachment typically demonstrate a healthy balance between emotional closeness and independence, fostering mutual trust and adaptive interdependence in their relationships (Mikulincer et al., 2010). In contrast, individuals with insecure attachment often experience discomfort with intimacy, driven by underlying fears of rejection, abandonment, or excessive reliance on others. Such insecurity may manifest as emotional distancing, defensive reactions, or heightened attachment behaviors, which can ultimately undermine relationship satisfaction (Mikulincer et al., 2010; Timm & Keiley, 2011).

Building upon earlier attachment research, Ainsworth (1978) demonstrated that the emotional patterns established through early caregiving extend into adult relational life. Individuals who experienced consistent and sensitive caregiving in childhood tend to develop adaptive emotion regulation and comfort with closeness in intimate partnerships whereas inconsistent or neglectful caregiving fosters defensive and avoidant tendencies in emotional expression. In line with previous empirical evidence, securely attached individuals tend to exhibit greater emotional balance,

utilize constructive approaches to managing conflict, and report higher levels of satisfaction within their romantic relationships (Laurenceau et al., 1998). These patterns suggest that secure attachment promotes both emotional regulation and adaptive relational functioning. Conversely, individuals with insecure attachment tend to exhibit greater challenges in managing emotions, engage more frequently in maladaptive or conflictual interaction patterns, and report reduced levels of satisfaction within their romantic relationships (Mikulincer et al., 2010; Timm & Keiley, 2011).

Fear of intimacy is often rooted in early adverse experiences that disrupt the development of secure attachment bonds. Individuals with avoidant or anxious attachment styles commonly display heightened apprehension toward vulnerability and emotional closeness, resulting in behaviors characterized by withdrawal and self-protection. These patterns can significantly impair relationship satisfaction and intimacy (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Mohan and Mathew (2024) further highlighted that fear of intimacy functions as the most influential predictor of relationship outcomes, even exceeding the predictive power of attachment styles. These findings indicate that fear of intimacy serves as a mediating mechanism between attachment insecurity and relationship dissatisfaction, playing a central role in sustaining relational difficulties.

From a developmental standpoint, attachment theory supposes that relational patterns and emotional regulation strategies are transmitted across generations. In line with this framework, Olsson et al. (2023) reported that mothers who exhibited higher levels of fear of intimacy were up to 70% more likely to have infants classified as insecurely or anxiously/ambivalently attached, even after controlling for variables such as parental psychological health and relationship quality. These findings suggest that unresolved intimacy-related anxieties may undermine sensitive caregiving, thereby reinforcing intergenerational cycles of attachment insecurity (Olsson et al., 2023). Interventions that foster open emotional communication and reflective parenting could help disrupt these patterns and promote secure relational development in both parents and children.

Attachment orientations interact with personality traits to influence interpersonal behavior. Ramazanoğlu and Cicerali (2025) reported that vulnerable narcissism, a form marked by heightened sensitivity to rejection, proneness to shame, and fear of intimacy, is closely linked with insecure attachment patterns. Individuals exhibiting high levels of vulnerable narcissism often fluctuate between desiring emotional closeness and fearing exposure or relational rejection. As a result, they may hide aspects of their authentic self and experience persistent anxiety in close relationships (Ramazanoğlu & Cicerali, 2025).

Li and Chan (2012) conducted a meta-analysis to explore how attachment anxiety and avoidance relate to overall relationship quality. Their results indicated that both insecure attachment dimensions were associated with lower satisfaction, reduced perceived support, and increased interpersonal conflict. Individuals with anxious attachment experienced a push-pull dynamic, seeking closeness while simultaneously fearing rejection, whereas those with avoidant attachment maintained emotional distance to protect themselves from dependency (Li & Chan, 2012). Each attachment style contributed to fear of intimacy via distinct pathways, highlighting the complex ways in which attachment insecurity can affect relational functioning.

Fraley and Shaver (2000) advanced attachment theory by differentiating between dismissive and fearful avoidant patterns. Fearful avoidance, marked by a simultaneous longing for closeness and discomfort with dependency, has particular relevance for explaining fear of intimacy. The authors noted that while attachment orientations exhibit moderate stability, they can vary across relationships and developmental stages. This adaptability implies that fear of intimacy encompasses both trait-like predispositions and contextually driven fluctuations in attachment behavior. Furthermore, they argued that a comprehensive understanding of adult intimacy requires integrating the attachment, caregiving, and sexual behavior systems, as neglecting their interdependence leaves attachment theory theoretically incomplete.

When the need for intimacy is fulfilled through secure attachment bonds, individuals experience emotional balance and a greater sense of meaning (Bowlby, 1982).

However, disruptions in intimacy can contribute to the development of insecure attachment patterns. Supporting this view, Koolae et al. (2013) found that women who had filed for divorce exhibited significantly higher levels of fear of intimacy and both anxious and avoidant attachment compared to their married counterparts, suggesting that elevated intimacy fears may undermine marital stability and satisfaction.

Supporting previous research, Thorberg and Lyvers (2006) identified a positive association between fear of intimacy and both anxious and avoidant attachment styles, highlighting the discomfort these individuals experience with emotional openness. No notable differences emerged in dependent attachment, indicating that both groups may contend with similar challenges regarding autonomy and self-esteem. These results emphasize the impact of attachment-related intimacy concerns on marital satisfaction and suggest that interventions targeting attachment insecurity may strengthen relational functioning.

2.2.1. Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment Style

Among the insecure attachment styles, the anxious or ambivalent type tends to be associated with heightened emotional reactivity, fear of rejection, and dependency within close relationships (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Consistent with this, research in Turkish samples demonstrated that rejection sensitivity is most strongly related to both anxious and avoidant attachment dimensions, indicating that attachment orientations influence not only relational behaviors but also the cognitive and emotional processes through which individuals interpret intimacy and social feedback (Göncü Köse et al., 2017).

Anxious attachment often arises from inconsistent caregiving, where emotional availability is unpredictable. In adulthood, individuals with this attachment style commonly fear abandonment, exhibit dependency, and frequently seek reassurance from romantic partners (Ramazanoğlu & Ciceralli, 2025). They may also experience self-doubt, heightened jealousy, and emotional instability, interpreting others' hesitations toward intimacy as signs of potential rejection (Ramazanoğlu & Ciceralli,

2025). Finzi-Dottan and Abadi (2024) demonstrated that both anxious and avoidant attachment styles are associated with reduced expectation of acceptance and elevated expectation of rejection, which in turn predicts fear of intimacy.

Avoidant attachment typically develops in the context of persistent emotional neglect, leading individuals to suppress attachment needs, avoid vulnerability, and emphasize self-reliance as a strategy to protect against emotional distress (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1982; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Despite presenting as self-sufficient, those with avoidant attachment often experience difficulties with empathy and struggle to establish emotionally reciprocal relationships, which can negatively impact overall relationship quality (Ramazanoğlu & Cicerali, 2025).

From a cognitive perspective, anxious individuals exhibit hyperactivation of the attachment system, amplifying distress and limiting their ability to process new experiences (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Their heightened emotional arousal interferes with cognitive flexibility, leading them to misinterpret neutral cues as rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Avoidant individuals, by contrast, deactivate attachment needs by suppressing distressing emotions and avoiding contradictory information. This defensive detachment reinforces rigid beliefs about self-reliance and distrust in others. Securely attached individuals, on the other hand, show greater adaptability, adjusting perceptions of their partners based on new experiences and emphasizing positive relational changes (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). These mechanisms demonstrate how attachment security underpins resilience and healthy emotional functioning.

Fraley and Shaver (2000) critically evaluated key assumptions in attachment theory, particularly the notion that all romantic relationships uniformly activate the attachment system. They argued that attachment involvement differs across relationships depending on emotional investment and perceived security. Furthermore, they contended that the traditional tripartite classification of attachment, secure, anxious, and avoidant, oversimplifies the complexity of adult relational experiences, calling for a more multidimensional understanding of intimacy and dependency patterns. Drawing on Ainsworth's (1978) early typology of

infant–caregiver attachment and the adult attachment framework proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), the two-dimensional model conceptualizes attachment patterns along the axes of anxiety and avoidance. This model provides a more refined understanding of how individuals navigate closeness and dependence in intimate relationships. Particularly, the fearful-avoidant orientation, defined by the coexistence of a strong desire for connection and a simultaneous fear of emotional vulnerability, closely parallels characteristics of the anxious–ambivalent attachment style.

Fraley and Shaver (2000) emphasized that although attachment orientations show moderate stability, they remain open to change through corrective relational experiences. This flexibility carries important therapeutic implications, indicating that individuals with insecure patterns, particularly those marked by anxiety, can cultivate greater attachment security within consistent and supportive relationships. Moreover, Fraley and Shaver (2000) proposed that understanding intimacy and rejection requires viewing attachment alongside the caregiving and sexual behavioral systems, forming a more integrated model of adult relational functioning.

In summary, the anxious/ambivalent attachment style reflects a persistent internal conflict between the desire for closeness and the fear of rejection (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This paradoxical pattern contributes to heightened emotional reactivity, dependence, and relational instability. The next section explores rejection sensitivity, a construct that further elucidates how these attachment-related fears shape cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns in intimate relationships (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

2.3. Rejection Sensitivity

Rejection sensitivity is characterized by a cognitive-emotional tendency in which individuals anticipate rejection, interpret ambiguous cues as indicative of potential rejection, and respond with heightened emotional intensity (Downey et al., 1996). According to the rejection sensitivity Model, early relational experiences, especially those involving caregivers, play a critical role in shaping internalized schemas that

predispose individuals to expect rejection in subsequent relationships (Downey et al., 1996). These schemas are further reinforced through both direct interactions and observational learning within the family context, influencing interpersonal perceptions and reactions throughout development. Early caregiving experiences characterized by warmth, sensitivity, and consistent responsiveness are associated with stronger emotional regulation capacities and lower susceptibility to rejection sensitivity. In contrast, environments marked by parental neglect, hostility, or psychological control tend to foster hypervigilance to rejection cues and reinforce anxious or defensive relational expectations (Godleski et al., 2019). Research indicates that maternal behaviors play a uniquely influential role in shaping schemas related to fear of intimacy.

Research indicates that individuals exhibiting elevated rejection sensitivity tend to interpret ambiguous interpersonal cues as deliberate signs of rejection, which can provoke intensified emotional reactions such as anxiety, anger, jealousy, withdrawal, or attempts to control the situation (Downey et al., 1996). Although these behaviors are often intended as protective strategies against perceived relational threats, they may unintentionally be the cause of continuing rejection, which is feared by oneself, generating a self-reinforcing cycle of interpersonal difficulties (Downey et al., 1996). Rejection sensitivity has been shown to undermine interpersonal functioning across various relational domains, including peer, academic, and romantic contexts, emerging early in childhood and persisting throughout adolescence and adulthood (Godleski et al., 2019). In romantic relationships, people who are highly sensitive to rejection often interpret unclear or inconsiderate behaviors from their partners as signs of rejection. This perception can lead them to act in controlling or hostile ways, which may reduce overall relationship satisfaction (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

Attachment theory also offers insight into rejection sensitivity, as Bowlby (1979, 1982) proposed that early interactions with caregivers create internal cognitive-emotional representations of self and others, which subsequently shape individuals' expectations and behaviors in interpersonal relationships. Caregiving that is inconsistent, emotionally unresponsive, or rejecting tends to contribute to the development of insecure attachment orientations such as anxious, avoidant, or

disorganized patterns, which subsequently heighten susceptibility to rejection sensitivity (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Individuals exhibiting anxious attachment tendencies typically seek heightened emotional closeness and reassurance from their partners, while simultaneously harboring persistent worries about rejection and doubts regarding their partner's affection. These patterns collectively contribute to an increased sensitivity to rejection (Elibol & Tok, 2019). Although avoidant attachment is linked with tendencies toward emotional suppression and relational distancing, these strategies may lead individuals to expect less acceptance and heighten their fear of intimacy. This interpretation is supported in part by Finzi-Dottan et al. (2024) and related literature (e.g., Ramazanoğlu & Cicerali, 2025; Wright et al., 2010).

Research consistently highlights the significant role of parental rejection in shaping both rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy. Parental rejection, manifested through maternal or paternal coldness, neglect, hostility, or emotional unavailability, contributes to the formation of maladaptive cognitive-affective schemas, such as heightened personalization, vigilant monitoring for potential rejection, and increased emotional reactivity (Ali et al., 2019; Rohner & Lansford, 2017). These patterns can persist into adulthood, influencing relational expectations and behaviors. Such behavioral and emotional patterns are associated with psychological maladjustment, heightened relationship-related anxiety, and challenges in developing and sustaining intimacy (Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Sherman & Thelen, 1996).

Rejection sensitivity emerges through intricate interactions between early caregiving practices, emotional experiences, and family conflict. Empirical findings by Godleski et al. (2019) indicate that maternal harshness fosters anxious expectations of rejection, whereas maternal psychological control contributes to angry rejection expectations during adolescence. Exposure to interparental aggression further intensifies these processes, amplifying adolescents' emotional reactivity to perceived rejection. Conversely, maternal warmth and sensitivity serve as protective mechanisms that mitigate the development of rejection sensitivity, underscoring the enduring influence of caregiving consistency. Additionally, parental psychopathology, particularly maternal depression, heightens family tension and

unpredictability, thereby reinforcing emotional insecurity and rejection sensitivity in offspring. Collectively, these findings emphasize that both proximal caregiver behaviors and broader familial dynamics shape the developmental trajectory of rejection sensitivity and its later interpersonal manifestations.

Fear of intimacy is closely related to rejection sensitivity, as individuals who anticipate rejection often avoid vulnerability and emotional disclosure in relationships. (Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Giovazolias & Paschalidi, 2022). High levels of rejection sensitivity may intensify fear of intimacy via psychological pathways such as maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, deliberate self-concealment, and heightened attentional bias toward relational threats (Elibol & Tok, 2019; Finzi-Dottan et al., 2024). Individuals with heightened rejection sensitivity often employ avoidance strategies as a means of protecting self-esteem, minimizing perceived vulnerability, and mitigating the potential for relational harm (Ramazanoğlu & Ciceralli, 2025; Wright et al., 2010). Empirical findings demonstrate that fear of intimacy tends to co-occur with insecure attachment orientations—particularly anxious and avoidant patterns—and is inversely related to acceptance expectancy. Moreover, acceptance expectancy appears to mediate the link between attachment insecurity and individuals' comfort with emotional closeness (Finzi-Dottan & Abadi, 2024). Early experiences of rejection and inconsistent caregiving contribute to the development of internal schemas that influence rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy, leading to challenges in forming secure and emotionally fulfilling relationships in adulthood (Giovazolias & Paschalidi, 2022; Obeid et al., 2020).

Individuals with high rejection sensitivity often place great importance on social acceptance, which can trigger strong emotional reactions when they perceive signs of rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Longitudinal research demonstrates that rejection sensitivity contributes to maladaptive patterns of emotion regulation, including heightened emotional instability, suppression of emotional expression, and tendencies toward social withdrawal. These regulatory difficulties, in turn, have been found to mediate the onset and persistence of depressive and anxiety symptoms (Gardner et al., 2020). Although gender variations emerge with women typically

exhibiting greater interpersonal sensitivity and emotional responsiveness, and men showing stronger associations between rejection sensitivity and dysregulated affect. Rejection sensitivity consistently predicts relational and psychological maladjustment across both genders (Gardner et al., 2020; Nolen-Hoeksema & Aldao, 2011; Pepping et al., 2015).

In summary, rejection sensitivity emerges from early relational experiences, particularly parental rejection and inconsistent caregiving, and is reinforced by maladaptive internal schemas, family conflict, and attachment insecurity. Rejection sensitivity predisposes individuals to heightened fear of intimacy, maladaptive emotion regulation, and impaired relational functioning in adulthood. The interplay between insecure attachment, fear of intimacy, and rejection sensitivity illustrates how early adverse experiences can shape long-term patterns of emotional vulnerability, interpersonal anxiety, and relational avoidance. This framework naturally leads to the concept of experiential avoidance, which encompasses broader behavioral and cognitive strategies that individuals employ to manage distressing internal experiences, including those arising from rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy. Investigating experiential avoidance provides further insight into the mechanisms through which early relational experiences and sensitivity to rejection influence emotional and interpersonal functioning across the lifespan.

2.4. Experiential Avoidance

Experiential avoidance describes a process in which individuals attempt to regulate or escape unwanted internal states such as distressing emotions, thoughts, sensations, or memories even when these efforts paradoxically sustain or intensify long-term psychological distress (Hayes et al., 1996). Although early psychoanalytic theories, notably Freud's (1920, 1966, as cited in Hayes et al., 1996) work, acknowledged the significance of internal experience, it was within the emergence of behavioral and cognitive-behavioral traditions that avoidance was reconceptualized as a modifiable process. This shift allowed therapists to focus not only on the presence of avoided experiences but also on cultivating psychological flexibility to respond to them more adaptively. Freud (1920, 1966) underscored that the repression of distressing

experiences lies at the core of psychological dysfunction. He posited that when painful or threatening emotions are avoided rather than acknowledged, they remain active within the unconscious and manifest through neurotic or relational difficulties. Thus, avoidance functions as both a defensive and pathogenic mechanism, impeding emotional awareness and adaptive interpersonal engagement. Hayes and Gifford (1997) emphasized that experiential avoidance may evolve into a self-perpetuating behavioral cycle in which short-term attempts to alleviate discomfort paradoxically intensify long-term distress. They argued that when individuals consistently avoid internal experiences, both the avoided emotions and the avoidance responses themselves can become maladaptive. Moreover, such avoidance can restrict self-awareness and diminish access to internal cues essential for effective and flexible decision-making.

Experiential avoidance operates across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains. As described by Hayes et al. (1996), individuals often attempt to modify or suppress their internal experiences to minimize distress or discomfort. For instance, an employee who experiences irritation during workplace discussions may consciously inhibit expressions of anger or refrain from voicing disagreement, perceiving emotional restraint as a sign of professionalism. Although such avoidance may momentarily reduce tension, it ultimately undermines emotional adaptability and the development of effective coping strategies. Rogers (2000) emphasized that genuine personal development depends on an individual's willingness to remain open to both pleasant and painful experiences, as this openness nurtures psychological flexibility and facilitates adaptation to change.

Maitland (2020) identified experiential avoidance as a significant antecedent of fear of intimacy and related emotional difficulties. Individuals who habitually suppress or avoid distressing internal experiences were found to exhibit stronger intimacy fears, which in turn contributed to feelings of loneliness and greater psychological strain. These findings underscore the maladaptive nature of avoidance in sustaining relational and emotional dysfunction (Maitland, 2020). Avoidant strategies can initially play a protective role, helping individuals cope with intense grief by temporarily withdrawing from emotionally challenging situations (Shear, 2010). This

selective disengagement offers short-term psychological relief and facilitates gradual emotional processing. Nevertheless, if avoidance becomes persistent or inflexible, it may hinder adaptive adjustment and contribute to prolonged difficulties, such as the development of complicated grief (Shear, 2010).

Attachment theory offers a foundational lens through which the interpersonal dimensions of experiential avoidance can be understood. A secure attachment orientation supports psychological well-being by enhancing emotional regulation, cognitive openness, coherent self-concept, and effective interpersonal functioning, capacities shaped by the internal working models that emerge from early caregiver-child interactions (Cassidy, 1994; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In contrast, caregiving that is inconsistent, neglectful, or emotionally unresponsive tends to foster insecure attachment formations. Such early relational environments can give rise to ambivalent/resistant, avoidant, or disorganized attachment styles, each reflecting distinct patterns of coping with unreliable or distressing caregiving experiences (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Carlson et al., 1989; Lyons-Ruth et al., 1993; Main & Solomon, 1990).

Ambivalent or resistant attachment is marked by a simultaneous desire for closeness and uncertainty about caregiver responsiveness, often expressed through dependency mixed with passive or ambivalent behavior (Ainsworth et al., 1978). In contrast, avoidant attachment stems from early experiences of emotional rejection, leading individuals to suppress closeness needs and minimize expressions of vulnerability (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Disorganized attachment, frequently observed in contexts of trauma, neglect, or abuse, is reflected in contradictory, unpredictable, or difficult-to-classify patterns of interaction (Carlson et al., 1989; Lyons-Ruth et al., 1989).

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that both insecure and disorganized attachment patterns are linked to difficulties in emotion regulation, a higher incidence of behavioral disturbances, and an elevated susceptibility to anxiety and depressive symptoms (Brenning & Braet, 2013; Colonna et al., 2011). In Turkish samples, studies have demonstrated that insecure attachment established during early

childhood is associated with elevated internalizing symptoms, including anxiety and somatic complaints (i.e., somatic difficulties) (Sümer & Şendağ, 2009), while adolescents exhibiting insecure attachment patterns tend to experience greater emotional instability and attentional problems, accompanied by diminished prosocial behaviors toward peers and family members (Keskin & Çam, 2010).

Avoidantly attached individuals tend to rely on strategies that involve emotional suppression and psychological distancing as a means of coping with the perceived threat of rejection or dependency. This attachment pattern reflects an internalized expectation that others are unavailable or unresponsive, prompting the person to downplay emotional needs and emphasize self-sufficiency (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990). Avoidant tendencies often generalize to close relationships, where individuals may struggle to express emotions openly, respond sensitively to partners, or sustain meaningful interpersonal bonds (Kashdan et al., 2009). Gerhart et al. (2014) demonstrated that attachment anxiety serves as a mediator between experiential avoidance and tendencies toward social withdrawal or emotionally distant behaviors. In contrast, hostility mediated the association between avoidance and controlling or vindictive interpersonal strategies. These findings highlight how experiential avoidance promotes inflexible relational patterns, offering temporary emotional relief at the expense of sustained interpersonal functioning.

Maternal attachment styles play a critical role in shaping both children's attachment security and their later tendencies toward experiential avoidance. Tasel-Gunal and Arikan (2024) investigated mother-toddler dyads from low socioeconomic backgrounds in Türkiye and reported that mothers with higher attachment avoidance in romantic relationships tended to have children with lower attachment security. This pattern suggests that emotionally distant or disengaged maternal behaviors may undermine sensitive caregiving, thereby fostering insecure attachment patterns in the children (Tasel-Gunal & Arikan, 2024). Conversely, maternal attachment anxiety appeared unrelated to children's attachment outcomes, possibly because hyperactivating strategies enable mothers to preserve emotional proximity even when regulation difficulties are present (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008; Mills-Koonce et al., 2011). Overall, these results underscore the lasting influence of parental attachment

patterns on children's relational trajectories and their tendency toward experiential avoidance.

Experiential avoidance also interacts with broader social and emotional domains, including loneliness, perceived social support, and fear of intimacy. Maitland (2020) developed and empirically validated a sequential mediation framework demonstrating that experiential avoidance indirectly fosters psychological distress through its impact on fear of intimacy, diminished perceived social support, and heightened loneliness. This model highlights how avoidance-based coping progressively undermines relational connectedness, contributing to broader psychopathological outcomes.

Individuals exhibiting high levels of experiential avoidance tend to shy away from vulnerable interpersonal exchanges, which can amplify fear of intimacy (Descutner & Thelen, 1991) and reduce perceived social support. This combination may heighten feelings of loneliness, which is identified as a proximal predictor of psychological distress in relational models (Maitland, 2020). These results underscore that intrapersonal avoidance behaviors can indirectly compromise both relational functioning and mental health, highlighting the clinical relevance of interventions aimed at reducing experiential avoidance and fostering emotional openness.

In summary, experiential avoidance represents a multifaceted cognitive-behavioral phenomenon that disrupts both individual well-being and interpersonal functioning. Rooted in attachment experiences and reinforced by maladaptive coping strategies, experiential avoidance fosters fear of intimacy, reduces social support, and heightens loneliness, ultimately contributing to psychopathological symptoms. Its relational and emotional consequences underscore the critical importance of early attachment experiences, parental caregiving patterns, and the development of psychological flexibility. Interventions aimed at reducing experiential avoidance, enhancing openness to internal experiences, and fostering secure attachment may be particularly effective in promoting relational and psychological health across the lifespan. This understanding of experiential avoidance establishes a foundation for examining

related constructs such as rejection sensitivity and anticipatory relational anxieties, which are central to the development of maladaptive relational patterns and fear of intimacy.

2.5. Summary of the Literature Review

The reviewed literature underscores the intricate interplay among fear of intimacy, attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance constructs that collectively shape relational and emotional functioning. Intimacy emerges as a core developmental process essential for psychological well-being, grounded in Eriksonian theory and elaborated by Descutner and Thelen (1991), who identified fear of intimacy as an enduring difficulty in emotional openness and vulnerability. Empirical findings demonstrate that early caregiving experiences—particularly parental rejection—serve as critical antecedents of intimacy-related anxiety, thereby influencing adult relational patterns (Ali et al., 2019; Aracı-İyiaydın et al., 2023).

Fear of intimacy represents not only an interpersonal challenge but also a manifestation of broader developmental vulnerabilities. It is closely linked to attachment insecurity, emotion regulation difficulties, and maladaptive cognitive schemas (Obeid et al., 2020). Individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment orientations tend to experience discomfort with vulnerability, oscillating between the desire for closeness and fear of rejection (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020). These attachment-based insecurities often sustain cycles of emotional withdrawal, dependency, or conflict, thereby undermining relationship satisfaction (Mohan & Mathew, 2024).

Rejection sensitivity further elucidates the cognitive–emotional mechanisms underlying fear of intimacy. Rooted in early experiences of parental rejection and inconsistent caregiving (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Godleski et al., 2019), rejection sensitivity predisposes individuals to interpret ambiguous social cues as evidence of potential rejection. This bias evokes heightened emotional arousal and defensive behaviors such as withdrawal or hostility, which reinforce both interpersonal distance and emotional distress (Elibol & Tok, 2019; Finzi-Dottan & Abadi, 2024). Empirical

studies demonstrate that rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy are mutually reinforcing: heightened rejection expectations amplify intimacy fears, while avoidance of vulnerability ensures continuity of perceptions about rejection and isolation (Giovazolias & Paschalidi, 2022; Ramazanoğlu & Ciceralli, 2025).

Experiential avoidance provides a broader behavioral framework that connects these constructs. Defined as the tendency to evade unwanted internal experiences, experiential avoidance contributes to emotional inflexibility and relational disengagement (Hayes et al., 1996; Maitland, 2020). Individuals high in experiential avoidance tend to suppress distressing emotions and avoid interpersonal exposure, which exacerbates fear of intimacy and reduces perceived social support. The resulting loneliness and detachment have been identified as significant mediators between avoidance-based coping and psychological distress (Cacioppo et al., 2015; Maitland, 2020). Attachment theory offers a unifying foundation for understanding these processes: insecure or disorganized attachment, stemming from inconsistent or rejecting caregiving, fosters both experiential avoidance and rejection sensitivity, which in turn heighten intimacy fears and relational anxiety (Ainsworth, 1978; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Overall, the literature converges on the view that fear of intimacy is a multifactorial construct shaped by early attachment dynamics, maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, and cognitive biases toward rejection and avoidance. These mechanisms operate in a reciprocal manner, reinforcing cycles of emotional inhibition, interpersonal distance, and psychological distress. Interventions that target experiential avoidance and attachment insecurity, through approaches such as Functional Analytic Psychotherapy or emotion-focused therapies, may therefore enhance emotional openness, reduce rejection sensitivity, and promote healthier intimacy patterns (Maitland & Neilson, 2023). The synthesis of these findings highlights the developmental and psychological complexity of intimacy, emphasizing the importance of early relational experiences in shaping adult emotional and relational functioning.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Firstly, the current study's research design is stated primarily in this chapter. Secondly, the participants' age and relationship status are specified, along with other detailed demographic information. In the next section, the instruments used in the current study are explained. Fourthly, the methods for collecting data and obtaining ethical approvals are presented. In the fifth section, the description of the variables is explained. The statistical analysis of the current study is presented in the following section. Finally, a detailed representation of the limitations of the current research is stated.

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative and correlational research design to examine the role of attachment styles, experiential avoidance, and rejection sensitivity in predicting fear of intimacy, while controlling for age and relationship status among young women in Türkiye. Instead of seeking to infer causality, the analysis aimed to determine the distinct and additive effects of each predictor variable, controlling for the influence of covariates (Cohen et al., 2013). The correlational design was considered appropriate given the study's focus on examining patterns of association among the variables as they naturally occur, without experimental manipulation.

3.2. Participants of the Study

A total of 385 women participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 42 years ($M = 26.03$, $SD = 4.62$). The majority of participants were between the ages of 23 and 27, with smaller groups represented at the younger (19–21) and older (35 and above) ends of the spectrum.

In terms of educational attainment, 21 participants held a doctoral degree, 94 completed a master's degree, 226 held a bachelor's degree, 26 had an associate's degree, 17 completed high school, and 1 completed primary school. At the time of data collection, 224 participants were continuing their studies, while 161 were not enrolled in any academic program. Among those currently studying, 30 were doctoral students, 71 were master's students, 116 were undergraduate students, and 12 were enrolled in associate degree programs.

Participants resided in various provinces of Türkiye, representing all seven geographical regions. The regional distribution was as follows: Central Anatolia (46.49%), Marmara (27.01%), Aegean (7.53%), Mediterranean (7.27%), Black Sea (4.94%), Southeastern Anatolia (3.38%), and Eastern Anatolia (3.12%). The provinces with the highest number of participants within each region were Ankara (Central Anatolia; $n = 148$), İstanbul (Marmara; $n = 71$), İzmir (Aegean; $n = 15$), Antalya (Mediterranean; $n = 13$), Samsun (Black Sea; $n = 3$), Gaziantep (Southeastern Anatolia; $n = 5$), and Erzurum (Eastern Anatolia; $n = 4$).

Regarding employment status, 193 participants reported being employed, whereas 192 were not working at the time of the study. In terms of relationship status, 209 participants were in a romantic relationship, while 176 reported not having a partner. The types of relationships reported included marriage ($n = 80$), engagement ($n = 36$), dating ($n = 46$), having a boyfriend or girlfriend ($n = 40$), cohabiting ($n = 2$), and serious relationships without cohabitation ($n = 2$). Four participants described their relationship status as "other." A total of 176 participants reported having no romantic relationship.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

For data gathering, an online survey prepared by the researcher which was containing the Turkish version of the following form and five scales: Demographic and Relational Information Form designed by the researcher, the Fear of Intimacy Scale (Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Elibol & Tok, 2018), the Three Dimensional Attachment Styles Scale (Erzen, 2016), the Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale

(Gámez, et al., 2011; Yıldırım & Bahtiyar, 2020), and the Rejection Sensitivity Scale (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Göncü Köse et al., 2017).

3.3.1. Demographic and Relational Information Form

The researcher developed the Demographic and Relational Information Form in this study. It aims to collect demographic and relational information about the participants' age, educational level, status of studentship, ongoing academic program, city of residence, job status, relationship status, relationship duration, and relationship description.

3.3.2. Fear of Intimacy Scale

The Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) was developed by Descutner and Thelen in 1991. The scale measures the individual's anxiety about close, dating relationships, and their relationship status with 35 items. The sample item includes "I would be afraid that I might not always feel close to O" and "I would find it difficult being open with O about my thoughts." In these sentences, O refers to the partner of the participants. A 5-point Likert-type scale was employed to assess participants' responses, with scores ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (extremely characteristic of me). Higher scores indicate a higher fear of intimacy. Previous research by Descutner et al. (1991) indicated the high reliability through the high test-retest reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$), and with the internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$). On the other hand, with a single-factor structure explaining 48% of the variance, the scale also demonstrated strong construct validity. Lastly, even though there is no research to the researchers' knowledge that applied only for the people who are not experiencing a romantic relationship, Descutner et al. (1991) ensured that the conceptual basis of the scale supports its use in evaluating individuals' fear of intimacy.

Although several measurement tools have been adapted into Turkish to examine variables related to close relationships, none of them directly assesses the fear of intimacy (Elibol & Tok, 2018). To address this gap, Elibol et al. (2018) adapted the

Fear of Intimacy Scale into Turkish and reported evidence for its validity and reliability in a Turkish sample. They conducted both internal consistency and test-retest methods to be able to explain the reliability of the scale. The adaptation of the scale was identified as a three-factor structure: imagined fear of intimacy, imagined openness, and fear of past intimacy. However, consistent with the unidimensional conceptualization of the original scale and in line with the purpose of the present study, the total score was used to represent participants' overall level of fear of intimacy. Elibol et al. (2018) stated that in the internal consistency analysis results, the total Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated as .94. They also applied the scale to 134 students with an interval of four weeks for the test-retest reliability. The correlation coefficient between the two applications was found to be 0.76 ($p < 0.01$). As a result of the validity examination, there appears to be a scale with 35 items, which accounts for 58% of the variance. It states that the Turkish version of the scale is consistent and decisive over time. These results indicate that the scale is a reliable instrument for assessing total fear of intimacy in this sample.

The Fear of Intimacy Scale was assessed in the present study with a sample of 385 participants. The scale showed high internal consistency reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .94 for 35 items (Nunnally, 1978).

3.3.3. Three-Dimensional Attachment Styles Scale

The Three-Dimensional Attachment Styles Scale used in the present study was developed by Erzen (2016) to assess individuals' attachment orientations in close relationships. The scale aims to evaluate attachment styles within a multidimensional framework grounded in attachment theory.

The scale consists of 18 items and is structured around three distinct subdimensions: (1) secure attachment style, (2) avoidant attachment style, and (3) anxious-ambivalent attachment style. Exploratory factor analysis conducted during the scale development revealed a clear three-factor structure, with all 18 items loading consistently on their respective dimensions (Erzen, 2016). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("I strongly disagree") to 5 ("I strongly agree").

agree”). Higher scores on a given subdimension indicate a stronger endorsement of that particular attachment style. Based on the scoring procedure, individuals are classified according to the attachment style on which they obtain the highest subscale score.

With respect to reliability, internal consistency analyses were performed for each subdimension. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were reported as .80 for the avoidant attachment style, .69 for the secure attachment style, and .71 for the anxious-ambivalent attachment style, indicating acceptable reliability levels across subscales (Erzen, 2016).

Evidence for the validity of the scale was obtained through several analyses. Item–total correlation coefficients ranged between .53 and .75, and all correlations were statistically significant. Pearson correlation analyses examining the relationships among the subscales revealed correlation coefficients ranging from $-.39$ to $.39$, suggesting that the subdimensions are related yet conceptually distinct. Descriptive statistics indicated mean scores of 15.83 (SD = 5.86) for the avoidant attachment style, 19.82 (SD = 3.70) for the secure attachment style, and 15.56 (SD = 4.90) for the anxious-ambivalent attachment style.

To further support the validity of the original factor structure, Erzen (2016) conducted confirmatory factor analysis. The results demonstrated an adequate model fit, with goodness-of-fit indices reported as GFI = .93, CFI = .90, AGFI = .90, and RMSEA = .05. The chi-square value was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 328.21$, $df = 132$, $p < .001$), indicating that the proposed three-factor model was supported. In the present study, the three subscale scores—secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent attachment styles—were used separately in the analyses to examine their distinct contributions to fear of intimacy.

In the current study, the Three-Dimensional Attachment Styles Scale was assessed with a sample of 385 participants. The scale showed moderate internal consistency reliability for the secure attachment subdimension with a Cronbach’s alpha of .61, high internal consistency reliability for the avoidant attachment subdimension with a

Cronbach's alpha of .82, and also high internal consistency reliability for the anxious-ambivalent attachment subdimension with a Cronbach's alpha of .84 (Nunnally, 1978).

3.3.4. Rejection Sensitivity Scale

The Rejection Sensitivity Scale used in the present study was originally developed by Downey and Feldman (1996) to assess individuals' tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to interpersonal rejection. The scale evaluates rejection sensitivity through hypothetical social situations in which rejection is a possible outcome.

The original scale consists of 18 items, each describing a scenario in which an individual may experience rejection (e.g., "You ask someone you just met in class to have coffee with you"). Participants are asked to respond to each scenario using a 6-point Likert-type scale by rating two components: their level of anxiety regarding the situation and their expectation of being accepted. Anxiety is rated from 1 ("not at all worried/anxious") to 6 ("very worried/anxious"), while expectation of acceptance is rated from 1 ("very unlikely") to 6 ("very likely").

Rejection sensitivity scores are calculated by first reverse-coding the expectation of acceptance ratings and then multiplying these values by the corresponding rejection anxiety ratings. Higher scores indicate greater rejection sensitivity, reflecting a stronger tendency to anxiously anticipate and react to perceived rejection.

Regarding reliability, Downey and Feldman (1996, Study 1) reported an internal consistency coefficient of .83. The test-retest reliability was found to be .83 over a three-week interval and .78 over a four-month interval, indicating adequate temporal stability.

The scale was adapted into Turkish by Göncü Köse et al. (2017). The Turkish version retained all 18 items and preserved the original response format, requiring participants to rate both rejection-related anxiety and expectations of acceptance

using the same 6-point Likert-type scales as in the original version. Internal consistency analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .85 for the total scale. Exploratory factor analysis supported a single-factor structure, which accounted for 30.82% of the total variance. In the present study, the total score of the Rejection Sensitivity Scale was used to represent participants' overall level of rejection sensitivity.

The reliability analysis of the Rejection Sensitivity Scale was conducted with a sample of 385 participants in the present study. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .91 for the total 36 items (Nunnally, 1978).

3.3.5. Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale

The Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale was originally developed by Gámez et al. (2011) to assess different experiential avoidance strategies. The scale aims to evaluate individuals' tendencies to avoid, control, or alter unwanted internal experiences across multiple behavioral and cognitive dimensions.

The original version of the scale consists of 62 items and comprises six subdimensions. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 6 ("strongly agree"), with higher scores indicating higher levels of experiential avoidance. The behavioral avoidance subdimension consists of 11 items assessing behaviors aimed at avoiding distress and physical discomfort. The distress endurance subdimension includes 11 items related to individuals' negative evaluations of distress and their difficulty accepting distress. The postponement subdimension consists of 7 items assessing efforts to postpone anticipated distress. The suppression/distraction subdimension includes 7 items focusing on ignoring or suppressing distress. The repression/denial subdimension consists of 13 items assessing detachment from distress, distancing from distress, and lack of awareness of distress. Finally, the distress endurance subscale includes 11 items assessing individuals' ability to act effectively in the presence of distressing experiences. The original validation study included both student and patient samples.

Regarding validity, the six-factor solution explained 43.79% of the total variance in the student sample and 43.80% of the total variance in the patient sample, indicating highly similar item content and variance levels across groups (Gómez et al., 2011). In terms of reliability, the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the total scale score ranged between .91 and .92, which was attributed in part to the large number of items included in the scale (Gómez et al., 2011).

The scale was adapted into Turkish by Yıldırım and Bahtiyar (2020). During the adaptation process, three items were removed due to semantic and statistical concerns, resulting in a Turkish version consisting of 59 items and five subdimensions. Detailed validity and reliability analyses indicated that the Turkish version of the scale was appropriate for use in Turkish samples. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale score was reported as .93. Internal consistency coefficients for the Turkish version subdimensions were .91 for avoidance, .87 for suppression/distraction, .87 for distress endurance, .85 for procrastination, and .84 for repression/denial (Yıldırım et al., 2020). Principal components analysis supported a five-factor structure, explaining 46.4% of the total variance. Specifically, the 21-item avoidance subdimension accounted for 20.89% of the variance, the 8-item suppression/distraction subdimension accounted for 10.29%, the 11-item distress endurance subdimension accounted for 6.25%, the 7-item procrastination subdimension accounted for 4.91%, and the 12-item repression/denial subdimension accounted for 4.22% of the total variance. In the present study, the total score and relevant subdimension scores of the Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale were used to examine experiential avoidance as a predictor of fear of intimacy.

The Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale (MEAS) was examined for its internal consistency reliability with a sample size of 385. For the current study, the 21-item avoidance sub-dimension's internal consistency was high with a Cronbach alpha of .90; the 8-item suppression/distraction sub-dimension's internal consistency was high with a Cronbach alpha of .87; the 11-item distress endurance sub-dimension's internal consistency was high with a Cronbach alpha of .85; 7-item procrastination sub-dimension's internal consistency was high with a Cronbach alpha of .84; and finally, the 12-item repression/denial sub-dimension's internal

consistency was high with a Cronbach alpha of .84. The overall scale demonstrated strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .90 across 59 items (Nunnally, 1978).

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Firstly, the authors of the Turkish instruments were contacted to get permission to use the instruments in the current study. All of their approvals were collected via email. The researcher obtained approval from the Middle East Technical University Human Subjects Ethics Committee. After Ethics Committee approval, five different instruments were transferred to Google Forms as an online survey. A QR code and a hyperlink were developed for the participants to access the survey. The poster with the QR code that had been prepared for the explanation of the study was shared through various social media platforms, including LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Instagram, with a specific focus on the relevant age group and citizens of the Republic of Türkiye. QR code and hyperlink facilitated access for prospective participants to the Google Forms platform. Completing the survey took approximately 20-25 minutes for each participant. The initial stage of the study involved the presentation of a consent form to the participants. This document provided details regarding the study, such as how long it would take to fill out the survey, the voluntary nature of participation, what is the purpose of the study, the right to participate anonymously, the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point, and the aim of collecting all the information. To access the survey, participants were required to confirm their consent by acknowledging and approving the related area on the consent form. The data recorded in Google Forms was limited to only the individuals who completed each item. The collection of the data lasted from the end of April to the end of June 2025.

3.5. Definition of Variables

In this part, the operational definitions of the variables are presented.

Fear of Intimacy: In the present study, fear of intimacy was measured by the total score of 35 items of the Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS; Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Elibol et al, 2018).

Age: One of the controlled variables of this study was the self-reported chronological age of the participants, obtained from the demographic and relational information form.

Romantic Relationship Status: One of the controlled variables in this study was the self-reported romantic relationship status of the participants, as determined from the demographic and relational information form completed by each participant. The romantic relationship status was initially assessed using multiple categorical response options reflecting their current relationship situations as living together, being engaged, being married, being a couple, being single, being in a relationship for years but not thinking about marriage, being in a relationship for months, and being serious about each other for each participant. However, because the distribution across categories was uneven and did not sufficiently represent group comparisons, the variable was subsequently recoded into two broader categories. Accordingly, romantic relationship status was dummy coded as 0 = not being in a romantic relationship (N = 176) and 1 = being in a romantic relationship (N = 209).

Attachment Styles: Attachment styles were measured by the scores of all three subdimensions collected from 18 items. As individuals' characteristic patterns of emotional bonding and relational behavior, total scores of all the subdimensions are measured by the *Three-Dimensional Attachment Styles Scale* (Erzen, 2016). This predictor variable was formed into three subdimensions- secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent attachment styles- each representing a distinct pattern of relational approach.

Secure Attachment Style: This subdimension was measured by the total score of 6 specific items about secure attachment from the *Three-Dimensional Attachment Styles Scale* (Erzen, 2016).

Avoidant Attachment Style: This subdimension was measured by the total score of 6 specific items about avoidant attachment from the *Three-Dimensional Attachment Styles Scale* (Erzen, 2016).

Anxious- Ambivalent Attachment Style: This subdimension was measured by the total score of 6 specific items about anxious-ambivalent attachment from the Three-Dimensional Attachment Styles Scale (Erzen, 2016).

Rejection Sensitivity: The rejection sensitivity score was measured by the total score of 18 items of the Rejection Sensitivity Scale. The total score of the scale was included with the two parts of the scale, as anxiety items and expectation items, in the analysis.

Experiential Avoidance: It was measured by the *Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale* (MEAQ; Gámez et al., 2011; Yıldırım & Bahtiyar, 2020), which was formed into five subdimensions: avoidance, suppression/distraction, distress endurance, procrastination, and repression/denial.

Avoidance: This subdimension was measured by using the total scores of 21 specific items of the Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale (Yıldırım & Bahtiyar, 2020).

Suppression/Distraction: This subdimension was measured by using the total scores of 8 specific items of the Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale (Yıldırım & Bahtiyar, 2020).

Distress Endurance: This subdimension was measured by using the total scores of 11 specific items of the Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale (Yıldırım & Bahtiyar, 2020).

Procrastination: This subdimension was measured by using the total scores of 12 specific items of the Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale (Yıldırım & Bahtiyar, 2020).

Repression/Denial: This subdimension was measured by using the total score of 7 specific items of the Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Scale (Yıldırım & Bahtiyar, 2020).

3.6. Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between fear of intimacy and other variables, including age, romantic relationship status, attachment styles, experiential avoidance, and rejection sensitivity. First, the dataset was screened to determine usable cases.

After data cleaning, age was analyzed as a continuous variable, relationship status was dummy-coded, and all scale items were coded according to their names and subdimensions. Reliability and descriptive statistics were then calculated, including means, standard deviations, and range. Prior to conducting the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, bivariate correlations were examined, and the relevant statistical assumptions (i.e., normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity) were assessed to ensure the appropriateness of the analysis.

In line with the aim of the study, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to assess how attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance predict fear of intimacy after controlling for age and romantic relationship status. In Model 1, age and relationship status were entered as control variables. In Model 2, attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent) were added. In Model 3, rejection sensitivity was entered. Finally, in Model 4, five subdimensions of experiential avoidance (avoidance, suppression/distraction, procrastination, repression/denial, and distress endurance) were included to examine their additional contribution to the prediction of fear of intimacy among young adults. This procedure provided clearer insights into the predictive power of the main variables beyond the effects of controlled age and romantic relationship status variables.

3.7. Limitations

While the present study contributes meaningfully to the understanding of fear of intimacy, rejection sensitivity, attachment styles, and experiential avoidance, several limitations should be acknowledged, particularly concerning the methodology and sampling processes.

First, collecting data on emotion-based constructs presents unique challenges within psychological counseling and clinical research. Constructs such as fear of intimacy and rejection sensitivity often evoke discomfort, as they require participants to reflect on potentially painful relational experiences. This emotional vulnerability may lead to response distortions due to social desirability bias or defense mechanisms, which can limit the authenticity of self-reports (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Paulhus, 2002). Furthermore, such constructs are inherently subjective and introspective, and the reliability of self-reported data is contingent upon the participants' self-awareness and willingness to disclose sensitive information (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Secondly, the operationalization of the romantic relationship status was a limitation of the present study. Although participants initially reported their relationship statuses using multiple categorical options, reflecting varying levels of relational commitment, these categories were collapsed into two broader groups due to uneven distribution across categories. While this approach facilitated statistical analysis, it may have reduced sensitivity to qualitative differences between distinct relationship types (e.g., dating versus cohabitation or marriage). Consequently, potential variations in fear of intimacy associated with different forms or stages of romantic involvement may not have been fully captured.

Lastly, due to logistical and ethical constraints, data were collected entirely online. While digital platforms enable broad accessibility, remote data collection may compromise environmental control and participant engagement (Benfield & Szlemko, 2006). Without the presence of a researcher, participants may misinterpret items, experience distractions, or prematurely discontinue their participation. Moreover, technical barriers and a lack of digital literacy in certain populations may have further limited the inclusivity of the sample.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this part of the study, the results of the statistical analyses were presented. Preliminary analyses' results of the study were first explained. After that, the descriptive statistics for the variables were presented. Then, the assumption checks of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis and the results were explained. Finally, a summary of the statistical findings was presented.

4.1. Preliminary Analyses of the Study

Given the complexity and sensitivity of hierarchical regression, the diagnostic checks were essential for ensuring the integrity of the results. First, the dataset was screened for missing values. In the Excel that was used for the categorization of the values, there was no missing data. Still, the removed data from the collected answers were as follows: women who are out of the required age group of 19- 42 ($n=24$), participants who did not mention gender ($n=1$), and participants who filled out the form from abroad ($n=30$).

4.2. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the central tendency, dispersion, and distributional properties of the variables included in the study. Table 4.1 presents the means, standard deviations, range, minimum and maximum values, as well as skewness and kurtosis values for each variable.

Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 42 years ($M = 26.47$, $SD = 4.71$). The fear of intimacy scores ranged from 38 to 154 ($M = 80.15$, $SD = 24.63$). Secure attachment

scores ranged from 7 to 25 ($M = 19.78$, $SD = 3.23$). In contrast, Avoidant attachment ($M = 13.73$, $SD = 5.38$) showed a non-normal distribution. Anxious-ambivalent attachment scores ranged from 6 to 30 ($M = 16.21$, $SD = 6.02$). Similarly, rejection sensitivity ($M = 149.44$, $SD = 65.92$) demonstrated moderate normality, with a wide range from 18 to 542. Experiential avoidance ($M = 73.60$, $SD = 19.06$) and its subdimensions (Suppression/Distraction, Distress Endurance, Procrastination, and Repression/Denial) also demonstrated broad variability across participants.

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics of Predictor and Criterion Variables (N= 385)

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Actual Range	Potential Range
Age	26.47	4.71	0.72	0.11	19-42	19-42
Fear of Intimacy	80.15	24.63	0.53	-0.35	38-154	35-175
Secure Attachment	19.78	3.23	-0.56	0.33	7-25	6-30
Avoidant Attachment	13.73	5.38	1.09	1.12	7-25	6-30
Anxious-Ambivalent Attachment	16.21	6.02	0.39	-0.63	6-30	6-30
Rejection Sensitivity	149.44	65.92	1.53	5.64	18-542	18-648
Avoidance	73.60	19.06	-0.17	-0.25	23-121	21-126
Suppression/ Distraction	30.55	8.97	-0.24	-0.53	8-48	8-48
Distress Endurance	43.84	9.69	-0.01	-0.30	14-66	11-66
Procrastination	25.40	7.80	0.05	-0.66	7-42	7-42
Repression/Denial	35.20	11.73	0.42	-0.24	13-69	12-72

4.3. Bivariate Correlation Matrices of the Variables

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analyses were conducted to examine the associations between predictor variables (age, romantic relationship status, attachment styles, experiential avoidance, rejection sensitivity) and the criterion variable (fear of intimacy). The results are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Bivariate Pearson Correlation Matrix Among Study Variables (N = 385)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	—	.19**	.14**	-.15**	-.12*	-.10	.09	.10	-.17**	.00	-.10	.04
2. Relationship status (0 = none, 1 = yes)		—	.15**	-.05	-.05	-.04	.09	.02	-.11*	-.04	-.11*	-.04
3. Secure attachment			—	-.30**	-.25**	.26**	.06	.28**	-.18**	-.32**	-.24**	-.24**
4. Avoidant attachment				—	.34**	-.07	.13**	.09	.08	.30**	.07	-.07
5. Anxious/ambivalent attachment					—	.25**	.10	.09	.38**	.47**	.33**	.59**
6. Avoidance						—	.57**	-.21**	.36**	.39**	.11	.21**
7. Suppression/Distractio							—	-.50**	-.36**	-.49**	-.19**	-.25**
8. Distress Endurance								—	.50**	.49**	.26**	.40**
9. Procrastination									—	.49**	.23**	.46**
10. Repression/Denial										—	.38**	.52**
11. Rejection sensitivity											—	.48**
12. Fear of Intimacy												—

Note. Values are Pearson correlation coefficients. $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$.

Based on Cohen's (1988) general guidelines for interpreting effect sizes—where small, medium, and large correlations fall roughly around the .10, .30, and .50 ranges—the data indicated that the most pronounced positive association in the study was between anxious–ambivalent attachment and fear of intimacy ($r = .59$, $p < .01$), avoidance and suppression/distractio ($r = .57$, $p < .01$), suppression/distractio and rejection sensitivity ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), suppression/distractio and fear of intimacy ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), distress endurance and procrastination ($r = .50$, $p < .01$), and repression/denial and fear of intimacy ($r = .52$, $p < .01$). On the other hand, the strongest and negative correlations in the dataset were observed between suppression/distractio and distress endurance ($r = -.50$, $p < .01$) and suppression/distractio and procrastination ($r = -.49$, $p < .01$). Relationship status was positively and weakly associated with secure attachment ($r = .15$, $p < .01$). Secure attachment was negatively and moderately related to avoidant ($r = -.30$, $p < .01$).

.01) and negatively and weakly related to anxious/ambivalent attachment ($r = -.25, p < .01$), and positively and moderately correlated with suppression/distraction ($r = .28, p < .01$).

However, relationship status has no significant correlation with the avoidance, suppression/distraction, distress endurance and repression/denial, fear of intimacy, anxious- ambivalent attachment style and avoidant attachment style. Also, age had no significant correlation with avoidance, suppression/distraction, repression/denial, fear of intimacy, and rejection sensitivity. On the other hand, age was positively and weakly correlated with relationship status ($r = .19, p < .01$) and secure attachment ($r = .14, p < .01$), and negatively, and weakly correlated with avoidant attachment ($r = -.15, p < .01$) and anxious/ambivalent attachment ($r = -.12, p < .05$).

Avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment were positively and moderately correlated ($r = .34, p < .01$). Notably, anxious/ambivalent attachment was positively and moderately correlated with rejection ($r = .33, p < .01$) and positively and strongly correlated with fear of intimacy ($r = .59, p < .01$).

4.4. Testing Assumptions for Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Before conducting Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis to predict the dependent variable, fear of intimacy score, it was essential to examine whether the core assumptions of linear regression were met. Given the large size of the target population, the determination of sample size was guided by statistical power considerations rather than population-based proportion estimation.

The required sample size was calculated using “GPower 3.1.” (Faul et al., 2009) for a hierarchical multiple regression analysis with five predictors. Assuming a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), an alpha level of .05, and a desired statistical power of .95, the analysis indicated that a minimum sample size of approximately 204 participants was required (Faul et al., 2009). The final sample of 385 participants exceeded this requirement, thereby ensuring sufficient statistical power, stable parameter estimates, and enhanced generalizability of the findings within the target population. Also,

skewness and kurtosis values were examined. According to Kline (2016), skewness values greater than $|2|$ and kurtosis values greater than $|7|$ indicate severe deviations from normality. The results showed that all variables remained within these limits, suggesting no severe violations. For most constructs, skewness falls within ± 1 and kurtosis within ± 2 , which points to distributions that are generally consistent with normality.

Other variables, such as Anxious-ambivalent attachment, Avoidance, Suppression/Distraction, Distress Endurance, Procrastination, and Repression/Denial, were approximately normally distributed, with skewness and kurtosis values falling within acceptable limits (± 1 for skewness and ± 2 for kurtosis), except for slight deviations in Suppression/Distraction and Repression/Denial. For regression analysis where assumptions are more sensitive, further examination (e.g., histogram, Q-Q plot, or transformation) was also conducted to verify that the assumptions were reasonably met. Furthermore, the examination of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values indicated no evidence of problematic multicollinearity. These diagnostics ensure that the statistical inference drawn from the regression model is valid, reliable, and generalizable (Cohen et al., 2013).

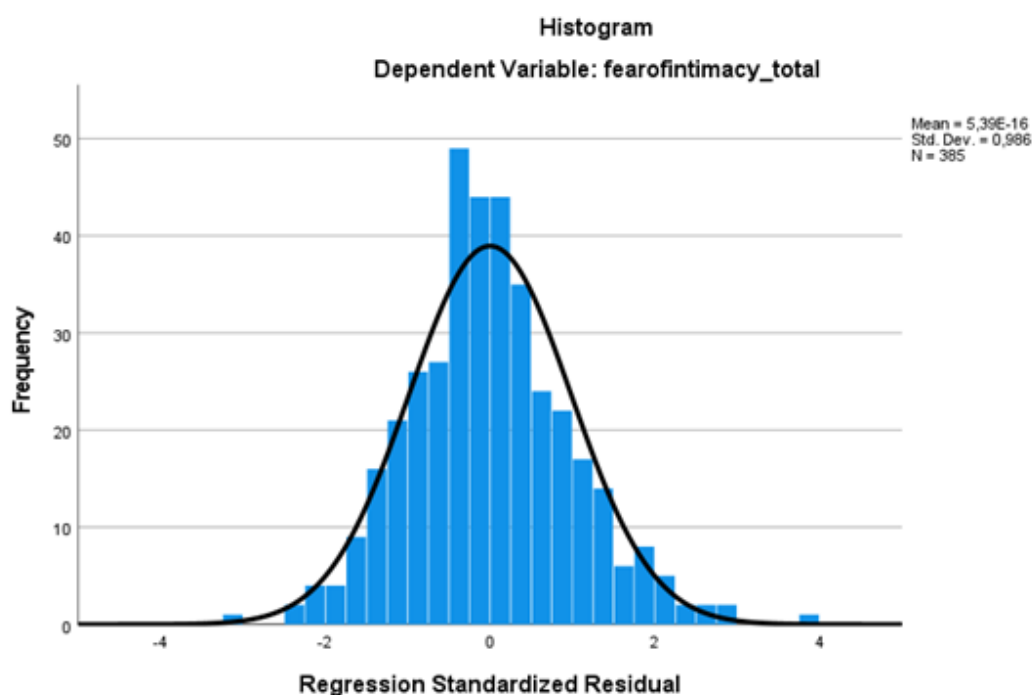


Figure 4.1. Histogram showing the normality of residuals

The normality assumption requires that the residuals of a regression model follow a normal distribution. Meeting this condition ensures the accuracy of inferential procedures, such as confidence intervals, significance testing, and parameter estimation, since these rely on normally distributed errors for valid statistical inference (Gel et al., 2005).

The histogram of regression shown in Figure 4.1 is standardized residuals displaying a symmetric, bell-shaped curve, closely approximating the shape of a normal distribution. The frequency of residuals is highest near the center (around zero) and tapers off symmetrically towards both tails. This visual pattern is consistent with a normal distribution. The statistical summary in the top-right of the graph further supports this: the mean of the standardized residuals is virtually zero ($M = 5.39 \times 10^{-16}$), and the standard deviation is very close to 1 ($SD = 0.986$), which is expected for standardized residuals in a well-fitting model (Cohen et al., 2013; Wilkinson et al., 1999).

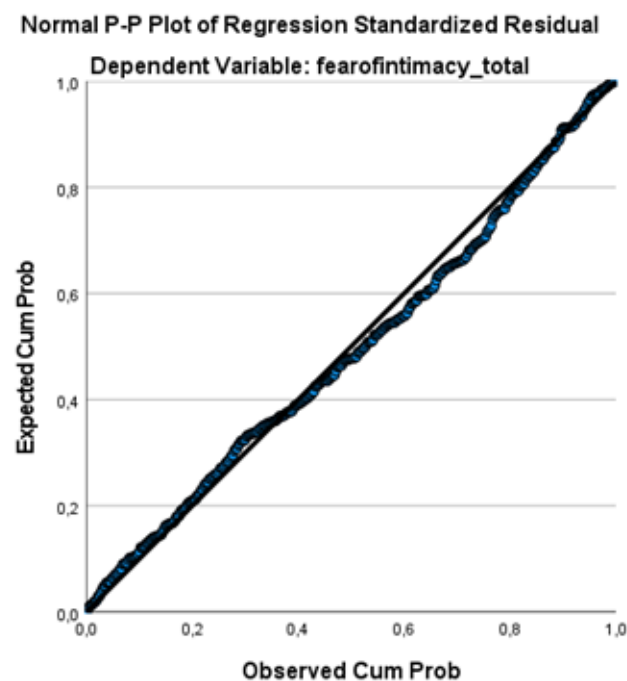


Figure 4.2. Plot showing the distribution of the residuals

The normal probability plot of regression standardized residuals shows data points closely aligned with the diagonal line representing the expected cumulative

probability under a normal distribution, presented in Figure 4.2. Minor deviations are present at the extremes, but the overall alignment suggests that the residuals are approximately normally distributed. The linear trend indicates that the assumption of normality is reasonably satisfied (Cortina, 1993; Wilkinson et al., 1999). The combined evidence from these two plots suggests that the distribution of residuals does not deviate significantly from normality, thereby supporting the use of parametric tests and the overall validity of the regression analysis.

The independence of residuals was examined using the Durbin–Watson statistic. Values close to 2 indicate no autocorrelation, whereas values approaching 0 or 4 reflect positive or negative autocorrelation, respectively (Benjamin et al., 2018; Durbin & Watson, 1950). Across the four regression models, Durbin–Watson values ranged from 1.86 to 1.87, which falls within the acceptable range of 1.5–2.5, suggesting that the assumption of independence of errors was met.

Additionally, model fit was evaluated through the Standard Error of the Estimate (SEE). Lower SEE values indicate better model fit (Benjamin et al., 2018). In the present analysis, SEE values progressively decreased across models, from 21.94 in Model 1 to 16.53 in Model 4, demonstrating improved predictive accuracy with the inclusion of additional predictors.

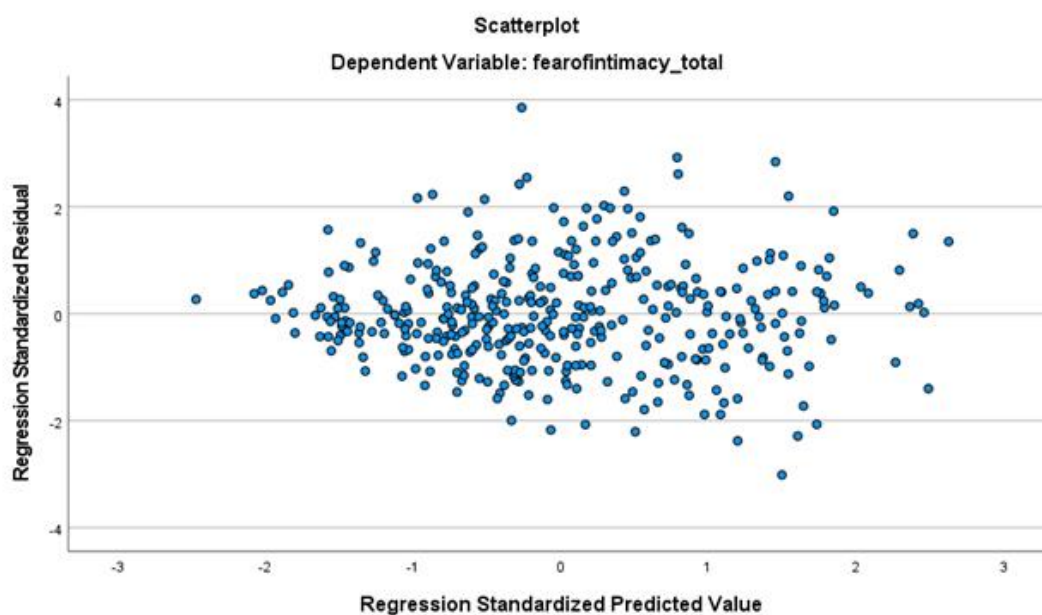


Figure 4.3. Distribution of the homoscedasticity of residuals

Linearity and homoscedasticity were assessed by examining the scatterplot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values (Figure 4.3).

A key assumption of multiple linear regression is that there is a linear relationship between each predictor and the dependent variable. While this is often tested through partial regression plots or component-plus-residual plots, the scatterplot of residuals versus predicted values can also provide indirect evidence. In the current analysis, the absence of systematic curves or non-linear patterns in the residual plot suggests that the linearity assumption is adequately met.

As Osborne and Waters (2002) stated, homoscedasticity refers to the assumption that the variance of residuals is constant across all levels of the independent variables. The scatterplot shows that the residuals are randomly dispersed around zero and form a roughly horizontal band across the range of predicted values. There is no visible funneling or clustering, which would indicate heteroscedasticity (Osborne & Waters, 2002).

Multicollinearity diagnostics for the final hierarchical regression model (Model 4) revealed VIF values ranging from 1.038 (Age) to 1.976 (Repression/Denial), corresponding to shared variance due to multicollinearity between 9.7% and 49.4%. All VIF values were below the commonly cited cut-off of 5 (Hair et al., 2020), suggesting that multicollinearity was not a severe concern. Thus, predictors operated independently and did not pose estimation issues for the analysis.

4.5. Findings of the Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether age, relationship status, attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance predicted fear of intimacy. The variables were entered in four blocks as Model 1: age, relationship status, Model 2: secure attachment, avoidant attachment, anxious/ambivalent attachment, Model 3: rejection sensitivity, Model 4: subdimensions of experiential avoidance as avoidance, distraction/suppression, distress endurance, procrastination, and repression/denial. The criterion variable is

fear of intimacy. The coefficients, standard errors, standardized beta values, and significance levels for each model are reported below.

Table 4.3. The Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables	B	SE	β	t	R ²	ΔR^2	Adjusted R ²
Model 1					.210*	.210*	.206*
Age	-0.08	0.24	-0.01	-0.31			
Relationship status	-22.51	2.29	-0.46	-9.84***			
Model 2					.468*	.258*	.461*
Secure attachment	-1.42	0.30	-0.19	-4.75***			
Avoidant attachment	0.24	0.19	0.05	1.28			
Anxious/ambivalent attachment	1.76	0.18	0.43	10.02***			
Model 3					.499*	.031*	.491*
Rejection sensitivity	0.07	0.02	0.19	4.81***			
Model 4					.562*	.063*	.550*
Avoidance	-0.11	0.06	-0.09	-1.82			
Suppression/Distraction	0.02	0.12	0.01	0.14			
Distress Endurance	-0.26	0.10	-0.10	-2.61**			
Procrastination	0.15	0.14	0.05	1.12			
Repression/Denial	0.55	0.10	0.26	5.48***			

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient. Relationship status 0 = not having a romantic relationship, 1= having a romantic relationship

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$.

In this last part, all the models are represented together in Table 4.3. To investigate the predictors of fear of intimacy, a four-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. The criterion variable in all models was the total fear of intimacy score. Predictor variables were entered in a theoretically guided sequence. Demographic variables (age and current romantic relationship status) were entered in

Model 1; attachment dimensions (secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent) in Model 2; rejection sensitivity in Model 3; and multidimensional experiential avoidance subdimensions (avoidance, suppression/distraction, distress endurance, repression/denial, and procrastination) in Model 4.

In Model 1, age and relationship status were included in the analysis. This model accounted for 21.0% of the variance in fear of intimacy, $R^2 = .21$, and was statistically significant, $F(2, 382) = 50.92, p < .001$. Relationship status was a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.46, p < .001$), indicating that individuals currently in a romantic relationship reported lower levels of fear of intimacy compared to those not in a relationship.

In Model 2, the increase in explained variance to 46.8% was significant ($R^2 = .26$). The variables added to the analysis were secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent attachment styles. The model was significant, $F(5, 379) = 66.75, p < .001$. Secure attachment negatively predicted fear of intimacy ($\beta = -.19, p < .001$), avoidant attachment was non-significant as a predictor for fear of intimacy ($\beta = .05, p < .001$), while anxious/ambivalent attachment positively predicted it ($\beta = .43, p < .001$). These results suggest that lower secure attachment and higher anxious/ambivalent attachment are associated with greater fear of intimacy.

In Model 3, the change in explained variance was relatively small ($R^2 = .03$). The variables introduced in this step of the analysis were rejection sensitivity, which yielded an additional significant increase in explained variance, bringing the total to 49.9%. This model was significant, $F(6, 378) = 62.72, p < .001$. Rejection sensitivity positively and significantly predicted fear of intimacy ($\beta = .19, p < .001$), indicating that individuals who were more sensitive to rejection tended to report higher fear of intimacy.

In Model 4, the change in explained variance was modest but statistically meaningful ($R^2 = .06$). The variables added to the analysis included emotion regulation variables (avoidance, suppression/distraction, distress endurance, procrastination, and repression/denial). This final model explained 56.2% of the variance in fear of

intimacy, and was significant, $F(11, 373) = 43.59, p < .001$. Significant predictors included age ($\beta = .10, p < .01$), relationship status ($\beta = -.30, p < .001$), later anxious/ambivalent attachment ($\beta = .30, p < .001$), rejection sensitivity ($\beta = .17, p < .001$), distress endurance ($\beta = -.10, p < .01$), and repression/denial ($\beta = .26, p < .001$). Secure and avoidant attachment, avoidance, suppression/distraction, and procrastination did not significantly predict fear of intimacy in the final model.

Taken together, these results indicated that fear of intimacy was primarily associated with anxious/ambivalent attachment style, higher use of repression/denial strategies, greater rejection sensitivity, not being in a romantic relationship, lower distress endurance, and older age. The progressive increase in explained variance across models highlights the increasing contribution of attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and emotion regulation processes in understanding fear of intimacy.

4.6. Summary of the Results

The present study examined the predictors of fear of intimacy using a four-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Preliminary analyses indicated that the data met the assumptions required for regression analysis, allowing the findings to be interpreted with confidence. Overall, the final model was statistically meaningful and demonstrated strong explanatory power, accounting for a substantial proportion of the variance in fear of intimacy.

Across the models, several variables emerged as significant predictors of fear of intimacy. Among attachment dimensions, anxious-ambivalent attachment consistently showed the strongest association, indicating that individuals with heightened attachment-related anxiety tend to experience greater discomfort and apprehension in emotionally close relationships. Rejection sensitivity also remained as a strong predictor, suggesting that a heightened expectation and concern about rejection contribute meaningfully to fear of intimacy.

In terms of experiential avoidance, specific emotion regulation strategies played a notable role. Repression and denial emerged as one of the most influential predictors,

indicating that suppressing or distancing oneself from emotional experiences is closely linked to greater fear of closeness. Distress endurance was also associated with fear of intimacy, suggesting that individuals' capacity to tolerate emotional distress is relevant to how they navigate intimacy-related challenges.

Although age did not show a consistent effect in earlier models, it became a meaningful predictor in the final model, pointing a tendency for increased self-protectiveness in intimate contexts as individuals get older. Romantic relationship status also contributed to the model, indicating that not being in a relationship may intensify intimacy-related emotional processes for women.

Taken together, the findings highlight the combined importance of attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance strategies in understanding fear of intimacy. The results underscore that fear of intimacy is shaped not by a single factor, but by the interplay of relational expectations and emotion regulation processes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the study findings, situating them within existing theoretical and empirical literature on attachment, rejection sensitivity, experiential avoidance, and fear of intimacy. The discussion begins by examining the predictive role of demographic factors and attachment dimensions in shaping fear of intimacy, followed by an analysis of how rejection sensitivity and multidimensional experiential avoidance contribute to intimacy-related difficulties. The chapter further explores the theoretical and practical implications of these findings, highlighting how cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes interact to influence relational functioning among young adult women in Türkiye. Finally, directions for future research are proposed to guide subsequent investigations into the psychological mechanisms underlying fear of intimacy and related interpersonal challenges.

5.1. Discussion of the Findings

The present study was designed to explore how attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance contribute to the fear of intimacy among young women in Türkiye. Drawing upon attachment theory (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1982) and from a grounded perspective in the experiential avoidance model proposed by Hayes et al, (1996), the study sought to examine how early attachment experiences and individual coping mechanisms influence adults' ability to engage in emotional intimacy. As outlined in the introduction, fear of intimacy is defined as an inhibited ability to share personally significant thoughts and feelings due to anxiety about closeness or rejection (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). This study sought to understand the underlying mechanisms of this fear within a culturally

relevant context, emphasizing how attachment dimensions (anxious, avoidant, and secure), rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance predict intimacy-related difficulties.

Overall, the results partially supported the theoretical propositions. Individuals with higher levels of attachment anxiety, greater rejection sensitivity, and stronger tendencies toward experiential avoidance were more likely to experience fear of intimacy. Conversely, secure attachment and adaptive emotion regulation strategies were generally associated with lower fear of intimacy, although some variables, including secure and avoidant attachment, avoidance, suppression/distraction, and procrastination, did not significantly predict fear of intimacy in the current sample. This result might be related to the specific characteristics of the sample, which consisted primarily of young adult women between 23 and 27, many of whom were not currently in romantic relationships. Such demographic factors could influence the expression of intimacy fears, as previous research indicates that fear of intimacy may be particularly salient for individuals with limited recent romantic experience (Olsson et al., 2023; Pepping et al., 2014).

Furthermore, these findings are largely consistent with prior empirical studies linking attachment anxiety and avoidance-based coping to fear of intimacy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kashdan et al., 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), while also highlighting nuanced discrepancies. For example, although avoidance-oriented strategies such as suppression or procrastination have been associated with intimacy difficulties in other contexts (Boulanger et al., 2010), they did not significantly predict fear of intimacy in the present sample, suggesting that these mechanisms may interact with contextual or demographic factors, such as age, relational history, or cultural norms, which were emphasized in prior Turkish samples (Sümer et al., 2009). By integrating these empirical comparisons, the discussion provides a more comprehensive understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral mechanisms underlying fear of intimacy among young adult women.

The results of this study offer a detailed perspective on the interplay between attachment orientations and experiential avoidance in shaping fear of intimacy. As

anticipated, anxious/ambivalent attachment style was identified as a significant predictor. In line with Mikulincer and Shaver's (2016, 2020) framework, individuals with anxious attachment exhibit pronounced concerns about abandonment and excessive reliance on others, which may amplify rejection sensitivity and hinder authentic emotional closeness. These patterns are consistent with earlier research indicating that insecure attachment can compromise trust, openness in self-disclosure, and overall satisfaction within romantic partnerships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Pepping et al., 2014).

Rejection sensitivity refers to a cognitive-affective tendency in which individuals anxiously anticipate, readily perceive, and intensely respond to perceived or actual rejection from others. This heightened sensitivity has been shown to amplify fear of intimacy, as individuals who expect rejection often adopt defensive or avoidant behaviors that reinforce relational distancing, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of social withdrawal and emotional inhibition (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Such mechanisms may be particularly pronounced in cultural contexts like Türkiye, where relational interdependence and familial expectations strongly influence romantic attachment patterns (Sümer et al., 2009). Individuals who internalize rigid norms about emotional expression or relational control may thus experience heightened conflict between the desire for closeness and the fear of vulnerability.

Consistent with the theoretical framework of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, experiential avoidance has been identified as a significant antecedent of fear of intimacy. Individuals who habitually suppress or avoid unwanted internal experiences tend to exhibit greater discomfort with emotional closeness and vulnerability (Boulanger et al., 2010; Hayes et al., 1996). Individuals who exhibit high levels of experiential avoidance often attempt to inhibit or suppress distressing thoughts and emotions. While such strategies may provide temporary relief, they tend to limit emotional expressiveness and reduce the capacity for close interpersonal connection (Gerhart et al., 2014; Kashdan et al., 2006). This pattern aligns with avoidant coping observed in attachment theory, suggesting that avoidance operates both as a protective defense and as a maladaptive regulatory strategy. These results collectively indicate that fear of intimacy is not a singular construct but a multi-

determined phenomenon influenced by attachment insecurities, cognitive distortions about rejection, and avoidance-based emotional regulation. The convergence of these dimensions underscores that difficulties in intimacy often stem not only from external relational experiences but also from internalized beliefs and learned avoidance patterns. In this sense, the study contributes to the growing body of research that integrates attachment theory and third-wave behavioral approaches to explain interpersonal dysfunction.

5.2. Implications for Theory and Practice

Theoretically, this study reinforces the relevance of attachment theory as a framework for understanding adult intimacy. It extends the literature by empirically linking attachment styles and experiential avoidance, concepts historically explored in separate traditions. The integration of these constructs supports the notion that fear of intimacy emerges from both early relational experiences and current cognitive-affective processes. While attachment theory explains the origins of relational insecurity, experiential avoidance clarifies how individuals maintain and reinforce these patterns in adulthood.

Secondly, by demonstrating the combined predictive power of attachment insecurity, rejection sensitivity, and experiential avoidance, the study refines theoretical models of intimacy. It suggests that fear of intimacy is best understood as an interactional process between relational expectations and internal emotion regulation tendencies. This multidimensional model provides a more holistic framework for understanding interpersonal difficulties and offers a foundation for future empirical testing.

From an applied standpoint, the findings offer meaningful guidance for clinical and educational practices. For practitioners working with young adult women, it is crucial to conceptualize fear of intimacy not simply as relational withdrawal but as an interplay between attachment-related insecurity and avoidance-oriented coping strategies. Incorporating therapeutic components that target experiential avoidance, such as mindfulness-based, acceptance-based, and emotion-focused interventions can strengthen individuals' emotional openness and ability to form close, supportive relationships (Hayes et al., 1996; Wong et al., 2018).

In therapeutic contexts, fostering secure attachment representations can be a corrective emotional experience. Therapists/counselors can intentionally model consistent, empathetic, and attuned interactions, helping clients reframe beliefs about rejection and develop greater tolerance for emotional exposure. These approaches may be particularly beneficial for individuals exhibiting high attachment anxiety or avoidance, as they address both the cognitive and affective dimensions of intimacy fear.

5.3. Recommendations for Further Research

The current findings point to several promising directions for future investigation into intimacy fears, attachment processes, and their underlying emotional-cognitive mechanisms. Future studies should focus on how therapeutic modalities such as Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT; Greenman & Johnson, 2022) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Harris, 2007; Hayes, 2011) can be adapted for individuals characterized by high experiential avoidance, emotional inhibition, or rigid attributional patterns. Within the context of fear of intimacy, ACT may be particularly suitable as it directly targets experiential avoidance by promoting acceptance of internal experiences, reducing avoidance-based coping, and increasing individuals' capacity to remain in emotional contact with vulnerability-related thoughts and feelings. By fostering psychological flexibility and cognitive defusion, ACT may support individuals in engaging more openly in emotionally close relationships despite discomfort (ACT; Harris, 2007; Hayes, 2011). Similarly, EFT may address fear of intimacy by intervening in attachment-related emotional processes, facilitating access to primary emotions, and restructuring maladaptive relational patterns that maintain emotional distance and withdrawal (EFT; Greenman & Johnson, 2022). Empirical exploration of interventions that enhance emotion regulation, mentalization, and reflective functioning may clarify how such approaches reduce fear-based avoidance and improve relational functioning among young adult women (Santoro et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024).

Another important area of the study looks at how our early relationships affect how we interact with our current romantic partners (Andersen & Cole, 1990). According

to adult attachment theory, individuals develop internal working models that extend from broad relational expectations to beliefs specific to their romantic partners (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006, 2007). However, the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying the transfer of early attachment patterns to adult relationships, particularly among those exhibiting high levels of rejection sensitivity or experiential avoidance, remain insufficiently examined. Longitudinal and experimental approaches could clarify how these internal representations persist, re-emerge, and transform across developmental periods, thereby informing more effective preventive and therapeutic practices.

Future research could also consider psychological processes that may complement the variables examined in the present study. Although these constructs were not included in the current model, factors such as self-regulation, affect regulation, and cognitive flexibility might provide additional insight into how individuals manage perceived rejection and intimacy-related concerns. Exploring these processes in future work, without proposing a new model, could help clarify whether they play an indirect or supportive role in relation to the patterns identified here. Similarly, examining abilities such as mentalization and adaptive attributional tendencies may further illuminate how individuals develop healthier relational functioning and reduce reliance on avoidance-based coping strategies (Clarke et al., 2020).

Comparative studies represent another critical area for inquiry. Variations in relational norms, emotional expression, and caregiving practices may shape the development and maintenance of intimacy-related fears. Comparing individuals across cultural contexts, as well as examining relational status (e.g., single versus partnered), could identify moderating factors that either exacerbate or attenuate attachment-related vulnerabilities.

Methodologically, future studies could draw on mixed-method approaches to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the processes examined in this research. For instance, qualitative tools such as in-depth interviews or observational methods may help capture the experiential and relational dynamics underlying participants' intimacy-related concerns, which are difficult to access through self-report alone.

Likewise, physiological or behavioral indicators could offer complementary evidence regarding the emotional and regulatory processes associated with fear of intimacy and avoidance-based coping. Employing these methods, together with more demographically diverse samples, would allow future work to assess these constructs in a broader and more ecologically valid manner.

Finally, preventive and applied research targeting early relational contexts is warranted. Educational initiatives for caregivers, attachment-informed assessment tools in clinical and community settings, and structured interventions promoting secure relational experiences could mitigate later vulnerability to intimacy fears. Empirical evaluation of these programs would provide valuable evidence for the design of interventions that foster emotional resilience, enhance interpersonal competence, and support the development of secure, satisfying relationships across the lifespan.

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APPENDICES

A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
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Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu 21 MART 2025

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Prof. Dr. Zeynep Hatipoğlu Sümer

Danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz Selin Altun'un "*Genç Yetişkinlerde Yakınlık Korkusu: Yaşantısal Kaçınma, Reddedilme Duyarlılığı ve Bağlanma Stillerinin Rolü*" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek 0178-ODTÜİAEK-2025 protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır. Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.

Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN
Başkan

Prof. Dr. İ. Semih AKÇOMAK
Üye

Doç. Dr. Ali Emre Turgut
Üye

Doç. Dr. Aslı KILIÇ ÖZHAN
Üye

Doç. Dr. Murat Perit ÇAKIR
Üye

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Duygu ÖZGE
Üye

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Müge GÜNDÜZ
Üye

B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM IN TURKISH

Bu araştırma, ODTÜ Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık Programı Yüksek Lisans öğrencisi Selin Altun tarafından Prof. Dr. Zeynep Hatipoğlu Sümer danışmanlığındaki yüksek lisans tezi kapsamında yürütülmektedir. Bu form sizi araştırma koşulları hakkında bilgilendirmek için hazırlanmıştır.

Çalışmanın Amacı Nedir?

Araştırmanın amacı, yaşantısal kaçınma, reddedilme duyarlılığı ve bağlanma stillerinin Türkiye’deki genç yetişkin katılımcılarda yakınlık korkusunu ne ölçüde yordadığını belirlemektir.

Bize Nasıl Yardımcı Olmanızı İsteyeceğiz?

Araştırmaya katılmayı kabul ederseniz, sizden beklenen, anketlerde yer alan soruları derecelendirme ölçeği üzerinde yanıtlamanızdır. Bu çalışmaya katılım ortalama olarak 20 - 25 dakika sürmektedir.

Sizden Topladığımız Bilgileri Nasıl Kullanacağız?

Araştırmaya katılımınız tamamen gönüllülük temelinde olmalıdır. Ankette, sizden kimlik veya kurum belirleyici hiçbir bilgi istenmemektedir. Cevaplarınız tamamıyla gizli tutulacak, sadece araştırmacı tarafından değerlendirilecektir. Katılımcılardan elde edilecek bilgiler toplu halde değerlendirilecek ve bilimsel yayımlarda kullanılacaktır.

Katılımınızla ilgili bilmeniz gerekenler:

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 bırakıp çıkmakta serbestsiniz. Böyle bir durumda anketi uygulayan kişiye, anketi tamamlamadığınızı söylemek yeterli olacaktır.

Arařtırmayla ilgili daha fazla bilgi almak isterseniz:

Anket sonunda, bu alıřmayla ilgili sorularınızı iletebileceėiniz bir mail adresi bulunacaktır. Bu alıřmaya katıldığınız iin řimdiden teřekkr ederiz. alıřma hakkında daha fazla bilgi almak iin yksek lisans ėrencisi Selin Altun' (E-posta:) ile iletiřim kurabilirsiniz.

Yukarıdaki bilgileri okudum ve bu alıřmaya tamamen gnll olarak katılıyorum.



C. DEMOGRAPHIC AND RELATIONAL INFORMATION FORM

Yaş :

Cinsiyet : ☐ Kadın ☐ Erkek

Eğitim durumu: ☐ İlkokul ☐ Ortaokul ☐ Lise ☐ Üniversite

☐ Yüksek lisans/Doktora

Gelir Düzeyi: ☐ Düşük ☐ Orta ☐ Yüksek

İlişki durumu : ☐ İlişkisi var ☐ İlişkisi yok

D. FEAR OF INTIMACY SCALE IN TURKISH

1	2	3	4	5
Hiç bana uygun bir özellik değil	Bana biraz uygun bir özellik	Orta derecede bana uygun bir özellik	Bana oldukça uygun bir özellik	Kesinlikle bana uygun bir özellik

A Bölümü için Yönerge: Yakın bir duygusal ilişkide olduğunuzu düşünün. Aşağıdaki ifadeleri *söz konusu yakın ilişkideymişsiniz gibi* cevaplayın. Her bir ifadenin size uygun bir özellik olma derecesini yukarıda belirtilen 1’den 5’e kadar olan ölçek üzerinden puanlayın ve yanıtınızı cevap kağıdına yazın.

Not: Her bir ifadedeki “O” sizinle yakın ilişki içinde olan kişiyi ifade etmektedir.

____ “O”na, benim için utanç verici olan geçmişteki şeyleri anlatırken kendimi rahatsız hissedebilirim.

____ “O”nunla, beni derinden yaralayan bir şey hakkında konuşmaktan huzursuzluk duyabilirim.

____ “O”na gerçek duygularımı ifade etme konusunda kendimi rahat hissedebilirim.

____ Eğer “O” üzgünse, onu önemseydiğimi göstermekten bazen korkabilirim.

____ “O”na en içten duygularımı açmaktan korkabilirim.

B Bölümü için Yönerge: Aşağıdaki ifadeleri, geçmiş ilişkilerinizi göz önünde bulundurarak yanıtlayın. Her bir ifadenin size olan uygunluğunu A Bölümü’nün yönergesinde anlatıldığı gibi 1’den 5’e kadar olan ölçek üzerinden derecelendirin.

____ Biriyle yakın olmaya ilişkin fırsatlardan kaçındım.

____ Önceki ilişkilerimde duygularımı içimde tuttum.

E. THREE DIMENSIONAL ATTACHMENT STYLES SCALE IN TURKISH

Aşağıda sizinle ilgili ifadeler bulunmaktadır. Lütfen her bir maddeyi dikkatlice okuyunuz ve sizi en iyi tanımlayan seçeneği işaretleyiniz. Doğru ya da yanlış cevap yoktur. Sizden beklenen içtenlikle cevap vererek bilimsel bir çalışmaya yardımcı olmanız. Lütfen bütün sorularla ilgili görüşlerinizi ifade ediniz. Katkılarınız için teşekkürler. 1= Kesinlikle katılmıyorum 2= Katılmıyorum 3=Kısmen katılıyorum 4=Katılıyorum 5=Kesinlikle katılıyorum anlamına gelmektedir.					
1. Karşımdaki insanlar benim kadar değerli değiller.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Birisiyle çok fazla samimi olduğumda sorun çıkabileceğinden kaygılanıyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Karar alırken kimseyi önemsemem.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Sorunu olan birisini gördüğümde kendimi onun yerine koyabiliyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Başkalarının benim kadar değerli olduklarını düşünmüyorum.	1	2	3	4	5

F. MULTIDIMENSIONAL EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE SCALE IN TURKISH

Lütfen aşağıdaki maddelere ne derecede katıldığınızı ya da katılmadığınızı her maddenin yanında ayrılan alanda belirtiniz.

1. Hiç katılmıyorum
2. Kısmen katılmıyorum
3. Biraz katılmıyorum
4. Biraz katılıyorum
5. Kısmen katılıyorum
6. Tamamen katılıyorum

	1 Hiç katı lmı yor um	2 Kıs men Katıl mıyo rum	3 Bir az katı lmı yor um	4 Bir az katı lıyo rum	5 Kıs me n Kat ılıy oru m	6 Tama men katılı yorum
1. Acı verici anılarımın tümünü sihirli bir silebilecek olsaydım, bunu yapardım.						
2. Üzücü bir şey olduğu zaman, onun hakkında düşünmemek için çok çabalarım.						
3. Yapılması gereken hoş olmayan şeyleri erteleme eğilimindeyim.						
4. İnsanlar korkularıyla yüzleşmelidir.						

5. Mutluluk, hiçbir zaman acı ya da hayal kırıklığı hissetmemek demektir.						
6. Düşük de olsa, zarar görme ihtimalinin olduğu aktivitelerden kaçınırım.						
7. Olumsuz düşünceler aklıma geldiğinde, zihnimi başka şeylerle meşgul etmeye çalışırım.						
8. İnsanların bana inkâr içinde olduğunu söylediği zamanlar oldu.						
9. Bazen zorluklarla karşılaşmaktan kaçınmak için işlerimi ertelerim.						
10. Rahatsız hissetsem bile, değer verdiğim şeyler için çalışmaktan vazgeçmem.						

G. REJECTION SENSITIVITY SCALE IN TURKISH

YÖNERGE. Aşağıdaki her bir madde genelde üniversite öğrencilerinin bazen diğer kişilerden talep ettiği şeyleri tanımlamaktadır. Lütfen, her bir durumda/koşulda bulunduğunuzu düşünün ve cevaplarınızı ona göre verin. Her bir soruda, sizin için uygun olan numarayı daire içine alarak işaretlemeleri yapınız.

Maddeleri değerlendirirken, karşınızdaki kişinin (örneğin, bir hocanız veya bir arkadaşınızla ilgili olan maddelerde) lütfen belirli bir kişiyi değil, **ORTALAMA BİR KİŞİYİ DÜŞÜNEREK** yanıt veriniz.

Araştırma, **özel kişilere karşı olan tutumlarınızı değil, GENEL TUTUMLARINIZI** incelemektedir.

Her bir maddenin ardından gelen şu soruları yanıtlamanız beklenmektedir:

- 1) Başkalarının size tepkisi konusunda ne kadar **endişe eder veya kaygı duvarsınız?**
- 2) İlgili durumda diğer kişilerin ne tür tepki verebileceğini düşünürsünüz?

1. Sınıftaki birine notlarını ödünç alıp alamayacağınızı soruyorsunuz.

- Kişinin notlarını vermek isteyip istemeyebileceği ile ilgili olarak ne kadar **endişe eder veya kaygı duvarsınız?**

Hiç endişelenmem / Kaygı duymam Çok endişelenirim / Kaygı duyarım
1 2 3 4 5 6

- Bu kişinin notlarını bana isteyerek vermesini beklerdim.

Çok küçük ihtimalle Çok büyük ihtimalle
1 2 3 4 5 6

2. Romantik partnerinizden sizinle aynı eve taşınmasını istiyorsunuz.

- Romantik partnerinizin sizinle aynı eve taşınmayı isteyip istemeyeceği ile ilgili ne kadar **endişe eder veya kaygı duvarsınız?**

Hiç endişelenmem / Kaygı duymam Çok endişelenirim / Kaygı duyarım
1 2 3 4 5 6

- Romantik partnerimin benimle aynı eve taşınmayı istemesini beklerdim.

Çok küçük ihtimalle Çok büyük ihtimalle
1 2 3 4 5 6

3. Yurtdışı gezisine gitmek için ebeveynlerinizden destek istiyorsunuz.

- Ebeveynlerinizin size yardımcı olmayı isteyip istemeyebileceği ile ilgili ne kadar **endişe eder veya kaygı duvarsınız?**

Hiç endişelenmem / Kaygı duymam Çok endişelenirim / Kaygı duyarım
1 2 3 4 5 6

- Onların (Ebeveynlerimin) bana yardım etmek için istekli olmalarını beklerdim.

Çok küçük ihtimalle
1 2

3

4

5

Çok büyük ihtimalle
6



H. TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET

GEN KADINLARDA YAKINLIK KORKUSU: BALANMA STİLLERİNİN, REDDEDİLME DUYARLILIĞININ VE DENEYİMSEL KAÇINMANIN ROL

1. GİRİŞ

Yakınlık korkusu, bireyin kendisi iin kişisel anlam taşıyan düşünce ve duygularını, kendisi aısından oldukça önemli olarak algılanan bir başkasıyla paylaşmada yaşadığı kaygı temelli güçlük olarak tanımlanmaktadır (Descutner ve Thelen, 1991). Descutner ve Thelen (1991), bu yapıyı birbiriyle ilişkili üç boyut üzerinden kavramsallaştırmıştır: kendini açma, paylaşılan materyale atfedilen duygusal önem ve ilişki partnerinin algılanan önemi. Gerçek yakınlık, bu boyutların etkileşimi sonucunda ortaya çıkmakta ve duygusal açıklık, derinlik ve karşılıklı saygı ile kendini göstermektedir. Bu süreçlerde yaşanan aksaklıklar, bireylerin yakın ilişkiler kurma kapasitelerini sınırlayabilmekte ve duygusal yakınlığa yönelik kalıcı bir korkunun gelişmesine katkıda bulunabilmektedir (Descutner ve Thelen, 1991).

Yakınlık korkusu tek başına ortaya çıkan bir olgu değildir; daha geniş gelişimsel ve ilişkişel bağlamlar tarafından şekillendirilmektedir. Yaş, bireylerin yakınlık kurma kapasitesini etkileyen temel arka plan faktörlerinden biridir. Erikson'un (1959) psikososyal gelişim kuramına göre, erken ve genç yetişkinlik dönemi, yakınlık ile yalıtılmışlık arasındaki temel çatışmanın yaşandığı bir gelişim evresini temsil etmektedir. Bu evrede sağlıklı bir ilerleme, bireyin kimliğini bütünleştirebilmesine ve bunun sonucunda istikrarlı ve sürdürülebilir kişilerarası bağlar kurabilmesine bağlıdır (Erikson, 1959). Genellikle 18–29 yaş aralığını kapsayan beliren yetişkinlik dönemi, yoğun kimlik keşfi, artan öz-yönelimli karar alma süreçleri ve yetişkin rollerine ilişkin belirsizliklerle karakterizedir (Arnett ve Mitra, 2020). Güncel demografik eğilimler, otuzlu ve kırklı yaşlara kadar bekar kalmanın giderek yaygınlaştığını ve

bunun bireysel özerkliğe verilen önemin artması ile ilişkisel bağlanmaların ertelenmesine yönelik daha geniş toplumsal değişimleri yansıttığını göstermektedir (Apostolou ve Tekeş, 2024; Beckmeyer ve Jamison, 2023, 2024). Bu gelişimsel dinamikler, yaşa bağlı geçişlerin bireylerin yakınlık deneyimlerini ve duygusal açıklığa yönelik kırılganlıklarını etkileyebileceğini düşündürmektedir.

Yaş ile yakından ilişkili olan ilişki durumu, yakınlık korkusuyla ilişkili bir diğer bağlamsal faktördür. Ampirik bulgular, bireylerin erken ve orta yetişkinlik dönemlerindeki romantik ilişki örüntülerinin, ilerleyen dönemlerdeki psikolojik iyi oluşla yakından bağlantılı olduğunu göstermektedir (Grundström ve ark., 2021). İlişki istikrarı ve değişim örüntülerinin, orta yetişkinlikte depresif belirtiler ve benlik saygısını yordadığı bulunmuştur (Grundström ve ark., 2021). Ayrıca, uzun süreli ve doyumlu romantik ilişkiler içinde olan bireylerin daha düşük psikolojik sıkıntı, daha olumlu benlik algısı, daha gelişmiş duygu düzenleme becerileri ve daha yüksek benlik saygısı bildirdikleri görülmektedir (Sagone ve Commodari, 2023). Buna karşılık, ilişki başlatma, geçiş ya da sonlanma dönemleri, özellikle flört ya da ilişkinin erken evrelerinde, yakınlıkla ilişkili kaygının artmasıyla ilişkili olabilmektedir (Descutner ve Thelen, 1991; Montesi ve ark., 2013). Bu nedenle, yaş ve ilişki durumu, yakınlık korkusunun psikolojik yordayıcılarını incelerken önemli kontrol değişkenleri olarak değerlendirilmektedir.

Bu bağlamsal etkilerin ötesinde, bağlanma kuramı yakınlıkla ilişkili bireysel farklılıkları anlamada temel bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Güvenli bağlanmaya sahip bireyler, stresi duygusal yakınlık arayışı ve duygularını açıkça ifade etme yoluyla düzenleme eğiliminde olup, bu durum ilişkisel istikrarı ve uyumlu başa çıkmayı desteklemektedir (Bowlby, 1982; Clark ve Beck, 2011). Buna karşılık, güvensiz bağlanma yönelimleri; reddedilme, terk edilme ya da özerklik kaybına ilişkin korkularla karakterizedir ve bu korkular duygusal yakınlık kurma ya da sürdürme kapasitesini zayıflatarak yakınlık korkusuna yönelik kırılganlığı artırmaktadır. Psikodinamik yaklaşımlar da yakınlık korkusunu bilinçdışı kaygıyı düzenlemeye yönelik savunmacı bir mekanizma olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır (Freud, 1920). İlişkisel travma öyküsü bulunan bireyler, psikolojik acıyı yeniden yaşamamak amacıyla bilinçdışı düzeyde duygusal yakınlıktan uzak durabilmektedir. Bağlanma

kuramı ise bu bakış açısını tamamlayarak, erken dönem bakımveren-çocuk etkileşimlerinin yetişkinlikte de devam eden içsel çalışma modelleri üzerindeki kalıcı etkisini vurgulamaktadır (Mikulincer ve Shaver, 2020). Özellikle kaçınan bağlanma yönelimlerine sahip bireyler, yakınlığı tehdit edici olarak algılamaya daha yatkın olup, bu durum mesafe koyma davranışlarını artırarak ilişkisel korkuları ve yakınlık korkusunu sürdürmektedir (Bartholomew ve Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer ve Shaver, 2016, 2020).

Bağlanmaya ilişkin bu hassasiyetler, reddedilme duyarlılığı gibi kişilerarası-bilişsel süreçler tarafından da şekillenmektedir. Reddedilme duyarlılığı yüksek olan bireyler, reddedilmeyi kaygılı bir biçimde bekleme ve reddedilme ipuçlarını kolaylıkla algılama eğilimindedir ve yakın ilişkilerde yoğun duygusal tepkiler verebilmektedir. Pepping ve arkadaşları (2015), bazı bireylerin duygusal yakınlığı aktif olarak arzularken reddedilme ipuçlarına karşı yüksek duyarlılık gösterdiğini, bazılarının ise özerkliği korumak amacıyla bilinçli olarak duygusal mesafeyi sürdürdüğünü bildirmiştir. Bu örüntüler, reddedilme duyarlılığının bağlanmaya ilişkin korkuları güçlendirebileceğini ve yakınlıktan kaçınma ya da geri çekilme davranışlarını pekiştirerek duygusal yakınlık korkusunu sürdürebileceğini düşündürmektedir.

Bilişsel-davranışçı bir bakış açısından, deneyimsel kaçınma, yakınlık korkusunun sürdürülmesinde rol oynayan bir diğer mekanizma olarak ele alınmaktadır. Deneyimsel kaçınma, bireyin rahatsız edici duygu ve düşünceler gibi içsel yaşantılardan kaçınma ya da bunları değiştirme çabalarını ifade etmektedir (Hayes ve ark., 1996). Kaçınma temelli stratejiler kısa vadede ilişkisel kaygıyı azaltabilse de uzun vadede gerçek duygusal etkileşimi sınırlandırmakta ve kişilerarası mesafeyi pekiştirmektedir (Clark ve Beck, 2011). Ampirik çalışmalar, deneyimsel kaçınmanın romantik ilişkilerde duygusal yakınlığı kısıtlayan temel faktörlerden biri olduğunu göstermektedir (Boulanger ve ark., 2010; Kashdan ve ark., 2006). Bu bağlamda, kaçınmaya dayalı başa çıkma stratejileri kısa süreli bir koruma sağlasa da uzun vadede yakınlık korkusunu sürdürmekte ve doyumsuz, duygusal olarak bağlı ilişkiler için fırsatları azaltmaktadır (Pepping ve ark., 2015).

Çalışmanın yalnızca kadınlara odaklanması da kavramsal açıdan ek bir önem taşımaktadır. Önceki araştırmalar, kadınların daha yüksek ilişkisel duyarlılık,

reddedilme ipuçlarına daha güçlü tepkiler ve yakın ilişkilerde daha yoğun duygusal yatırım bildirdiklerini göstermektedir; bu özellikler bağlanma yönelimleri ile yakınlık korkusu arasındaki ilişkileri daha da güçlendirebilmektedir (Fischer ve Good, 1997; Tolmacz ve Mikulincer, 2011). Kadınlar genellikle duygusal kendini açma ve ilişkisel yakınlığa erkeklere kıyasla daha fazla önem vermektedir (Descutner ve Thelen, 1991; Fischer ve Good, 1997). Ayrıca, düşük benlik saygısı ve aşırı duygusal bağımlılıkla tanımlanan bağımlılık yönelimli bağlanmanın, boşanmış ve boşanmamış kadınlarda kişilerarası güçlüklerle ilişkili olduğu gösterilmiştir (Koolae ve ark., 2013). Bu nedenle, çalışmanın örneklemini kadınlardan seçilerek romantik ilişki örüntülerinin daha iyi anlaşılması amaçlanmıştır. Bunun yanı sıra, bağlanma, reddedilme süreçleri ve yakınlık davranışları arasındaki psikolojik mekanizmaların kadınlar ve erkekler için farklı biçimlerde işleyebileceğine dair kanıtlar bulunmaktadır (Cross ve Madson, 1997; Rose ve Rudolph, 2006). Bu nedenle, genç yetişkin kadınlarda yakınlık korkusunun incelenmesi, gelişimsel açıdan kritik bir yaşam evresinde ilişkisel kırılganlıkların ve beklentilerin nasıl kesiştiğini anlamak açısından önemli bir fırsat sunmaktadır.

Kuramsal ve ampirik katkıların kapsamına rağmen, alanyazında önemli boşluklar bulunmaktadır. Önceki çalışmalar genellikle bağlanma stilleri, reddedilme duyarlılığı ve deneyimsel kaçınmayı yakınlıkla ilişkili güçlüklerin ayrı yordayıcıları olarak ele almış; bu değişkenlerin tek bir açıklayıcı çerçeve içinde bütüncül olarak incelendiği çalışmalar sınırlı kalmıştır. Ayrıca, mevcut araştırmaların büyük bir bölümü Batı kültürlerinde ve ağırlıklı olarak üniversite öğrencisi örneklemelerle yürütülmüş olup, bulguların Batı dışı topluluklara genellenebilirliği sınırlıdır. Bu bağlamda, Türkiye’deki genç kadınlarda bu psikolojik mekanizmaların yakınlık korkusuna nasıl birlikte katkıda bulunduğuna ilişkin bilgi oldukça sınırlıdır.

Bu çerçevede, mevcut çalışmanın amacı, 19–42 yaş aralığındaki Türk genç kadınlarda bağlanma stilleri, reddedilme duyarlılığı ve deneyimsel kaçınmanın yakınlık korkusunu ne ölçüde yordadığını; yaş ve ilişki durumu kontrol edilerek incelemektir. Önceki bulgularla tutarlı olarak, kaygılı ve kaçınan bağlanma stilleri, yüksek reddedilme duyarlılığı ve kaçınma temelli başa çıkma stratejilerinin yakınlık korkusu ile pozitif yönde ilişkili olacağı; güvenli bağlanma ve daha uyumlu başa

çıkma eğilimlerinin ise daha düşük yakınlık korkusu ile ilişkili olacağı öngörülmektedir. Bu değişkenlerin hiyerarşik regresyon çerçevesinde bütünleştirilmesiyle, beliren ve genç yetişkinlik döneminde yakınlıkla ilişkili kaygının altında yatan mekanizmalara daha bütüncül ve tutarlı bir açıklama sunulması amaçlanmaktadır.

1.2. Araştırma Sorusu

Mevcut çalışmanın araştırma sorusu şudur:

Güvenli bağlanma stili, kaçınan bağlanma stili ve kaygılı/kararsız bağlanma stili, reddedilme hassasiyeti ve kaçınma, bastırma/inkâr, erteleme, sıkıntıya dayanma ve bastırma/dikkati dağıtma deneyimsel kaçınma alt boyutları, yaş ve ilişki durumu kontrol edildikten sonra, genç yetişkin kadınlarda yakınlık korkusunu ne ölçüde öngörür?

1.3. Çalışmanın Önemi

Yakınlık korkusunun anlaşılması, özellikle kimlik keşfi, ilişkisel bağlılık ve özerklik ile yakınlık arasındaki gerilimle karakterize edilen bir gelişim dönemi olan genç yetişkinlik bağlamında hem kuramsal hem de uygulamaya yönelik açıdan önem taşımaktadır (Erikson, 1959).

Bu araştırma alanında, yakınlık korkusuyla ilişkili psikolojik faktörler çoğunlukla birbirinden bağımsız olarak ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışmada bağlanma stilleri, reddedilme duyarlılığı ve deneyimsel kaçınmanın tek bir model içinde ele alınması, bilişsel, duygusal ve davranışsal süreçlerin yakınlıktan kaçınmayı nasıl birlikte şekillendirdiğine dair daha kapsamlı bir açıklama sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bütüncül yaklaşım, bağlanma güvensizliği ile duygu düzenleme güçlüklerinin nasıl birleşerek yakınlık korkusu, kırılganlık ve geri çekilme örüntülerini etkilediğini ortaya koyarak, ilişkisel işleyişe ilişkin kuramsal anlayışı geliştirmektedir. Önceki araştırmalar, yakınlık korkusunun depresif belirtiler, anksiyete ve ilişki doyumsuzluğu gibi çeşitli olumsuz psikolojik sonuçlarla ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir (Descutner ve Thelen, 1991). Özellikle kaygılı ve kaçınan bağlanma yönelimleriyle karakterize edilen bağlanma güvensizliği, duygusal yakınlıkta

güçlükler ve artmış yakınlık korkusuyla tutarlı biçimde ilişkilendirilmiştir (Hazan ve Shaver, 1987). Benzer şekilde, reddedilme duyarlılığının kişilerarası tehdit ve olası reddedilmeye yönelik artmış bir tetikte olma hali yaratarak, yakınlıkla ilgili kaygıları yoğunlaştırdığı gösterilmiştir (Downey ve Feldman, 1996). Bilişsel-davranışçı bir bakış açısından ele alındığında ise, istenmeyen içsel yaşantılardan kaçınma eğilimi olarak tanımlanan deneyimsel kaçınmanın, duygusal mesafe koyma ve ilişkisel kaçınmanın sürdürülmesinde rol oynadığı belirtilmektedir (Hayes ve ark., 1996). Bu bulgular bir arada değerlendirildiğinde, yakınlık korkusunun bağlanma temelli kırılganlıklar, artmış reddedilme duyarlılığı ve kaçınmaya dayalı başa çıkma stratejilerinin etkileşimi yoluyla sürdürüldüğü söylenebilir.

Bağlanma stilleri, reddedilme duyarlılığı ve deneyimsel kaçınmanın yakınlık korkusuna nasıl katkıda bulunduğunun netleştirilmesi uygulamaya dönük önemli çıkarımlar sunmaktadır. Bu mekanizmaların daha iyi anlaşılması, psikolojik danışmanlar ve ruh sağlığı uzmanlarının genç kadın yetişkinlerin ilişkisel ihtiyaçlarına daha uygun müdahaleler geliştirmesine katkı sağlayabilir. Bu tür bilgiler, değişen toplumsal normların romantik ilişki örüntülerini çeşitlendirdiği Türkiye bağlamında, evlilik öncesi danışmanlık, çift terapisi ve bireysel psikoterapi açısından özellikle önemlidir. Yakınlıkla ilişkili güçlüklerin bu kültürel çerçevede ele alınması, duygusal açıklığı, kendini kabulü ve güveni destekleyen psiko-eğitsel ve terapötik yaklaşımların geliştirilmesine yardımcı olabilir. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışmanın önemi, kuram ile uygulama arasında bir köprü kurma potansiyelinde yatmaktadır. Batı dışı bir bağlamdan elde edilen ampirik bulgular sunarak, yakınlık ve bağlanma literatürüne katkı sağlamakta ve aynı zamanda genç yetişkinlerde daha sağlıklı ilişkisel gelişimi desteklemeyi amaçlayan uzmanlar için klinik açıdan anlamlı bilgiler sunmaktadır.

2. YÖNTEM

2.1. Araştırma Deseni

Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'deki genç kadınlar arasında bağlanma stilleri, deneyimsel kaçınma ve reddedilme duyarlılığının yakınlık korkusunu yordamadaki rolünü, yaş ve ilişki durumu kontrol edilerek incelemek amacıyla nicel ve ilişkisel bir araştırma deseni kullanılmıştır.

2.2. Araştırmanın Katılımcıları

Çalışmaya toplam 385 kişi katılmıştır. Katılımcıların yaşları 19 ile 42 arasında değişmektedir ($M = 26,03$, $SD = 4,62$). Katılımcıların çoğunluğu 23–27 yaş aralığında yer alırken, daha küçük gruplar genç (19–21) ve daha ileri (35 ve üzeri) yaş aralıklarında temsil edilmiştir.

Eğitim düzeyi açısından, 21 katılımcı doktora, 94 katılımcı yüksek lisans, 226 katılımcı lisans, 26 katılımcı ön lisans, 17 katılımcı lise ve 1 katılımcı ilkokul mezunudur. Veri toplama sırasında, 224 katılımcı eğitime devam ederken, 161 katılımcı herhangi bir akademik programa kayıtlı değildir.

Katılımcılar Türkiye'nin çeşitli illerinde ikamet etmekte olup, yedi coğrafi bölgenin tamamını temsil etmektedir. Bölgesel dağılım şu şekildedir: İç Anadolu (%46,49), Marmara (%27,01), Ege (%7,53), Akdeniz (%7,27), Karadeniz (%4,94), Güneydoğu Anadolu (%3,38) ve Doğu Anadolu (%3,12).

İstihdam durumu açısından, 193 katılımcı çalıştığını, 192 katılımcı ise çalışmadığını bildirmiştir. İlişki durumu açısından, 209 katılımcı romantik bir ilişki içinde olduğunu, 176 katılımcı ise partneri olmadığını belirtmiştir.

2.3. Veri Toplama Araçları

2.3.1. Demografik ve İlişkisel Bilgi Formu

Bu form araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilmiştir ve katılımcıların yaş, cinsiyet, eğitim düzeyi, öğrencilik durumu, öğrenim gördüğü akademik program, ikamet ili, çalışma durumu, ilişki durumu, ilişki süresi ve ilişki tanımı gibi demografik ve ilişkisel bilgilerini toplamak amacıyla hazırlanmıştır.

2.3.2. Yakınlık Korkusu Ölçeği

Yakınlık Korkusu Ölçeği (Fear of Intimacy Scale – FIS), Descutner ve Thelen (1991) tarafından geliştirilmiştir. Ölçek, bireylerin yakın ve romantik ilişkilerde yaşadığı

kaygıyı ölçmektedir ve 35 maddeden oluşmaktadır. Ölçekte O, katılımcının partnerini temsil etmektedir. 1 (hiç bana uygun değil) ile 5 (tamamen bana uygun) arasında değişen 5’li Likert tipi bir derecelendirme kullanılmıştır. Yüksek puanlar, yüksek düzeyde yakınlık korkusunu göstermektedir.

Elibol ve Tok (2018), ölçeğin iç tutarlılık katsayısını $\alpha = .94$ olarak bildirmiştir. Test-tekrar test güvenilirliği dört haftalık aralıkla $r = .76$ ($p < .01$) bulunmuştur. Ölçek varyansın %58’ini açıklamıştır. Bu sonuçlar, Türkçe formun zaman içinde kararlı ve güvenilir olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu çalışmada ölçek 385 katılımcıya uygulanmış ve 35 madde için Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$ olarak bulunmuştur (Nunnally, 1978).

2.3.3. Üç Boyutlu Bağlanma Stilleri Ölçeği

Ölçek Erzen (2016) tarafından geliştirilmiştir. Ölçek, bağlanma kuramına dayalı çok boyutlu bir çerçeve içerisinde bağlanma stillerini değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ölçek toplam 18 maddeden oluşmakta ve üç ayrı alt boyut etrafında yapılandırılmıştır: (1) güvenli bağlanma stili, (2) kaçınan bağlanma stili ve (3) kaygılı-kararsız bağlanma stili. Ölçeğin geliştirilme sürecinde gerçekleştirilen açımlayıcı faktör analizi, 18 maddenin tamamının ilgili boyutlara tutarlı biçimde yüklendiğini gösteren net bir üç faktörlü yapı ortaya koymuştur (Erzen, 2016).

Maddeler, 1 (“Kesinlikle katılmıyorum”) ile 5 (“Kesinlikle katılıyorum”) arasında değişen 5’li Likert tipi bir ölçek üzerinde derecelendirilmektedir. Her bir alt boyuttan alınan yüksek puanlar, ilgili bağlanma stiline daha güçlü biçimde benimsendiğini göstermektedir. Puanlama prosedürüne göre bireyler, en yüksek puanı aldıkları alt ölçeğe göre sınıflandırılmaktadır.

Güvenirlilik açısından, her bir alt boyut için iç tutarlılık analizleri yapılmıştır. Cronbach alfa katsayıları kaçınan bağlanma stili için .80, güvenli bağlanma stili için .69 ve kaygılı-kararsız bağlanma stili için .71 olarak rapor edilmiştir. Bu değerler, alt ölçeklerin kabul edilebilir güvenirlik düzeylerine sahip olduğunu göstermektedir (Erzen, 2016). Ölçeğin geçerliğine ilişkin kanıtlar çeşitli analizlerle elde edilmiştir. Madde-toplam korelasyon katsayıları .53 ile .75 arasında değişmekte olup, tüm korelasyonlar istatistiksel olarak anlamlıdır.

Üç Boyutlu Bağlanma Stilleri Ölçeği, 385 katılımcıdan oluşan bir örneklem üzerinde değerlendirilmiştir. Ölçek, güvenli bağlanma alt boyutu için Cronbach alfa katsayısı .61 olan orta düzeyde iç tutarlılık güvenilirliği, kaçınan bağlanma alt boyutu için Cronbach alfa katsayısı .82 olan yüksek düzeyde iç tutarlılık güvenilirliği ve kaygılı-kararsız bağlanma alt boyutu için Cronbach alfa katsayısı .84 olan yüksek düzeyde iç tutarlılık güvenilirliği göstermiştir (Nunnally, 1978).

2.3.4. Reddedilme Duyarlılığı Ölçeği

Ölçeği, bireylerin kişilerarası reddedilmeye yönelik olarak kaygılı beklenti geliştirme, reddi kolaylıkla algılama ve buna aşırı tepki verme eğilimlerini değerlendirmek amacıyla Downey ve Feldman (1996) tarafından geliştirilmiştir. Ölçek, reddedilmenin olası olduğu varsayımsal sosyal durumlar aracılığıyla reddedilme duyarlılığını ölçmektedir.

Özgün ölçek, her biri bireyin reddedilme yaşayabileceği bir durumu betimleyen 18 maddeden oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılardan her bir senaryo için iki bileşeni 6'lı Likert tipi ölçek üzerinde değerlendirmeleri istenmektedir: duruma ilişkin kaygı düzeyi ve kabul edilme beklentisi. Kaygı düzeyi 1 ("hiç endişeli/kaygılı değilim") ile 6 ("çok endişeli/kaygılıyım") arasında, kabul edilme beklentisi ise 1 ("çok düşük olasılıklı") ile 6 ("çok yüksek olasılıklı") arasında puanlanmaktadır. Yüksek puanlar, reddedilmeyi kaygıyla bekleme ve algılanan reddedilmeye güçlü tepkiler verme eğiliminin daha yüksek olduğunu göstermektedir.

Ölçek, Göncü Köse ve arkadaşları (2017) tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanmıştır. Türkçe form, özgün ölçekteki tüm 18 maddeyi korumuş ve yanıt formatı açısından da özgün versiyonla tutarlı olacak şekilde, katılımcıların hem reddedilmeye ilişkin kaygılarını hem de kabul edilme beklentilerini aynı 6'lı Likert tipi ölçekler üzerinden değerlendirmelerini gerektirmiştir. İç tutarlılık analizi sonucunda toplam ölçek için Cronbach alfa katsayısı .85 olarak elde edilmiştir. Açımlayıcı faktör analizi, toplam varyansın % 30.82'sini açıklayan tek faktörlü bir yapıyı desteklemiştir. Bu çalışmada, katılımcıların genel reddedilme duyarlılığı düzeyini temsil etmek üzere Reddedilme Duyarlılığı Ölçeği'nin toplam puanı kullanılmıştır.

Reddedilme Duyarlılığı Ölçeği'nin güvenirlik analizi 385 katılımcıdan oluşan bir örneklem üzerinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ölçek, toplam 36 madde için Cronbach alfa katsayısı .91 olan yüksek düzeyde iç tutarlılık güvenirliği göstermiştir (Nunnally, 1978).

2.3.5. Çok Boyutlu Yaşantısal Kaçınma Ölçeği

Çok Boyutlu Deneyimsel Kaçınma Ölçeği, farklı deneyimsel kaçınma stratejilerini değerlendirmek amacıyla Gámez ve arkadaşları (2011) tarafından geliştirilmiştir. Ölçek, bireylerin istenmeyen içsel yaşantılardan kaçınma, bu yaşantıları kontrol etme ya da değiştirme eğilimlerini, birden fazla davranışsal ve bilişsel boyut üzerinden değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Ölçeğin özgün formu 62 maddeden oluşmakta ve altı alt boyutu içermektedir. Maddeler, 1 (“kesinlikle katılmıyorum”) ile 6 (“kesinlikle katılıyorum”) arasında derecelendirilen 6’lı Likert tipi bir ölçek üzerinde yanıtlanmakta olup, yüksek puanlar daha yüksek deneyimsel kaçınma düzeyine işaret etmektedir.

Ölçek, Yıldırım ve Bahtiyar (2020) tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanmıştır. Uyarlama sürecinde anlamsal ve istatistiksel gerekçelerle üç madde ölçekten çıkarılmış ve Türkçe form 59 madde ve beş alt boyuttan oluşacak şekilde yapılandırılmıştır. Yapılan ayrıntılı geçerlik ve güvenirlik analizleri, ölçeğin Türk örneklemeleri için uygun olduğunu göstermiştir. Toplam ölçek puanı için Cronbach alfa katsayısı .93 olarak rapor edilmiştir. Çok Boyutlu Deneyimsel Kaçınma Ölçeği'nin iç tutarlılık güvenirliği 385 kişilik bir örneklem üzerinde incelenmiştir. Bu çalışmada, 21 maddelik kaçınma alt boyutunun iç tutarlılığı Cronbach alfa katsayısı .90 ile yüksek düzeyde; 8 maddelik bastırma/dikkat dağıtma alt boyutunun iç tutarlılığı Cronbach alfa katsayısı .87 ile yüksek düzeyde; 11 maddelik sıkıntıya dayanıklılık alt boyutunun iç tutarlılığı Cronbach alfa katsayısı .85 ile yüksek düzeyde; 7 maddelik erteleme alt boyutunun iç tutarlılığı Cronbach alfa katsayısı .84 ile yüksek düzeyde; 12 maddelik bastırma/inkâr alt boyutunun iç tutarlılığı ise Cronbach alfa katsayısı .84 ile yüksek düzeyde bulunmuştur. Ölçeğin tamamı için ise 59 madde üzerinden hesaplanan Cronbach alfa katsayısı .90 olup, ölçeğin genel olarak güçlü bir güvenirlik düzeyi sergilediği görülmüştür (Nunnally, 1978).

2.4. Veri Analizi

Bu çalışmanın amacı, yakınlık korkusu ile yaş, romantik ilişki durumu, bağlanma stilleri, deneyimsel kaçınma ve reddedilme duyarlılığı arasındaki ilişkileri incelemektir. İlk olarak, veri seti kullanılabilir vakaları belirlemek amacıyla taranmıştır. Veri temizleme işlemlerinin ardından, yaş değişkeni sürekli bir değişken olarak analiz edilirken, ilişki durumu kukla (dummy) değişken olarak kodlanmış ve tüm ölçek maddeleri kendi adları ve alt boyutları doğrultusunda kodlanmıştır. Daha sonra, ortalama, standart sapma ve aralık değerlerini içeren güvenilirlik ve betimsel istatistikler hesaplanmıştır. Hiyerarşik çoklu regresyon analizine geçilmeden önce, ikili korelasyonlar incelenmiş ve analiz için gerekli istatistiksel varsayımlar (normallik, doğrusallık, çoklu doğrusal bağlantı ve varyansların homojenliği) değerlendirilerek analizin uygunluğu sağlanmıştır.

Çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda, yaş ve romantik ilişki durumu kontrol edildikten sonra bağlanma stilleri, reddedilme duyarlılığı ve deneyimsel kaçınmanın yakınlık korkusunu ne ölçüde yordadığını değerlendirmek için hiyerarşik çoklu regresyon analizi kullanılmıştır.

Model 1’de yaş ve ilişki durumu kontrol değişkenleri olarak analize dahil edilmiştir. Model 2’de bağlanma stilleri (güvenli, kaçınan ve kaygılı/kararsız) eklenmiştir. Model 3’te reddedilme duyarlılığı modele dahil edilmiştir. Son olarak Model 4’te, deneyimsel kaçınmanın beş alt boyutu (kaçınma, bastırma/dikkat dağıtma, erteleme, bastırma/inkâr ve sıkıntıya dayanıklılık) eklenerek, genç yetişkin kadınlarda yakınlık korkusunun yordanmasına sağladığı ek katkı incelenmiştir. Bu aşamalı süreç, temel değişkenlerin, yaş ve romantik ilişki durumu kontrol edildikten sonraki yordayıcı güçlerinin daha net bir biçimde değerlendirilmesine olanak sağlamıştır.

2.5. Sınırlılıklar

Mevcut çalışma, yakınlık korkusu, reddedilme duyarlılığı, bağlanma stilleri ve deneyimsel kaçınmanın anlaşılmasına anlamlı katkılarda bulunmasına rağmen, özellikle metodoloji ve örneklem süreçleriyle ilgili olarak bazı sınırlamalar kabul edilmelidir.

İlk olarak, duygusal temelli yapılarla veri toplamak, psikolojik danışmanlık ve klinik araştırmalarda özgün zorluklar sunar. Yakınlık korkusu ve reddedilme duyarlılığı gibi yapılar, katılımcıların potansiyel olarak acı verici ilişki deneyimlerini yansıtmalarını gerektirdiğinden, rahatsızlık uyandırabilir. Bu duygusal hassasiyet, sosyal beğenilirlik yanlılığı veya savunma mekanizmaları nedeniyle yanıt bozulmalarına yol açabilir ve öz-bildirimlerin özgünlüğünü sınırlayabilir (Crowne ve Marlowe, 1960; Paulhus, 2002).

İkinci olarak, romantik ilişki durumunun dummy tanımlanması, çalışmanın bir sınırlılığıdır. Katılımcılar başlangıçta farklı düzeylerde ilişkisel bağlılığı yansıtan çoklu kategorik seçenekler aracılığıyla ilişki durumlarını bildirmiş olsalar da bu kategoriler dağılımın dengesizliği nedeniyle iki daha geniş grupta birleştirilmiştir. Bu yaklaşım istatistiksel analizleri kolaylaştırırsa da farklı ilişki türleri arasındaki niteliksel farklılıklara (ör. flört etme, birlikte yaşama veya evlilik) duyarlılığı azaltmış olabilir. Sonuç olarak, farklı romantik ilişki biçimleri veya aşamalarıyla ilişkili yakınlık korkusundaki potansiyel varyasyonlar tam olarak yakalanmamış olabilir.

3. BULGULAR

3.1. Hiyerarşik Çoklu Regresyon Analizi Bulguları

Yaş, ilişki durumu, bağlanma stilleri, reddedilme duyarlılığı ve yaşantısal kaçınmanın yakınlık korkusunu yordayıp yordamadığını incelemek amacıyla hiyerarşik çoklu regresyon analizi yapılmıştır. Değişkenler dört blok hâlinde modele dâhil edilmiştir: Model 1; yaş ve ilişki durumu, Model 2; güvenli bağlanma, kaçınan bağlanma ve kaygılı/kararsız bağlanma, Model 3; reddedilme duyarlılığı, Model 4; yaşantısal kaçınmanın alt boyutları olan kaçınma, bastırma/oyalanma (suppression/distraction), sıkıntıya dayanma (distress endurance), erteleme (procrastination) ve baskılama/inkâr (repression/denial). Ölçüt değişken yakınlık korkusudur. Her model için katsayılar, standart hatalar, standartlaştırılmış beta değerleri ve anlamlılık düzeyleri aşağıda raporlanmıştır.

Model 1 yaş ve ilişki durumunu içermektedir. Bu model yakınlık korkusundaki varyansın % 21.0'ını açıklamış ($R^2 = .21$) ve istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bulunmuştur, $F(2, 382) = 50.92, p < .001$. İlişki durumu anlamlı bir yordayıcıdır ($\beta = -.46, p < .001$); bu sonuç, hâlihazırda romantik bir ilişki içinde olan bireylerin ilişkide olmayanlara kıyasla daha düşük düzeyde yakınlık korkusu bildirdiğini göstermektedir. Yaş ise yakınlık korkusunu anlamlı bir biçimde yordamamıştır ($\beta = .05, p < .01$).

Model 2'de güvenli, kaçınan ve kaygılı/kararsız bağlanma stilleri eklenmiş ve açıklanan varyans % 46.8'e yükselmiştir ($\Delta R^2 = .26$). Model anlamlı bulunmuştur, $F(5, 379) = 66.75, p < .001$. Güvenli bağlanma yakınlık korkusunu negatif yönde yordamıştır ($\beta = -.19, p < .001$); buna karşılık kaygılı/kararsız bağlanma pozitif yönde anlamlı bir yordayıcıdır ($\beta = .43, p < .001$). Kaçınan bağlanma anlamlı bir yordayıcı olarak ortaya çıkmamıştır ($\beta = .04, p < .01$). Bu sonuçlar, düşük güvenli bağlanma ve yüksek kaygılı/kararsız bağlanma düzeylerinin daha yüksek yakınlık korkusu ile ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir.

Model 3'e reddedilme duyarlılığı eklenmiş ve açıklanan varyansta ek bir artış sağlanarak toplam varyans % 49.9'a ulaşmıştır ($\Delta R^2 = .03$). Model anlamlıdır, $F(6, 378) = 62.72, p < .001$. Reddedilme duyarlılığı yakınlık korkusunu anlamlı biçimde yordamıştır ($\beta = .19, p < .001$); buna göre reddedilmeye daha duyarlı bireyler daha yüksek düzeyde yakınlık korkusu bildirme eğilimindedir.

Model 4'e duygu düzenleme değişkenleri (kaçınma, bastırma/oyalanma, sıkıntıya dayanma, erteleme ve baskılama/inkâr) eklenmiştir. Bu son model yakınlık korkusundaki varyansın % 56.2'sini açıklamaktadır ($\Delta R^2 = .06$) ve anlamlı bulunmuştur, $F(11, 373) = 43.59, p < .001$. Bu modelde anlamlı yordayıcılar arasında yaş ($\beta = .10, p < .01$), ilişki durumu ($\beta = -.30, p < .001$), kaygılı/kararsız bağlanma ($\beta = .30, p < .001$), reddedilme duyarlılığı ($\beta = .17, p < .001$), sıkıntıya dayanma ($\beta = -.10, p < .01$) ve baskılama/inkâr ($\beta = .26, p < .001$) yer almıştır. Güvenli ve kaçınan bağlanma, kaçınma, bastırma/oyalanma ve erteleme ise son modelde yakınlık korkusunu anlamlı bir biçimde yordamamıştır.

Genel olarak, bu sonuçlar yakınlık korkusunun özellikle kaygılı/kararsız bağlanma stili, daha yüksek baskılama/inkâr kullanımı, artmış reddedilme duyarlılığı, romantik bir ilişki içinde olmama, düşük sıkıntıya dayanma ve daha ileri yaş ile ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Modeller arasındaki açıklanan varyanstaki artış, bağlanma stilleri, reddedilme duyarlılığı ve yaşantısal kaçınma kapsamında yer alan duygu düzenleme süreçlerinin yakınlık korkusunu anlamada giderek daha büyük katkı sağladığını ortaya koymaktadır.

4. TARTIŞMA

4.1. Bulgulara Yönelik Tartışma

Bu çalışma, Türkiye’deki genç kadınlar arasında bağlanma stillerinin, reddedilme duyarlılığının ve deneyimsel kaçınmanın yakınlık korkusuna katkılarını incelemek amacıyla tasarlanmıştır. Bağlanma teorisi (Bartholomew ve Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1982) ve Hayes ve arkadaşları (1996) tarafından önerilen deneyimsel kaçınma modeli temel alınarak, çalışmada erken bağlanma deneyimlerinin ve bireysel başa çıkma mekanizmalarının yetişkin kadınların duygusal yakınlık kurabilme kapasitelerini nasıl etkilediği araştırılmıştır.

Genel olarak, elde edilen bulgular teorik önerileri kısmen desteklemiştir. Daha yüksek düzeyde bağlanma kaygısına, daha yüksek reddedilme duyarlılığına ve daha güçlü deneyimsel kaçınma eğilimlerine sahip bireyler, daha yüksek yakınlık korkusu yaşama olasılığı taşımıştır. Buna karşılık, güvenli bağlanma ve uyumlu duygusal düzenleme stratejileri genel olarak daha düşük yakınlık korkusu ile ilişkilendirilmiş olsa da mevcut örnekleme güvenli ve kaçınan bağlanma, kaçınma, bastırma/dikkat dağıtma ve erteleme alt değişkenleri yakınlık korkusunu anlamlı biçimde öngörmemiştir. Bu öngörücü gücün eksikliği, örneklemin özelliklerinden kaynaklanıyor olabilir; örneklem büyük ölçüde 23 ila 27 yaş arasındaki, herhangi bir romantik ilişki yaşamayan genç yetişkin kadınlardan oluşmaktadır. Demografik faktörler, yakınlık korkusunun ortaya çıkışını etkileyebilir; önceki araştırmalar, yakınlık korkusunun son dönemde sınırlı romantik deneyime sahip bireyler için özellikle belirgin olabileceğini göstermektedir (Olsson ve ark., 2023; Pepping ve ark., 2014).

Bulgular, bağlanma kaygısı ile kaçınma temelli başa çıkma stratejilerini yakınlık korkusuyla ilişkilendiren önceki ampirik çalışmalara büyük ölçüde uygundur (Hazan ve Shaver, 1987; Kashdan ve ark., 2006; Mikulincer ve Shaver, 2016), aynı zamanda bazı farklılıkları da ortaya koymaktadır. Örneğin, bastırma veya erteleme gibi kaçınma odaklı stratejiler diğer bağlamlarda yakınlık güçlükleriyle ilişkilendirilmiş olsa da (Boulanger ve ark., 2010), mevcut örnekleimde yakınlık korkusunu anlamlı biçimde öngörmemiştir. Bu durum, bu mekanizmaların yaş, ilişki geçmişi veya kültürel normlar gibi bağlamsal veya demografik faktörlerle etkileşime girebileceğini göstermektedir. Bu faktörler, önceki Türk örneklemelerinde vurgulanmıştır (Sümer ve ark., 2009). Bu ampirik karşılaştırmaları bütünleştirerek tartışma, genç yetişkin kadınlar arasında yakınlık korkusunun altında yatan bilişsel, duygusal ve davranışsal mekanizmaları daha kapsamlı biçimde anlamaya olanak sağlamaktadır.

Bu çalışmanın bulguları, bağlanma stilleri ile deneyimsel kaçınma arasındaki etkileşime ilişkin ayrıntılı bir perspektif sunmaktadır. Beklendiği gibi, kaygılı/kararsız bağlanma stili önemli bir yordayıcı olarak belirlenmiştir. Mikulincer ve Shaver'in (2016, 2020) kuramsal çerçevesiyle uyumlu olarak, kaygılı bağlanma stiline sahip bireyler terk edilme kaygısı yaşamakta ve başkalarına aşırı bağımlılık göstermekte olup, bu durum reddedilme duyarlılığını artırmakta ve gerçek duygusal yakınlığı engelleyebilmektedir. Bu örüntüler, güvensiz bağlanmanın romantik ilişkilerde güven, kendini açma ve genel tatmini olumsuz etkileyebileceğini gösteren önceki araştırmalarla tutarlıdır (Hazan ve Shaver, 1987; Pepping ve ark., 2014).

Reddedilme duyarlılığı, bireylerin başkalarından algılanan veya gerçek reddedilmeyi kaygıyla bekleme, hızlı algılama ve yoğun tepki verme eğilimi olarak tanımlanan bilişsel-duygusal bir yatkınlıktır. Bu yüksek duyarlılık, yakınlık korkusunu artırabilir; çünkü reddedilme beklentisi taşıyan bireyler, savunmacı veya kaçınmacı davranışlar sergileyerek ilişkisel uzaklığı pekiştiren, sosyal geri çekilme ve duygusal çekim döngüsünü sürdüren bir örüntü oluşturur (Downey ve Feldman, 1996). Duygusal ifade veya ilişkisel kontrol ile ilgili katı normları içselleştiren bireyler, yakınlık arzusu ile savunmasızlık korkusu arasında artan bir çatışma yaşayabilir.

Kabul ve Kararlılık Terapisi (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) teorik çerçevesi ile tutarlı olarak, deneyimsel kaçınma, yakınlık korkusunun önemli bir öncülü olarak

tanımlanmıştır. Yüksek düzeyde deneyimsel kaçınma sergileyen bireyler, sık sık sıkıntılı düşünce ve duyguları engelleme veya bastırma çabası gösterirler. Bu stratejiler geçici rahatlama sağlayabilir; ancak, duygusal ifade kapasitesini sınırlamakta ve yakın kişilerarası bağlantı kurma yetisini azaltmaktadır (Gerhart ve ark., 2014; Kashdan ve ark., 2006). Bu örüntü, bağlanma teorisinde gözlenen kaçınmacı başa çıkma ile uyumludur ve kaçınmanın hem koruyucu bir savunma hem de işlevsiz bir düzenleyici strateji olarak işlediğini göstermektedir.

Tüm bu bulgular bir araya getirildiğinde, yakınlık korkusunun tekil bir yapı olmadığı, bağlanma güvensizlikleri, reddedilme ile ilgili bilişsel çarpıtmalar ve kaçınma temelli duygusal düzenleme ile şekillenen çok belirleyicili bir olgu olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Bu boyutların kesişimi, yakınlık kurmada güçlüklerin yalnızca dışsal ilişki deneyimlerinden değil, aynı zamanda içselleştirilmiş inançlar ve öğrenilmiş kaçınma örüntülerinden de kaynaklandığını vurgular. Bu anlamda, çalışma, yakınlık korkusunu açıklamak için bağlanma teorisini ve üçüncü dalga davranışsal yaklaşımları bütünleştiren araştırma literatürüne katkı sağlamaktadır.

4.2. Kuramsal ve Uygulamaya Yönelik Çıkarımlar

Kuramsal olarak, bu çalışma, yetişkin yakınlığını anlamada bağlanma teorisinin önemini pekiştirmektedir. Bu yapıların bütünleşmesi, yakınlık korkusunun hem erken dönem ilişki deneyimlerinden hem de mevcut bilişsel-duygusal süreçlerden kaynaklandığını desteklemektedir. Bağlanma teorisi ilişkisel güvensizliğin kökenlerini açıklarken, deneyimsel kaçınma, bireylerin bu örüntüleri yetişkinlikte nasıl sürdürdüğünü ve pekiştirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır (Hayes ve ark., 1996).

Ayrıca, bağlanma güvensizliği, reddedilme duyarlılığı ve deneyimsel kaçınmanın birleşik yordayıcı gücünü göstererek, çalışma yakınlık ile ilgili kuramsal modelleri de geliştirmektedir. Bu bulgular, yakınlık korkusunun, ilişkisel beklentiler ile bireysel duygu düzenleme eğilimleri arasındaki etkileşimsel bir süreç olarak anlaşılmasının en uygun yaklaşım olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu çok boyutlu model, kişilerarası güçlükleri anlamak için daha bütünsel bir çerçeve sunmakta ve gelecekteki ampirik çalışmalar için bir temel sağlamaktadır.

Uygulama açısından, bulgular klinik ve eğitimsel uygulamalar için anlamlı rehberlik sunmaktadır. Genç yetişkin kadınlarla çalışan uygulayıcılar için, yakınlık korkusunun yalnızca ilişkisel geri çekilme olarak değil, bağlanma ile ilgili güvensizlik ve kaçınma odaklı başa çıkma stratejilerinin bir etkileşimi olarak kavramsallaştırılması önemlidir. Mindfulness temelli, kabul temelli ve duygusal odaklı müdahaleler gibi deneyimsel kaçınmayı hedefleyen terapötik bileşenlerin dahil edilmesi, bireylerin duygusal açıklıklarını ve yakın, destekleyici ilişkiler kurabilme yetilerini güçlendirebilir (Hayes ve ark., 1996; Wong ve ark., 2018).

Terapötik bağlamlarda, güvenli bağlanma temsillerinin geliştirilmesi düzeltici bir duygusal deneyim sağlayabilir. Terapistler/danışmanlar, tutarlı, empatik ve uyumlu etkileşim modelleri sergileyerek, danışanların reddedilme ile ilgili inançlarını yeniden çerçevelemelerine ve duygusal maruziyete daha fazla tolerans geliştirmelerine yardımcı olabilir. Bu yaklaşımlar, yüksek bağlanma kaygısı veya kaçınma sergileyen bireyler için özellikle faydalı olabilir; çünkü yakınlık korkusunun hem bilişsel hem de duygusal boyutlarını ele almaktadır.

4.3. Gelecek Çalışmalar için Öneriler

Mevcut bulgular, yakınlık korkusu, bağlanma süreçleri ve bunların temel duygusal-bilişsel mekanizmalarıyla ilgili gelecekteki araştırmalar için bir dizi umut verici yön önermektedir. Gelecek çalışmalar, yüksek deneyimsel kaçınma, duygusal inhibisyon veya katı atıf kalıplarına sahip bireyler için Duygu Odaklı Terapi (EFT; Greenman ve Johnson, 2022) ve Kabul ve Kararlılık Terapisi (ACT; Harris, 2007; Hayes, 2011) gibi terapötik yaklaşımların nasıl uyarlanabileceğine odaklanmalıdır. Yakınlık korkusu bağlamında, ACT özellikle uygun olabilir çünkü bu yöntem doğrudan deneyimsel kaçınmayı hedefler; içsel deneyimlerin kabulünü teşvik eder, kaçınma odaklı başa çıkmayı azaltır ve bireylerin kırılganlıkla ilişkili düşünce ve duygularla duygusal temasta kalma kapasitesini artırır. Psikolojik esnekliği ve bilişsel ayrışmayı geliştirerek, ACT bireylerin rahatsızlık hissetmelerine rağmen duygusal olarak yakın ilişkilerde daha açık bir şekilde yer almalarını destekleyebilir (ACT; Harris, 2007; Hayes, 2011). Benzer şekilde, EFT, bağlanma ile ilişkili duygusal süreçlere müdahale ederek, birincil duygulara erişimi kolaylaştırır ve duygusal mesafeyi ve

geri çekilmeyi sürdüren uyumsuz ilişki örüntülerini yeniden yapılandırabilir (EFT; Greenman & Johnson, 2022). Duygu düzenleme, mentalizasyon ve yansıtıcı işlevselliği artıran müdahalelerin ampirik olarak incelenmesi, bu yaklaşımların korkuya dayalı kaçınmayı nasıl azalttığını ve genç yetişkin kadınlar arasında ilişkisel işlevselliği nasıl iyileştirdiğini açıklığa kavuşturabilir (Santoro ve ark., 2021; Wang ve ark., 2024).

Çalışmanın bir diğer önemli alanı, erken dönem ilişkilerimizin mevcut romantik partnerlerle etkileşimimizi nasıl etkilediğini incelemektir (Andersen ve Cole, 1990). Yetişkin bağlanma teorisine göre, bireyler geniş ilişki beklentilerinden romantik partnerlerine özgü inançlara kadar uzanan içsel çalışma modelleri geliştirirler (Brumbaugh ve Fraley, 2006, 2007). Bununla birlikte, erken bağlanma örüntülerinin yetişkin ilişkilerine aktarılmasının bilişsel ve duygusal mekanizmaları, özellikle yüksek reddedilme duyarlılığı veya deneyimsel kaçınma sergileyen bireyler arasında, yeterince incelenmemiştir. Boylamsal ve deneysel yaklaşımlar, bu içsel temsillerin nasıl sürdüğünü, yeniden ortaya çıktığını ve gelişimsel dönemler boyunca nasıl dönüştüğünü açıklığa kavuşturabilir ve böylece daha etkili önleyici ve terapötik uygulamalara rehberlik edebilir.

Gelecek araştırmalar, mevcut çalışmada incelenen değişkenleri tamamlayabilecek psikolojik süreçleri de göz önünde bulundurabilir. Bu yapılar mevcut modelde yer almasa da öz-düzenleme, duygu düzenleme ve bilişsel esneklik gibi faktörler, bireylerin algılanan reddedilmeyi ve yakınlıkla ilgili kaygıları nasıl yönettiklerine dair ek bilgiler sağlayabilir. Bu süreçlerin gelecekte incelenmesi, yeni bir model önerilmeden, mevcut örüntülerle ilişkili olarak dolaylı veya destekleyici bir rol oynayıp oynamadığını açıklığa kavuşturabilir. Benzer şekilde, mentalizasyon ve uyumlu atıf eğilimlerinin incelenmesi, bireylerin daha sağlıklı ilişki işlevselliği geliştirmesi ve kaçınma odaklı başa çıkma stratejilerine olan bağımlılığını azaltması konusunda ek bilgiler sağlayabilir (Clarke ve ark., 2020).

Karşılaştırmalı çalışmalar, araştırma için bir diğer kritik alanı temsil eder. İlişkisel normlar, duygusal ifade ve bakım uygulamalarındaki farklılıklar, yakınlıkla ilgili korkuların gelişimini ve sürdürülmesini şekillendirebilir. Bireyleri farklı kültürel

bağlamalarda karşılaştırmak ve ilişki durumlarını (ör. bekâr vs. partnerli) incelemek, bağlanma ile ilişkili kırılganlıkları artıran veya azaltan düzenleyici faktörleri belirleyebilir.

Yöntemsel açıdan, gelecekteki çalışmalar, bu araştırmada incelenen süreçleri daha ayrıntılı anlamak için karma yöntemli yaklaşımlardan yararlanabilir. Örneğin, derinlemesine görüşmeler veya gözlemsel yöntemler gibi nitel araçlar, katılımcıların yakınlıkla ilgili kaygılarına temel olan deneyimsel ve ilişkisel dinamikleri yakalamaya yardımcı olabilir. Bu dinamikler yalnızca öz-bildirimle erişilmesi zor süreçlerdir. Benzer şekilde, fizyolojik veya davranışsal göstergeler, yakınlık korkusu ve kaçınma odaklı başa çıkma ile ilişkili duygusal ve düzenleyici süreçlere dair tamamlayıcı kanıt sunabilir. Bu yöntemlerin demografik olarak daha çeşitli örneklemelerle birlikte kullanılması, gelecekteki çalışmaların bu yapıları daha geniş ve ekolojik olarak geçerli bir şekilde değerlendirmesine olanak tanır.

Son olarak, erken dönem ilişki bağlamalarını hedef alan önleyici ve uygulamalı araştırmalar gereklidir. Bakım verenler için eğitim girişimleri, klinik ve toplum temelli bağlamalarda bağlanma temelli değerlendirme araçları ve güvenli ilişki deneyimlerini teşvik eden yapılandırılmış müdahaleler, ileride yakınlık korkusuna karşı savunmasızlığı azaltabilir. Bu programların ampirik değerlendirilmesi, duygusal dirençliliği artıran, kişilerarası yetkinliği geliştiren ve yaşam boyu güvenli, tatmin edici ilişkilerin gelişimini destekleyen müdahalelerin tasarımına yönelik değerli kanıtlar sağlayacaktır.

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