

**CONFLICT DISTRESS, CONFLICT ATTRIBUTIONS AND PERCEIVED
CONFLICT BEHAVIORS AS PREDICTORS OF
RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION**

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ABSTRACT

CONFLICT DISTRESS, CONFLICT ATTRIBUTIONS AND PERCEIVED CONFLICT BEHAVIORS AS PREDICTORS OF RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

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The main aim of the study was to investigate the relationship among conflict distress, conflict attributions (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference) and relationship satisfaction. Relationship Conflict Inventory (RCI), Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), Conflict Behavior Questionnaire and Demographic Information Form were administered to 58 dating couples. In order to investigate the predictive power of conflict distress level, conflict attributions (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference) and demographic variables on relationship satisfaction stepwise regression analyses was carried out. Moreover, separate cross partial pairwise intraclass correlations conducted in order to examine the relationship between one partner's conflict distress level, conflict attributions (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behaviors

(similarity/difference) and the other partner's relationship satisfaction; and to examine the relationship between one partner's conflict distress, conflict attributions (self/partner blame) and the other partner's perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference). Additionally, it was also aimed to examine demographic variables' (namely, gender) effects on each variable and in all analysis. The results revealed that higher levels of conflict distress and perceived difference on conflict behaviors predict lower levels of satisfaction. Additionally, results yielded that in predicting women's relationship satisfaction conflict distress accounts as the only variable, whereas for men similarity on perceived conflict behaviors and blaming self predicted relationship satisfaction. It is also found that one partner's conflict distress, partner blame, and perceived conflict behavior difference negatively correlated with other partner's relationship satisfaction; and one partner's conflict distress and partner blame is positively correlated with the other partner's perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference). Furthermore, results indicated no gender differences on conflict distress level, conflict attribution (self/partner blame), and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference). The results are discussed in the light of literature.

Key Words: Conflict Distress, Conflict Attributions, Perceived Conflict Behaviors, Relationship Satisfaction, Dating Couples.

ÖZ

İLİŞKİ DOYUMU YORDAYICILARI OLARAK ÇATIŞMADAN DUYULAN RAHATSIZLIK, ÇATIŞMA ATIFLARI VE ALGILANAN ÇATIŞMA DAVRANIŞLARI

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Araştırmanın temel amacı, çatışmadan duyulan rahatsızlık, çatışma atıfları (kendini/partneri suçlama), algılanan çatışma davranışların (benzerlik/farklılık) ve ilişki doyumu arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmaktır. Birlikteliği olan 58 çifte İlişki Çatışma Ölçeği, Çift Uyum Ölçeği (ÇUÖ), Çatışma Davranışı Anketi ve Demografik Bilgi Formu uygulanmıştır. Çatışmadan duyulan rahatsızlığın, çatışma atıflarının (kendini/partnerini suçlama), algılanan çatışma davranışlarının (benzerlik/farklılık) ve demografik değişkenlerin ilişki doyumunu yordamadaki gücünü ölçmek için regrasyon analizi yapılmıştır. Ayrıca, bir partnerin çatışmadan duyduğu rahatsızlık, çatışma atıfları (kendini/partnerini suçlama), algıladığı çatışma davranışları (benzerlik/farklılık) ile diğer partnerin ilişki doyumu arasındaki ilişkiyi ve bir partnerin çatışmadan duyduğu rahatsızlık ve çatışma atıfları

(kendini/partnerini suçlama) ile diğer partnerin çatışma davranışlarını nasıl algıladığı arasındaki ilişkiyi ölçmek için karşılıklı bağımlılık durumları için kısmi korelasyon analizi uygulanmıştır. Bunlara ek olarak, demografik değişkenlerden cinsiyetin, her değişken üzerindeki etkisi incelenmiştir. Sonuçlar, çatışmadan duyulan rahatsızlığın yüksek düzeyde olmasının ve algılanan çatışma davranışlarının farklı olmasının düşük ilişki doyumunu yordadığını göstermiştir. Kadınların ilişki doyumunu yordamada çatışmadan duyulan rahatsızlığın tek anlamlı değişken olduğu, ancak erkeklerin ilişki doyumunu algılanan çatışma davranışlarının benzer olmasının ve kendini suçlamanın yordadığı bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, bulgular bir partnerin çatışmadan duyduğu rahatsızlık, çatışma atıfları (kendini/partnerini suçlama) ve algılanan çatışma davranışların (benzerlik/farklılık) ile diğer partnerin ilişki doyumu arasında negatif bir ilişki olduğunu ve bir partnerin çatışmadan duyduğu rahatsızlık ve çatışma atıfları (kendini/partnerini suçlama) ile diğer partnerin çatışma davranışlarını (benzer/farklı) algılaması arasında pozitif bir ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Son olarak bulgular incelenen değişkenler açısından cinsiyet farklılığına işaret etmemiştir. Araştırma bulguları ilgili literatür ışığında tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çatışmadan Duyulan Rahatsızlık, Çatışma Atıfları, Algılanan Çatışma Davranışları, İlişki Doyumu, Birlikteliği Olan Çiftler.

To my father and mother,
Prof. Dr. A.Yalçın Egeci and Edeltraud Egeci

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Date: 01.07.2005

Signature:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, first, background information related with the topic of the study is given. Secondly, aims of the study are presented. Thirdly, significance of the study; and fourthly, implications of the present study are mentioned.

1.1 Background Information for the Topic of the Study

Conflict (Cahn, 1992), a disagreement, difference or incompatibility in views, interests, and opinions, exists in every intimate relationship in different degrees and complexities. As conflict increases, however, it becomes something more than specific disagreements due to the nature of intimacy, and usually viewed as a negative and destructive part of intimate relationships (Cahn, 1992). On the other hand, since intimacy is viewed as an important source of emotional, psychological, and physical well-being (Burman & Margolin, 1992), there have been a noteworthy focus on the study of sources and consequences of conflict in intimate relationships (Gottman, 1994). Conflict-based studies investigate different aspects of conflict such as behaviors that couples engage in during conflictual situations (Thomas, 1976; Rusbult, Zembrodt & Gunn, 1982), perceptions within conflictual situations (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Hojjat, 2000), attributions regarding the cause of conflict (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987a), frequency of conflict (McGonagle, Kessler & Schilling, 1992; Lloyd, 1987). Vast majority of the studies focuses on either one aspect or combinations of these aspects as determinants of relationship satisfaction (Heavey, Layne & Christensen, 1993; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, &

Clements, 1993) based on the global assessment of relationship with regard to each partner's subjective feelings of happiness and pleasure (Hawkins, 1968). Conflict behaviors, perceptions within conflictual situations and responsibility attributions are also an interest area of the current study.

Research in the area of relationship satisfaction and conflict indicates contradictory implications, on one extreme couples perceive less intimacy following the conflict, and on the other extreme, couples report that they felt closer, thought they understood each other better (Rands, Levinger & Mellinger, 1981). Braiker and Kelly (1979) found that spouses report an increase in degree of their love and communication skills about the relationship, an improvement in conflictual situations, and in modifying one's behavior to resolve conflict. These findings imply that although they experience conflict, partners managed to maintain their satisfaction. Contradictorily, some other studies yielded that inappropriate interaction and communication skills in conflict-laden situations strongly predict relationship quality and stability (Gottman, Coan, Correre & Swanson, 1998). Besides, frequency of conflict found to be a negative factor for relationship satisfaction (Kurdek, 1994). Braiker and Kelley (1979) also found that conflict negativity, such as frequency of conflict increased when moving from causal to serious dating, but remained stable thereafter. Additionally, results indicate that over time, conflict wear outs the affection that partners feels toward each other (Kelly, Huston & Cate, 1985).

As it is mentioned above, one of the important aspects studied in conflict-based research is the association between couples' ways of handling conflict and

relationship satisfaction. According to Thomas (1976), conflict could be either constructive or destructive depending on the behaviors engaged in to resolve conflict. These behaviors are defined based on two dimensions: assertiveness, (concern for one's own self) and cooperation (which is the concern for the other person) (Deutsch, 1994). According to these two dimensions five conflict handling behaviors have been identified. The first one, competing, is an attempt to force one's viewpoint to the other person, and is associated with high concern for self and low concern for the other. Avoiding is an attempt of withdrawal from the conflict, which is a behavior with low concern for self and other. The third behavior is compromising, which is the search for middle-ground solutions, and associated with an intermediate concern for self and other. The fourth behavior, accommodating involves giving up one's own needs for the sake of meeting the needs of the other. Accommodating is associated with low concern for self and high concern for other. Collaborating, the last behavior, seeks effective problem-solving strategies in order to accomplish a mutually satisfying conclusion for all parties. Collaborating is associated with high concern for self and for the other (Thomas, 1976)

Several researchers of intimate relationships have pointed out the significant roles of conflict handling behaviors in determining relationship satisfaction. For example, a study conducted by Cramer (2000) showed that what effects relationship satisfaction is the ways couples engage in to handle the disagreements and the extent to which these disagreements are satisfactorily resolved. Another study (Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002) examining the longitudinal course of marital quality and stability revealed that the quality of conflict handling behaviors establishes the

quantity and intensity of common conflict episode and influences overall quality and stability. A recent research (Cramer, 2002) examining whether the association between negative conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction was similar for minor and major issues indicated that what effects the relationship satisfaction is not specific issues according to their intensity, rather how they are handled. Likewise, Sprecher and Felmlee (1993) in their study found that content and management of conflicts are more important than the mere presence or frequency of conflict (cited in. Canary, Cupach & Messman, 1995).

On the other hand, literature indicates different results regarding the positive and negative ways of conflict handling behaviors. According to this, some studies revealed that positive or constructive conflict handling behaviors contribute to relationship satisfaction, whereas others found the opposite. Genshaft (1980) found that partners who are not satisfied with their relationship tend to see their partners more defensive. Similarly Knudson, Sommers and Golding (1980) found that couples who engage in issues and discuss openly reported an increase of agreement and understanding of the partner's perception, whereas couples who avoid conflicts reported a decrease in agreement and an increase in discrepancy on each other's perception. Another study Canary and Spitzberg (1987) concordant with these studies revealed that in both same sex and opposite sex relationships integrative strategies, which are defined as negotiation about the disagreement issues, viewed as more appropriate, and avoidance perceived to be antagonist and competitive (Canary et al., 1995). On the other hand, Fitzpatrick and Winke (1979) found that highly satisfied couples were more likely to engage in manipulation in order to

avoid conflicts. Similarly, Pike and Sillars (1985) showed that couples who used avoidance to a greater extent were satisfied couples.

According to the contradictory results with regard to the direction of relationship between conflict handling behaviors and relationship satisfaction, it could be assumed that in determination of relationship satisfaction, not only the chosen strategies to handle conflicts are important, but how each partner perceives themselves and their partners in the context of conflict is another important aspect. Literature contains various theories implying the importance of each partner's view on each other's conflict handling behaviors. For example, "Empathic Accuracy Model" (Simpson, Ickes & Orina, 2001) assumes that the degree to which each partner displays cues that reflect his/her true internal states and the degree to which each partner can accurately interpret the other's valid behavioral cues would effect the interaction patterns of the couple. Likewise, Baucom, Epstein, Sayers and Sher (1989) suggested that spouses' perceptions and inferences about each other's behavior can attribute to marital distress because they can serve as a distorted and dissatisfying version of reality, and because spouses normally unaware that the information they perceive is only a subset of the data available in any situation perceptual bias can have powerful effects on marital interaction. The association between strategies and outcome link pertain both to one's own reported behavior and to behavior ascribed to one's partner (Cahn, 1992). In fact, Acitelli, Douvan and Veroff (1993) stated that perceptions of self and partner play a crucial role in marital relationships, and moreover, they emphasized the importance of perceptions with regard to similarities and discrepancies in the strategies couples choose.

Acitelli et al. (1993) defined perceived similarity as correspondence of an individual's perception of the self and of the partner and investigated the contribution of actual and perceived similarity to relationship satisfaction. The results yielded that perceived similarity between couples is greater than actual similarity of behaviors within destructive and constructive conflict behaviors. However, although perceived similarities' and discrepancies' appear to be an important aspect of conflict, research has received scant attention on this subject.

Literature indicates that within conflict-based studies attributions are another important aspect. Cahn (1992) proposes that conflict process, sources of conflict and the strategies partners adopt for coping with the conflict are also influenced by their attributions for the conflict. Fincham and Bradbury (1987b) distinguished causal attributions from responsibility attributions. Accordingly, causal attributions are related with locating the factor producing behavior, whereas responsibility attributions decide the acceptability of the behavior according to a set of standards. In their study Fincham and Bradbury (1987a) investigated the importance of attributions concerning who caused the conflict. They found that both attributions for marital difficulties and negative couple behaviors are strongly related to concurrent relationship satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987a). In another study (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989) on perceived competence and conflict strategies revealed that a person's attributions of a coactor's intent, locus of conflict responsibility and stability influence the person's impression of the partner. Similarly, Canary and Cupach (1988), and Spitzberg, Canary and Cupach (1994) showed that conflict behaviors do not influence relational outcomes directly, but

how people interpret conflict behaviors effect the outcome. What happens in a conflict largely depends on couples' views about the causes of the problem they are experiencing and whether do they blame each other, themselves or outside circumstances (Hinde, 1997).

Since conflict is a result of interaction, it appears that both partner's views about conflict would effect the selection of conflict handling behaviors; their views about the causes of conflict and in turn would influence the course of the relationship. In fact, Braiker and Kelley (1979) investigated married couples retrospectively, and asked about four stages in their relationship history; causal dating, serious dating, engagement, and the first six months of marriage. They found that conflict negativity significantly increased when moving from causal to serious dating; then remained stable. In a similar study, Kelly, Huston and Cate (1985) found that premarital conflict predicted later levels of marital conflict and was negatively correlated with marital satisfaction. Moreover, Crohan (1992) found that if both partners similarly believe that avoiding conflicts are more useful for their relationship, relationship satisfaction lowered in the first year of marriage and two years after, than those couples who similarly believed that confronting conflictual situations are more effective. And finally, Baucom (1987) and Fletcher, Fincham, Cramer and Heron (1987) emphasized the role of attributions within different stages of the relationship. Accordingly, in the early stages of relationships, the relationship is perceived as unstable, and thus, events occurred within relationships more likely tried to be explained. Since negative events tend to be

more salient than positive ones, individuals tend to notice and assign causes to negative behavior by the partner.

Furthermore, studies in the area of conflict and relationship satisfaction also focused on the importance of conflict distress. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) stated that a deficit in effective conflict handling behaviors is a major causal factor for marital distress. In fact, Billings (1979) stressed that resolving conflicts is a crucial factor in maintaining relationship satisfaction. If conflicts are not handled in a constructive manner, conflictual situations would lead to distress. Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow (1986 a) examined dating couples' distress levels based on the views of partners about each other's conflict handling behaviors, and found that when individuals perceive their partners more tend to engage in destructive conflict behaviors, the reported distress level increases. In addition to the association of conflict distress and relationship satisfaction, literature also indicates the important association of attributions and distress. Findings indicate that happy and satisfied individuals usually attribute the cause to stable internal factors when things are in a good situation, whereas they tend to make attributions to unstable external causes in opposite situations in order to enhance the quality of their relationship. On the other hand, distressed and depressed individuals apt to do the opposite and are less likely make positive attributions about their partners (Baucom, 1987; Baucom, Sayers & Duke, 1989; Fletcher, Fitness & Blampied, 1990; Forgas, Bower & Moylan, 1990). Also, it is assumed that distress level may have a negative effect on the course of relationship. For example, Schriber, Larwood and Peterson (1985) found that couples who are experiencing higher levels of conflict reported lower levels of

positive attributions for the future outcome related with relationship. Thus, including distress in the study of conflict and relationship satisfaction appears to be important.

In addition, one of the analysis units that have been focused on investigation of relationship satisfaction and conflict handling behaviors is married couples (Acitelli et al., 1993; MGonagle, Kessler, & Gotlib, 1993; Ridley, Wilhelm & Surra, 2001). However, as it is mentioned before, all kinds of close relationships have an important effect on emotional, psychological, and physical well-being (Burman & Margolin, 1992), including dating couples. If dating relationships are considered as a platform in which each person experiences different conflictual situations, and developing different management strategies, this may contribute to later strategies which will be chosen, namely the ones within marriage. Since marriages increasingly end with divorce, identifying the effectiveness of conflict handling behaviors among dating couples should be another unit of analysis in research in order to prevent later negative effects of conflicts. Therefore, in the current study, dating couples were chosen as participants.

1.2 Aims of the Study

In the light of the literature presented in the previous section, the main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship among each partner's views on conflict distress, conflict attributions, conflict behaviors and relationship satisfaction in dating couples. In addition, it is also aimed to investigate the demographic variables', (namely age, gender, relationship duration, for how long

they know each other, time spent together within a week and frequency of considering breaking up), effects on conflict distress, conflict attribution (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and relationship satisfaction (for all variables and within each analysis gender differences were examined).

Furthermore, it was aimed to evaluate the Relationship Conflict Inventory according to its validity and reliability in the Turkish culture.

More specifically, the following questions were examined:

1. a. Do demographic variables (age, relationship duration, for how long they know each other, time spent together within a week, frequency of considering breaking up), conflict distress, conflict attributions (self/partner blame) and perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference) predict relationship satisfaction?

2. When each specific couple (partners who reported views for each other) is taken and when relationship duration is controlled,

a. Is there a relationship between one partner's conflict distress level and the other partner's relationship satisfaction?

b. Is there a relationship between one partner's conflict distress level and the other partner's perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference)?

c. Is there a relationship between one partner's conflict attributions (self/partner blame) and the other partner's relationship satisfaction?

d. Is there a relationship between one partner's conflict attributions (self/partner blame) and the other partner's perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference)?

e. Is there a relationship between one partner's perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference) and the other partner's relationship satisfaction?

1.3 Significance of the Study

One of the important aspects of this study is to provide a reliable and valid instrument in order to measure conflict from a wide perspective in romantic relationships. Although there are various studies and instruments (Touliates, Perlmutter & Straus, 1990) investigating marital conflict, dating couples' relationship is a rarely studied topic. Instruments are usually designed in order to measure specifically marital relationship, whereas dating couples are usually neglected. Since the Relationship Conflict Inventory is designed in order to measure the relationship, rather than only marital or only dating relationships, it provides a more global view about relationships. Moreover, most of the studies are conducted in social psychology area, focusing only on one aspect such as how individual's attributions are formed and affect the relationship. The Relationship Conflict Inventory, however, investigates relationships' multiple aspects, including frequency, distress and attributions. Thereby, it provides a more general perspective on interrelations of these aspects depending on both partner's views. Thus, this study may contribute as it serves both a research and a therapeutic tool in order to assess relationship.

Furthermore, conflict and related factors, such as conflict attributions (self/partner blame), conflict distress, and perceived conflict behaviors are vital determinants of relationship satisfaction. Thus, in order to improve couples'

intimate relationships and to help couples to experience more satisfactory relationships, studying conflict appears to be important. Earlier studies in this area, however, usually focused separately on these aspects of conflict or investigated only one partner's perceptions on these aspects, with the assumption that one partner's view would give an idea about the nature of the relationship. Therefore, studying the interaction of both partners' perceptions on each others' conflict behaviors and conflict attributions (self/partner blame) would contribute a great deal to this gap in the literature.

In addition, generally married couples' relationship satisfaction determinants were tried to be identified. However, studies revealed that the course of relationships before marriage has an important impact on later satisfaction. Thus, if dating relationships considered as a platform in order to experience different conflictual situations and to develop different ways to handle with these, identifying behavioral and attributional styles of dating couples and the effects of conflict distress would provide a more general view in understanding what leads couples failing in their relationships. And finally, a review of Turkish literature reveals that the relationship between satisfaction and conflict has received scant attention, so this study would add in order to understand the nature of intimate relationships within Turkish sample.

1.4 Implications of the Study

One of the implications of the current study is that the Turkish version of the RCI identifies multiple aspects of conflict of intimate relationships. Since the

inventory is appropriate for either individual application or couple applications, clinicians may provide information with regard to individual or dyad basis, which would give the opportunity to investigate interactions of perceptions on distress, attributions and behaviors. Moreover, since the inventory has not developed specifically on the basis of marital or dating relationships, but on the basis of intimate relationships, clinicians and researchers could be able to use the inventory in identifying both premarital and marital couples' conflict experiences.

In addition, the present study conducted in a non-clinical sample. Information gathered from this group provides a general idea about conflict and conflict's effects on relationship satisfaction in dating couples. It is well-known that conflict is generally viewed as a negative aspect of relationships, and partners tend to view the negative aspects of their relationship and of their partners. Hence, the findings of the present study would provide a basis of knowledge about the origin of distress, the nature of attributions, the role of perceptions on conflict behaviors, and additionally the interaction of these aspects. More specifically, the results would provide a deeper understanding of what makes partners distressed, and how being distressed effects the relationship; who is seen as the cause of conflicts, how this view effects couples general idea and feelings about the relationship, what could these attributions imply for the future of the relationship; how the conflict behaviors are perceived, what are the effects of these perceptions on the partners views about each other and about the relationship. These results would underlie the important factors which should be cautiously taken into account by the clinicians in order to help unhappy couples and may provide a

basis of knowledge in setting the goals for the conflicting couples. First of all, by knowing the sources of distress would provide a general idea about the couples' conflict patterns and would be helpful in determining the specific sources for that couple. Secondly, since attributions are usually made implicitly, they usually thought to be a part of reality, and thus, they are not evaluated or questioned. So, the results of this study would underlie the possible attributions which could be made by the unhappy partners, and consequently clinicians could be able to know which attributions needed to be discussed. In this way the clinician may help couples to realize the differences in real situations and their attributions, and ultimately, provide a platform for the couples to express their views on each other's motivations, expectations, and behaviors. Thirdly, if the clinicians have a general view about couples' perceptions on conflict behaviors and their effects on the relationship, s/he could provide an opportunity to discuss these behaviors' underlying motivations. In this way, couples could be able to view not only positive parts of their partner's behaviors, but also could be able to understand their partners from a different perspective. Furthermore, such clarifications may lead the partners to modify their possible hopelessness about the future of the relationship. As it is mentioned in the previous sections, intimate relationship before marriage is a factor in determining later satisfaction. In the light of this, clinicians may benefit from this information in order to identify approaches to prevent partners from failing in their relationships, or in order to provide educative information for couples who are planning to get married and seeking help or information to improve their relationships.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, a review of the related literature is summarized. First, relationship satisfaction is summarized under two titles; definition of relationship satisfaction, and measurement of relationship satisfaction. Second, different aspects of conflict, namely, conflict attributions, conflict behaviors, conflict distress, and perceptions on conflict behaviors are presented. Thirdly, researches on relationship satisfaction and conflict literature in Turkey are summarized. And finally, the connection of the literature and the present study is presented.

2.1 Relationship Satisfaction: Definition

People form different interactions in their daily lives. Some of these interactions include more intimate relationships with others. According to Perlman and Fehr (1987) definition of intimacy captures three themes, which are closeness, interdependence of partners, the extent of self-disclosure, and the warmth or affection experienced. Similarly Braiker and Kelley (1979) define intimacy as a close relationship which contains reciprocal dependency and joint actions. A reciprocally dependent relationship, like dating couples' relationship, creates a bond between two people and captures expression of love (Heath, 1976). Parties in such relationships tend to make global assessments of their relationship. The nature of this assessment affects each partner's immediate well-being, and also the longer-term course of the relationship, which in turn affects the partner's relationship

satisfaction (Hinde, 1997). A study conducted by Kurdek (1990) examined the newlyweds' evaluations with regard to relationship quality and found that partners' positive attributions and their evaluations about the positivity of their interactions contribute to relationship quality.

Relationship satisfaction is a complex concept which leads diversities in defining the term. In literature relationship satisfaction is labeled with semi-alternative terms, such as adjustment, quality or stability (Sabatelli, 1988). For example, LeMasters (1957) defines adjustment as a capacity for adaptation, capability of solving problems, whereas Hoult (1969) defines it as complex factors which includes amount of conflict, shared activities believed to be related with happiness or success of a marriage. According to Halford, Kelly and Markman (1997), relationship adjustment is related with partner's positive feelings and thoughts towards each other, having a positive relationship schema, being able to communicate well, having the ability to resolve conflicts, and joining in activities. On the other hand, Hawkins (1968) defines relationship satisfaction as a global assessment of experienced personal happiness and feeling pleasure. Thibaut and Kelley (1959; cited in Vaughn & Baier, 1999) defines a satisfied person as someone who evaluates the relationship as meeting or exceeding a set of internal standards for a good relationship and who does not perceive any other relationship that meet these internal standards. Although definitions vary, relationship satisfaction appears to be an important aspect for global assessment of individual's well-being.

To sum up, it appears that although there is no consensus on distinguishing the terms relationship satisfaction and adjustment, both terms are related to partners'

assessments of relationship, which in turn immediate the well-being of the parties in the relationship (Hinde, 1997). The difficulty in reaching a single definition of adjustment or satisfaction is discussed as a result of variety of social, psychological, personal and demographic factors related to adjustment (Glenn, 1990; Robinson & Blanton, 1993).

2.2 Measurement of Relationship Satisfaction

In measurement of relationship satisfaction, defining relationship quality appears to be including two major areas of disagreements. The first one is related with the lack of consensus on definition of relationship satisfaction or adjustment, which is discussed in the previous section. As a result of the diversity on definitions, in empirical studies on intimate relationships all these terms are used intermingled (Heyman, Sayers & Bellack, 1994), which leads confusion whether they really measure the same thing or different things. The second disagreement in the measurement of relationship satisfaction is that whether satisfaction should be seen as an overall evaluative judgment of the relationship or whether satisfaction in different aspects of the relationship should be evaluated (Hinde, 1997).

In measurement of relationship satisfaction there have been two main approaches. First approach is “composite” measures of marital quality. Scales which are composite consist of different items measuring different concepts. These scales exclusively use total score measures. One advantage of using a global evaluation of relationship satisfaction is that it eases interpretation and provides higher internal consistency. Moreover, global evaluations of the relationship

measures are not limited to objective descriptions of behavior, but they measure one's attitudes toward the relationship (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987c). One of the most well-known measurements of global assessment of relationship quality is Locke-Wallace Adjustment Test (Vaughn & Baier, 1999). The second approach in measurement is to assess marital quality in different aspects of relationship independently (Hinde, 1997). One of the most widely used instrument in assessing subconcepts of relationship quality is Dyadic Adjustment Scale, which consists of four subscales, namely dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction and affectional expression. These four subscales represent different constructs (Vaughn & Baier, 1999). These scales provide a more specific view over partners in order to distinguish the maladjusted and adjusted areas of the relationships.

It appears that measuring relationship quality differ in approaches, however, both have some advantages. On the other hand, the area whether the instruments developed for relationship satisfaction and relationship adjustment measure the same thing or different things remains unclear. However, some researchers argued that since there is no evidence for the distinctions between relationship satisfaction and relationship adjustment terms, and since these two constructs display a high correlation, they stated that there is no need to draw distinctions (Fowers, Applegate, Olson & Pomerantz, 1994). Vauhgn and Baier (1999) conducted a study in order to examine whether these terms measure the same constructs and found evidence for Fower et al.'s (1994) view. They used a global instrument (Relationship Assessment Scale) which is developed by Hendrick (1988) to measure relationship satisfaction and a specific instrument (Dyadic Adjustment

Scale) which is developed in order to assess relationship adjustment. In the study, same participants filled out both scales. The results revealed a high correlation between RAS and subscales and total scores of DAS indicating that both scales measure the same aspect of relationship despite the operational definitions.

To sum up, despite the diversities in definitions, both global and specific instruments developed according to assess either relationship satisfaction or adjustment appears to measure the same aspect of the relationship.

2.3 Conflict as an Aspect

In relationships, which are reciprocal in nature, like dating relationships or marriage, conflict appears as an inevitable aspect of interaction (Cahn, 1992). Consequently, research on relationship satisfaction has given an important emphasis on conflict (Rusbult et al., 1982; McGonagle et al, 1993).

Literature points out various definitions for conflict. For example, some definitions emphasize conflict as two or more competing responses to a single event (Cummings, Long & Lewis, 1987; cited in Lulofs & Cahn, 2000) or as a situation which arise when people believe that their aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously (Pruitt, & Rubin, 1986; cited in Lulofs, & Cahn, 2000). Deutch (1973) refers conflict as the occurrence of incompatible activities in which one prevents, obstructs or makes less likely or effective the other's behaviors, whereas Hocker and Wilmot (1991) define conflict as an interaction in which partners negotiate incompatible goals. According to Himes (1980; cited in Counts, 2003) conflict is a struggle over claims to status, and power in which the aims of the

conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, or eliminate their rivals. Finally, Thomas (1976) defines dyadic conflict as a process wherein one party perceives that the other has frustrated or about to frustrate his concerns and which includes partner's emotions, behaviors and perceptions. It appears that, although there have been many definitions; most agree that conflict involves incompatibility between people (Deutsch, 1973). In other words, the common aspect of these definitions is the emphasis given on incompatibility, whereas other aspects lack consensus (Wieder-Hatfield, 1993). Prinz (1976, cited in Canary et al., 1995, p 4) found eight different interpersonal conflict definitions in the literature in which conflict viewed as "interruption, disagreement, tension, defensive versus supportive communication, anxiety, tension and emotions, antagonism, negative interpersonal expressiveness, and contradictions between verbal and nonverbal messages".

On the other hand, despite the diversities, Cahn (1992) proposes a more general view in which, conflict is not seen as a stable situation, but rather an enduring and persistent component of interaction which has the potential to change and develop over time; and defines conflict as a process. So, when all the definitions are taken together, it could be assumed that conflict as a process, occurs along cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions (Mayer, 2000). In the cognitive dimension, conflict could be viewed as a set of perceptions in which one's beliefs, needs, interests are incompatible with someone else's. In the second dimension, conflict involves an emotional reaction to a situation or interaction that signals a disagreement. And lastly, conflict includes actions by which the individual

expresses his/her feelings, perceptions and needs. In this sense, examining couples' attitudes, beliefs, emotional reactions and behaviors in conflict situations is vital (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000) in order to clarify the factors which lead to dissatisfaction in close relationships.

Researches showed that different aspects of conflict are strongly related to relationship satisfaction. For example, negatively valued behaviors during conflict situations may deteriorate marital satisfaction. A study conducted by Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that behaviors such as stubbornness, defensiveness and withdrawal from interaction are dysfunctional in marital satisfaction and leads to deterioration. Similarly, in their study Huston and Vangelisti (1991) showed that negativity was associated with low satisfaction for both of the spouses, and receiving and giving affection was positively associated with satisfaction. Furthermore, frequency of conflict in various content areas were investigated by Kurdek (1994) and found that arguing over power and intimacy was strongly and negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Similarly McGonagle et al. (1992) investigated marital couples' frequency of disagreements in their relationships. Couples interviewed at two different points in time, 3 years apart. The vast majority of participants reported an average of one or two unpleasant disagreements per month. The accuracy of these retrospective reports was verified by a random subsample who kept daily diaries. Results indicated that there was no or very little change in disagreement frequency over a three year period. Another study conducted by Kelly et al. (1985) also used retrospective interviews with newlywed couples about conflict frequency, marital satisfaction and adjustment. Results

showed that premarital conflict predicted later levels of marital conflict, and moreover, higher levels of premarital conflict were negatively associated with marital satisfaction. These data suggest that conflict frequency can vary according to the satisfaction level of couples.

On the other hand, researches also indicate that conflict outcome varies from one extreme in which less intimacy was reported following the conflict to the other in which the couples felt closer, thought they understood each other better (Cahn, 1992). In this sense conflict serves a function as it makes clear of existing problems which are needed to be solved (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Moreover, McGonagle et al. (1993) proposed that engaging in conflict prevents couples from longer-term risks. Crohan (1992) stated that beliefs about conflicts are more important to relationship satisfaction than whether or not partners actually agree with one another. In this sense, it could be concluded that conflict can be either negative or positive depending on a variety of factors, including each partner's views about the situation and about the other.

2.3.1 Conflict Attributions

As it is mentioned in the previous section, conflict process captures three dimensions; namely cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Mayer, 2000). Furthermore, within cognitive dimension beliefs, attributions and perceptions have a major role. People tend to try to understand the events in their environments, which imply assignment of causes to event (Berscheid, Grazino & Monson, 1976; cited in Hinde, 1997). In intimate relationships, understanding the

partner involves understanding the bases for the other's behavior which may promote the sense of intimacy, closeness, and oneness with the other partner (Baucom, 1987). Moreover, attributions provide effective control over one's life (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967, 1972; cited in Baucom, 1987). In fact, if an individual views his/her partner's behavior as having a negative impact, s/he would likely to change the behavior. In order to establish such a change, knowing the reason of the behavior would be helpful (Baucom, 1987). It is widely assumed that causal attributions about marital events initiate and maintain marital distress, and ultimately lower relationship satisfaction (Fincham, Bradbury, 1993). In fact, Baucom (1987) argued that married individuals make attributions for their spouses' behavior in a manner that is consistent with the individuals' relationship satisfaction. However, attribution research assumes that individuals do not make attributions in every situation. Some authors suggest that one type of situation which triggers attribution is unpredictable behavior (Lau & Russel, 1980; Pyzczynski & Greenberg, 1981; Wong & Weiner, 1981). In other words, if an individual acts different than the other expects, this would attract attention by the observer and lead him/her try to understand this unexpected event. Another situation in which attributions would be made is negative behaviors, and conflict situations (Wong & Weiner, 1981). The impact of aversive events, such as conflicts, is likely to attract attention, and consequently couples tend to understand their negative interactions in order to promote change to alleviate their aversive states (Baucom, 1987). In this sense, causal attributions and the way each partner view the conflict situation is an important aspect of conflicts.

Attributions have been considered on several dimensions with different researchers focusing on different dimensions. First dimension is stability, which refers to whether the cause is likely to continue or is it changeable (Weiner, 1974; cited in Baucom, 1987). The second is internal/external dimension, which involves the source of conflict. In other words, the responsibility for the conflict is attributed. Third dimension, intent, subjects whether the behavior was perceived as positive or negative (Doherty, 1981; cited in Baucom, 1987). Fourth dimension is control (Weiner, 1979; cited in Baucom, 1987). Control dimension focuses on whether the cause is subject to personal influence. In other words, it refers to whether the behavior of the partner could be changed with the individual's efforts. Another dimension describes whether the actor's behavior is voluntary or involuntary (Hieder, 1958; cited in Baucom, 1987). The last dimension is whether the cause is global or specific. Global cause refers to attributions which would affect many aspects of the relationship, whereas specific causes refer to attributions which would affect relatively few aspects of the relationship. How people explain their own and partner's behaviors function to protect sense of self. In other words, in order to protect self-esteem individuals make attributions in a self-serving manner (Baucom, 1987).

In sum, individuals make causal attributions with regard to their partner's behaviors in order to understand their partners and provide control over their lives. These attributions are made based on several dimensions which function to protect their self-esteem.

2.3.1.1 Theories and Models on Attributions

Since attributions for the partner behavior is closely related with individual's overall relationship satisfaction (Baucom, 1987), researchers focused on attributions in order to enhance quality of relationships and to decrease the distress experienced within conflict situations.

Fincham and Bradbury (1987b) suggested an attribution-efficacy model, based on Doherty's (1981; cited in Fincham, Bradbury, 1987b) attribution model. According to this model, conflict in the context of intimate relationships initiates two processes. The first process concerns about determination of the causes of conflict, which represents the attributional dimension, whilst the second process entails whether the conflict can be solved, and represents the efficacy dimension. The two processes are assumed to influence various aspects of conflict including, the extent to which conflict on a specific topic generalizes to the other areas, the occurrence of blame, the foci of efforts made to resolve conflicts, and whether such efforts occur. Moreover, attributions about conflict are analyzed in terms of various causal dimensions, which of one is the locus of the cause to which the conflict attributed. On the other hand, Fincham and Bradbury (1987a) state that judgments of responsibility mediate the relation between causal attributions and blame, and in turn such attributions influence relationship satisfaction. Thus, they revised the model by distinguishing causal attributions from responsibility attributions. Accordingly, causal attributions are related with locating the factor producing behavior, whereas responsibility attributions decide the acceptability of the behavior according to a set of standards. In other words, judgments of causation

involve establishing what produces an event or outcome, and thereby involves analysis of past events; whereas responsibility concerns accountability for the outcome (behavior) once a cause is established and is related with current concerns about the partner or the relationship. So, the major difference is that responsibility involves evaluation component and assigns blame. This may have a direct effect or an indirect effect by the assumptions of causal inferences for partner behavior on subsequent responses to the behavior (Fincham & Bradbury, 1993).

Based on the attribution-efficacy model, Fincham, Beach and Nelson (1987) conducted a study, investigating causal and responsibility attributions for spouse behaviors in couples seeking therapy and in non-distressed couples. The spouses were asked to rate the cause of positive and negative partner behaviors, to assign responsibility for the partner behaviors, and their affective impact on them and finally, their own behaviors in response to each behavior of the partner. According to the results, the authors concluded that if negative behaviors occur many distressed couples tend to infer that their spouse's behavior represent selfish and intentional actions deserving blame. The greater they view the partners' actions as selfishly and blameworthy, the greater affectively upset and behaviorally punitive behaviors occur. When they display their upset and response in more punitive behaviors, their distressed spouse is likely to view their behavior as blameworthy and respond in a similar manner. In another longitudinal study examining the impact of causal and responsibility attributions conducted by Fincham and Bradbury (1987a), it is found that both attributions for marital difficulties and negative spouse behaviors were strongly related concurrent marital satisfaction.

Based on these findings they concluded that the attributions for specific partner behavior affect the spouse's subsequent response to the partner. In other words, it appears that the actions that partners choose are results of their interpretations. Partners' views about the conflict situation effect the current situation, their ideas about the conflict issues, their actions, and also their thoughts about the other person's actions, which in turn would affect the outcome of the conflict situation.

Deutsch (1973) claimed how perceptions may influence conflict. He stated that, how partners view each other is more important than the actual problems because it is these perceptions which motivate conflict. According to Secord, Backman and Slavit (1976) when couples disagree, they tend to attribute the cause to the other, and believe that the argument is not their fault. The course of conflict situation depends in largely on the participants' views of the causes of the problem and their attributions (Hinde, 1997).

According to the Lens Model of Conflict (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001) each person has a view of the self, of the other, and of the relationship. These three perceptual pieces form the fundamental views of conflict. The features of a conflict are "communicative acts", which are the behaviors of each person; the "meanings", which are the attributions attached to those behaviors by each person, and finally, the "meanings" (attributions) the two people ascribe to their relationship. The behaviors' impact depends largely on the other person's perceptions and attributions about the behaviors. In other words, each person creates meanings as they interact and reflect. Thus, perceptions of and attributions about the behaviors are in a central position of the conflict process. Researches about attribution theory

indicate that people tend to make different attributions about themselves than about others, especially attribute negative effects to the other. In a study (Sillars & Parry, 1982; cited in Wilmot & Hocker, 2001), it is found that as conflict severity increases, blaming the other also increases. Thereby it is concluded that as one attributes the blame to the other, the next conflict move starts based on the perception that the other is at fault. Confounding the problem, each individual attributes success to their own efforts, and their faults to external events. Attribution studies showed that people try to make sense out of behaviors by looking for causes, people attribute causes of their own behavior to external factors, and people attribute causes of others' behaviors to internal dispositions. These findings suggest that people use different lens for viewing themselves than they do for viewing others, in a way in which negative effects are attributed to the other (cited in Wilmot & Hocker, 1995).

Another theory, Empathic Accuracy Model (Simpson et al., 2001), proposes that the extent to which each partner displays cues that reflect their true internal states and the extent to which each partner can accurately interpret the other's behavioral cues would affect the communication pattern of the couple. According to the model, each partner makes a preliminary assessment in order to understand whether the present situation is likely to lead a danger zone topic or issue in the relationship. Danger zone refers to any topic or issue that could threaten the relationship by displaying one of the partner's thoughts and feelings that the perceiver might find personally distressing or upsetting. What each partner finds

distressing or perceives as danger zone might differ, and they can follow different paths when one partner anticipates a danger zone emerging in the present situation.

The model explains empathic accuracy within two contexts; in non-threatening contexts and in threatening contexts. In this sense, the model predicts that when perceivers expect to discuss issues which do not have threatening implications, they should be motivated to accurately understand their partners' thoughts and feelings. Accordingly, in non-threatening situations in which no danger zone is perceived such as everyday conversations, partners display a habit-based accuracy orientation which helps them to clear up misunderstandings, keep minor conflicts from escalating into major ones, and gain an understanding of their partners. This orientation leads enhancing feelings of satisfaction and closeness in the relationship. On the other hand, partners inevitably encounter with danger zones and when these situations evoke, the model predicts that the partners' first attempt is to avoid or escape from them (Simpson et al., 2001). Over time, partners learn to identify and avoid the potential danger zone areas to protect their own self-esteem, their partner's self-esteem, and their positive views of the relationship (Murray & Holmes, 1996).

However, avoiding or escaping from danger zones is not always possible, and the model predicts that when partners feel that they obliged to remain in a threatening situation, partners would engage in motivated inaccuracy, which is a conscious or unconscious failure to accurately infer specific content of their partner's potentially hurtful thoughts and feelings. The success of this strategy varies depending on the extent to which the inferred content of the partner's

distressing thoughts/feelings is perceived as ambiguous versus unambiguous. If the content of the partners' potentially threatening thoughts and feelings is perceived as ambiguous, partners use motivated accuracy in order to avoid the need of dealing with the threatening implications of their partners' potentially destructive thoughts and feelings. In this way, they decrease their personal and relational distress and keep their relationship more stable. On the other hand, when partners do not feel obliged to remain in a relationship-threatening situation but cannot use motivated inaccuracy for dealing with relationship threat, the threatening content of the partner's thoughts and feelings is perceived as clear and unambiguous. In this situation, the clarity of the information force the partner to achieve at least moderate accuracy, accompanied by very low relationship satisfaction and instability (Simpson et al., 2001).

Likewise, Rusbult, Yovetich and Verentte (1996) suggest that assigning responsibility or blame for the events and trying to discern meanings to events is a part of human nature, and these are done both in cognitive and emotional levels. Thus, they suggest that it is the cognitive interpretations and emotions which lead to action. According to Rusbult et al. (1996) implicit and explicit interpretations of another's behavior can be analyzed as meaning analysis, which is the process of assigning meanings to an event either deliberately or automatically. Meaning analysis is a combination of cognitive interpretations and emotional responses. These two factors has a central position in guiding interaction by their role in interpreting the direct significance of a specific event, in understanding the broader implications of the event, in understanding the implications of this knowledge in

light of one's own needs and preferences, and in directing behavioral reactions to the interaction pattern. So, these two factors serve as summaries of the causal factors that are relevant to the event, embodying the meaning of a partner's actions (e.g. blame), shaping preferences for one's own and a partner's outcomes, shaping motivation, and directing actual behavior.

Researches focusing on the importance of emotions, indicate that happy and satisfied individuals usually attribute to stable internal causes when things are in a good situation, whereas they tend to make attributions to unstable external causes in opposite situations in order to enhance the quality of their relationship. On the other hand, distressed and depressed individuals apt to do the opposite and are less likely to make positive attributions about their partners (Baucom, 1987; Baucom et al., 1989; Fletcher et al., 1990; Forgas et al., 1990). On account of these findings, it appears that the effect of mood on attribution is an important factor, especially for serious conflicts than minor ones, because of their requirement of greater cognitive processing time (Forgas, 1994). However, attributions may also have an enhancing effect on quality of relationships, by idealizing the attributes of their spouses in order to maintain their relationship and to have hope for future rewarding interactions (Lavin, 1987; Murray & Holmes, 1996). Schriber et al. (1985) investigated distressed and non-distressed couples' tendency of assuming more objective responsibility for an event ("responsibility bias"), and found that couples who were experiencing higher levels of conflict reported lower levels of positive attributions for the future outcome related with their relationship. It is discussed by Harvey, Wells and Alvarez (1978) that whether attributions would function as an

enhancing factor or as a threat to the relationship depends on conflict's severity. According to Harvey et al. what maintains a relationship is not the partners' agreement, rather their perception of agreement. Thus, misattribution may change the perception of threat in a positive manner, by its function of protection or illusion. However, if the conflict becomes severe, couples tend to check illusion and try to find the causes of the conflict. In this reevaluation, they would tend to justify their own behaviors, and blame their partners. Researches indicate that distressed couples make more negative attributions about their partners, whereas non-distressed couples tend to make more positive ones (Baucom, Sayers et al., 1989; Bradbury & Fincham, 1988; Fincham, Beach & Baucom, 1987; Fincham, Beach et al., 1987).

To sum up, theories and models on attributions give great emphasis on individuals' tendency to assign meanings to causes of conflicts based on the ways they perceive each other's behaviors, and accordingly, how they view their relationship is get influenced by these attributions. Thus, attributions have an important impact in order to gain a general view on relationship satisfaction.

2.3.2 Conflict Handling Behaviors

The mark of a successful relationship is often not the absence of conflict, but its successful management. Gotmann and Krokoff (1989) states the ability in solving conflicts is a strong determinant for marital satisfaction. In a study of a 155 married couples, husbands' satisfaction was found to be more frequently affected by how the wives dealt with conflict than the wives' satisfaction was affected by the

husbands' style. When the wife engages and husband withdraws both found to be less satisfied (Kurdek, 1995). Thus, how people manage conflict reveals much about the nature of their relationship, and conflict interaction behaviors strongly determines the evaluations of the messages, attributions about the communicator, the partner's subsequent behavior, and ultimately, the relationship satisfaction (Burggraf & Sillars, 1987; Canary & Cupach, 1988; Harvey et al., 1978). Assessments of the relationship and patterns of interaction that maintain the relational system, in turn, affects how partners manage conflict between them (Gottman, 1979; Robin & Foster, 1989; Weiss & Dehle, 1994). Huston and Vangelisti (1991) examined the association between negativity and relationship satisfaction in a longitudinal study. Results indicated that either husband's or wife's negativity was associated with low satisfaction, whilst receiving or giving affection was associated with both spouse's satisfaction, but especially for men's satisfaction. On the basis of their research, Huston and Vangelisti (1991) concluded that the husband's negativity increases the wife's dissatisfaction, and this increases the husband's tendency to behave negatively. On the other hand, wife's negativity early in marriage predicted decrease in their own satisfaction, which may be a factor for husband's negativity, which in turn influencing the wife's dissatisfaction. These results support that spouses' attitudes and behaviors operate reciprocally, and each spouse contributes the other's evaluations about relationship.

Borisoff and Victor (1989) propose five steps for conflict management. In the first step (assessment), couples look at the problem situation and decide on how to deal with it. In the second step (acknowledgement), partners need to recognize the

other partner's perspective. And in third step (attitude), partners need to have a supportive attitude and willingness to manage conflict. The fourth step is action. The couple needs to know how to reduce conflict. In the final step, couples analyze the success of their decision and action in conflict management.

According to Burgess and Huston (1979), in order to management or resolution to begin, the partners need to communicate effectively, may talk about the causes of conflicts and be able to express their own viewpoints to find the best ways to handle the disagreement. Thereby, they could be able to take the best aspects of each viewpoint and decide to act on ideas they suggested. If the communication is successful, the commitment within the relationship could be strengthen, whereas unsuccessful communication could lead the relationship to end.

Likewise Thomas (1976) states that conflict may have constructive or destructive effects on the relationship depending on its management. Thus, in order to manage conflicts successfully, the behaviors which lead to constructive outcome and the conflict behaviors that would cause unproductive or destructive results should be understood (Thomas, 1976). And for this purpose he proposes a "process model". According to this model, conflict phenomena could be understood by examining the internal dynamics of conflict episode. In this episode, frustration of one partner leads to conceptualization of the situation, and acts upon that conceptualization, and the other partner reacts to that behavior, and ultimately, and with agreement or disagreement. Since, during the course of interaction, each partner's conceptualization of the conflict issue may change, affecting his behavior accordingly, the model is concerned with the influence of each event upon the

following events. Knowing what effects one's own behaviors upon others would help partners manage the behavior which occurs during a conflict, and may lead them toward a more productive outcome. Based on this model Thomas (1976) reinterpreted Blake and Mouton's (1964; cited in Thomas, 1976) conflict behavior conceptualizations; namely, competing, collaborating, avoiding, compromising, and accommodating. These behaviors are the combination of two separate orientations: assertiveness and cooperation. Assertiveness is the attempt to satisfy one's own behaviors, whereas cooperation is the attempt to satisfy the other person's concerns. In this sense, competing, is an attempt to force one's viewpoint to the other person, and is associated with high concern for self and low concern for the other. Avoiding is an attempt of withdrawal from the conflict, which is a behavior with low concern for self and other. The third behavior is compromising, which is the search for middle-ground solutions, and associated with an intermediate concern for self and other. The fourth behavior, accommodating involves giving up one's own needs for the sake of meeting the needs of the other. Accommodating is associated with low concern for self and high concern for other. Collaborating, the last behavior, seeks effective problem-solving strategies in order to accomplish a mutually satisfying conclusion for all parties. Collaborating is associated with high concern for self and for the other (Thomas, 1976).

In an attempt to examine cognitive responses to sources of conflict, Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) identified four responses to relationship problems regarding partner's destructive acts, which are exit, loyalty, neglect, and voice. Exit is characterized with ending the relationship or behaving in a destructive manner.

Neglect refers to the passive acts which allow the relationship to atrophy. These responses differ along two dimensions. The first dimension, constructiveness or destructiveness, refers to the impact of the response on the relationship, whereas the second dimension, activity or passivity refers to individual's response typology. Exit, which is characterized with ending the relationship or behaving in a destructive manner, is defined in the active/destructive dimension. Voice, however, is characterized with actively and constructively attempting to improve the relationship, thus categorized in the active/constructive dimension. On the other hand, loyalty, a passive/constructive response is defined as remaining loyal to the relationship in a passive manner and waiting for conditions to improve. The last response, neglect is defined as passively allowing the relationship to atrophy, and categorized in the passive/constructive dimension (Rusbult, Johnson & Morrow, 1986b).

Rusbult et al. (1982) argued that under which conditions exit, voice, loyalty and neglect would occur are influenced by three factors defined in investment model. According to this, the degree to which the individual was satisfied with the relationship prior to occurrence of the problems (satisfaction level) is a factor which contributes to the selection of response. Higher prior satisfaction would promote constructive responses since the individual is likely to believe that it is desirable to restore the relationship and the individual would tend to induce voice or loyalty. The second of the three factors is the magnitude of the individual's investment of resources in the relationship (investment size). Investments are defined as resources the individual has put directly into the relationship that are intrinsic to the

involvement, such as time spent together with partner, self-disclosures, emotional investments, and energy, or extrinsic resources that are indirectly connected to the relationship, such as mutual friends, and shared activities. Since individuals who invested much in the relationship would have more at stake, increases in investment size would promote constructive responses. Thus, it could be expected that individuals with higher investment size tend to engage in voice or loyalty. The final factor is the quality of the individual's alternatives to the current relationship (alternative quality) which determines the response within the activity/passivity dimension. Accordingly, in the absence of a good alternative the individuals would tend to wait passively for conditions to improve (loyalty) or passively allow the conditions to worsen (neglect).

In their study to test the model regarding the determinants of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect responses, Rusbult et al. (1986b) found supporting results. Consistent with the model, they found that greater satisfaction prior to the occurrence of problems was associated with lesser tendencies to engage in exit and neglect, and greater tendencies to voice. Similarly, greater investment size was found to be associated with promotion of voice and loyalty. And finally, the findings yielded an association with good alternatives and exit. Additionally, consequences of the four response types received strong support. As it is stated in the model, constructive responses of voice and loyalty produced more desirable outcomes and predicted later satisfaction and commitment. When taken together, the partners who are satisfied with their relationship perceive no better alternatives to their current relationship, and make high investments in their relationship prefer

to be loyal or give voice to the sources of conflict. on the other hand, partners who are unsatisfied with their relationship, perceive superior alternatives to the current relationship, have little or no investment in a relationship prefer neglect or exit from the relationship as a response to the conflict situations (Cahn, 1992).

In another study, married couples' conflict styles were examined and four main ways of dealing with conflict were identified along dimensions of perceived aggressiveness and intimacy (Rands et al., 1981). Based on the study, 30% of the respondents found to be engage in a non-intimate-aggressive strategy, which is found to be least satisfying responses especially when the partner was seen as uncompromising. The second dimension found to be nonintimate –nonaggressive strategy, which is used by 20% of the respondents with indicating rather more tolerable results with regard to relationship satisfaction. The third subtype, intimate-aggressive strategy, also found to be used by 20 %of the respondents. In this subtype, for some spouses who achieved intimacy after confrontation, spouses' high intimacy appeared to counteract perception of their attacking behavior. The researchers concluded that perceptions of conflict varied on a continuum on one end less intimacy was perceived following the conflict and on the other end spouses felt closer (cited in Cahn, 1992).

2.3.2.1 Conflict Handling Behaviors and Perceptions

Perceived conflict behaviors refer to each partner's view about each other's conflict behaviors (Sillars, Scott, 1983; cited in Hojjat, 2000). Since psychological reality of one member of a couple may be quite different from the other member

(Knudson et al., 1980) and individuals' perceptions of the partner's cognition or behavior often are strongly related to the relationship quality (Acitelli et al., 1993; Levinger & Breedlove, 1966), perceived conflict behaviors appear to be an important aspect of intimate relationships. As Sillars (1985; cited in Hojjat, 1997) stated, in intimate relationships individuals have a great deal of knowledge about each other, and hence, may perceive that they have an accurate perception about each other. On the other hand, being intimate does not ultimately bring accuracy. According to Acitelli et al. (1993), understanding takes place when individuals' views correspond with the partner's self-perception. Research of interpersonal perception indicated that accurately understanding of partner's behavior is strongly related to relationship satisfaction (Christensen & Wallace, 1976; Corsini, 1956; Gottman & Porterfield, 1981; Madden & Janoff-Bulman, 1981). This is because understanding helps couples to predict each other's responses to specific conflictual situations more accurately, provides a possibility to adjust their own reactions accordingly, and ultimately, increases their chances to achieve a more successful outcome. Hence, accurate understanding of each other's conflict management strategies would contribute more successful conflict management outcomes and, as a result, promote relationship satisfaction (Hojjat, 2000).

In their model, in which perceptions taken into account, Canary and Cupach (1988) stated that relationship between conflict behaviors and relational outcome is mediated by assessments of communicator's competence. Competence is characterized with a general impression of communication quality, which is influenced by perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness. Appropriateness

consists of two dimensions. The first dimension, general appropriateness, refers to a general view of the propriety of interaction; whereas the second dimension, specific appropriateness refers to the evaluations of particular remarks against background of the entire interaction (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987). Appropriate communication avoids violation of relationally or situationally approved rules governing the communicative context, whereas effective communication accomplishes the goals, objectives, or intended functions of the interactant (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989). So, as the interactant's appropriate and effective communication increases, he/she perceived as more competent. Thereby, conflict strategies can be differentiated by perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of the partner (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987). Canary and Cupach (1988) categorized conflict management behaviors into three distinctive orientations: integrative, distributive and avoidant. In integrative strategies, partners negotiate about the issues, pointing out positive aspects, expressing trust, and discussing their views until they establish an agreement, and thus, contribute positively to relationship satisfaction. In distributive strategies, partners are usually being sarcastic, hostile, and threatening and blaming each other. Thereby, these acts lead to escalation of conflict, and are destructive. Avoidance strategies are usually non-confrontational, however may involve indirect attacks. These acts minimize or deny the occurrence of conflict, divert attention. Moreover, avoidance presumably avoids negative feelings, however, may indicate perception that the partner is being competitive or avoidant. Canary and Spitzberg (1987) studied the association between integrative and avoidance strategies to sources of conflict with partners' perceptions of appropriateness in same-sex and opposite-sex

relationships. The results indicated that in both types of relationships integrative strategies like cooperation and disclosure considered as more appropriate than avoidance or distributive strategies which are perceived as antagonist or competitive. Other two studies conducted by Canary and Cupach (1988), and Canary and Spitzberg (1989), the perceived communication competence of conflict behaviors have been investigated as mediating factors. Both studies showed that distributive conflict behaviors are perceived as inappropriate and ineffective, whereas integrative strategies are perceived as appropriate and effective. Furthermore, the link between partners' conflict management behaviors and relationship qualities such as trust, mutuality of control, intimacy and relationship satisfaction found to be having a positive impact when partners' conflict management behaviors are viewed as competent.

Research on specific episodes of conflict in both marital and non-marital romantic relationships showed that reported use of integrative tactics is positively correlated with relational satisfaction; whereas reported use of distributive tactics found to be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Canary & Spitzberg, 1989). Accordingly, Canary and his colleagues (1995) concluded that within the competence-based approach, the link between conflict and satisfaction has been dramatically mediated by the views of the communicator's competence. That is, conflict behaviors do not seem to have a direct influence on relational outcome, rather the interpretations of conflict behaviors in terms of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the partner has an important effect on the outcome. In other words, people first interpret the behaviors and these

interpretations filter the effects due to the conflict behavior. The associations regarding strategy-outcome links pertain both to one's own reported behavior and to behavior ascribed to one's partner. Likewise Brehm, Kassin and Fein (1999) emphasized the importance of understanding partner's each other's viewpoints. The individual should try and evaluate the conflict in terms of how the partner would view it, that is; they should be empathic with each other and try to view their perspective on the disagreement.

Hojjat (2000) developed a typology of conflict management strategies with adding partners' perceptions about each other's conflict resolution behaviors within romantic relationships and stated that two main factors contribute to conflict management. The first factor is activity or engagement. Activity refers to the degree in which conflict strategies are covert and indirect, as opposed to overt and indirect. Activity represents behaviors that may be considered active or assertive, passivity, in contrast, represents passive or non-assertive behaviors. The second factor, valence related with the variation of the conflict management strategies in a continuum on which one end represents positive behaviors and the other end the negative responses. Positivity is related with being concerned with resolving conflict in the most equitable manner, and negativity refers to not being concerned with such outcome. Depending on the activity and valence factors, Hojjat identified four types of conflict management strategies. The first one is positive and active. The individuals who uses positive-active strategies tend to resolve conflicts actively and desire the most equitable solution. For this purpose they try to expose the problems, find the origin of the problems and tend to reach a solution in which

mutual acceptance is accomplished. The second strategy defined by Hojjat is positive-passive. Although individuals, who are more likely to engage in positive-passive strategies, also seek the most equitable outcome, they stay passive in the activity to resolve the problems. These individuals tend to put aside the conflict issues and without saying anything negative to the partner, they listen silently. On the other hand, individuals who use the third strategy, negative-passive strategy, do not desire an equitable outcome and stay passive in resolving the conflicts. Such individuals tend to avoid communication, and prefer to stay distant from their partners. The last strategy is negative-active conflict management strategy. It refers to engaging in active behaviors which would lead to inequitable results, such as lying, forcing the partner to accept one's own beliefs, threatening or physical aggression. Individuals may tend to use one of these strategies in different situations.

One study conducted by Buunk, Schaap and Prevoe (1990) examined interpersonal perceptions of partners' conflict management strategies and gender differences. The results revealed that both men and women perceived men as being more avoidant from emotional discussions. Similarly Hojjat (2000) found that higher levels of negative-active strategy predict lower relationship satisfaction for women, whereas higher levels of negative-passive conflict management strategy predict lower satisfaction for men. Hence, it seems that women engage in more negative-active strategies when they are dissatisfied, and men tend to use more negative-passive strategies when dissatisfied. Moreover, in the same study, accuracy of perceived conflict management strategies of partners' was also

examined, and the results yielded an association between degrees of accuracy in perceiving partner's conflict management strategies and degrees of relationship satisfaction.

It appears that in context of close relationships, rather than the actual behaviors in conflictual situations, individuals' views of their partners' behaviors are more important (Hojjat, 1997). How each partner views the other have a considerable impact on the course of action that the individual is likely to pursue in response to his/her partner's behaviors or in response to the conflictual situation. For example, Witteman (1988, 1992) found that individuals who attribute the cause of the event to the partner are more likely to use competitive, distributive conflict behaviors. Moreover in the same studies, it is found that when goals are perceived to be mutual, partners tend to use more integrative strategies. As a result, relationship satisfaction is likely to be affected by how partner' perceive each other (Acitelli et al., 1993; Levinger & Breedlov, 1966).

2.3.3. Conflict Distress

Distress is defined as the tension which emerges from an event which is not managed at that point in time (Cole & Ackerman, 1981). Thus, distress experienced within intimate relationships mostly occurs within conflictual situations. Due to the inevitable nature of conflicts, a little distress is also normal and inevitable; however, higher levels of distress would have negative effects on relationship satisfaction (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). Conflict emerges as a factor which leads to distress (Billings, 1979), and marital distress changes subsequent

relationship satisfaction (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Markman, Flyod, Stanley & Storaasli, 1988). Based on this notion, researchers focused on the association between relationship distress, conflict behaviors and attributions within intimate relationships.

It is emphasized that a deficit in effective conflict behaviors is a major causal factor for marital distress (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Hence, in order to prevent distress within intimate relationships it appears that resolving conflicts is a crucial factor in maintaining relationship satisfaction (Billings, 1979). If couples cannot maintain mutually constructive conflict behaviors, conflictual situations would lead to distress. For example, if couples avoid discussion of conflictual situations, they would be preventing the resolution of conflicts. On the other hand, if they discuss in aversive ways, this may prevent both resolution of conflict and also generate negative affect such as anger, resentment (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). In their study Christensen and Shenk (1991) compared distressed and non-distressed couples based on their communication patterns and conflicts. The results revealed that distressed couples had less mutual constructive communication, more avoidance of communication, more demand/withdraw communication, and more conflict over psychological distance, which indicates a significant difference in both quality and quantity in communication patterns. Similarly, Rusbult et al.(1986a) examined dating couple's distress levels based on the views of partners about each other's conflict behaviors. She found that when individuals perceive their partners exhibit greater tendencies to engage in exit and neglect, and lower levels of voice and loyalty, their distress level increased significantly. Additionally, couple distress

was greater to the extent that individuals respond destructively to their partner's destructive conflict handling behaviors. On the other hand, responses to partner's constructive behaviors were less effectively predictive of couple functioning. Thus, it is concluded that the destructive behaviors of partners is best predict relationship health. In another study, Markman and Hahlweg (1993) examined the degree to which premarital couples' constructive or destructive conflict behaviors predict marital distress a six-year period. The results revealed that males who were destined to become distressed had significant lower levels of conflict handling facilitation and higher levels of conflict handling inhibition compared to males who were destined to remain happy, whereas females yielded no significant results. Moreover, the results showed that male withdrawal from conflict, negative affect escalation and conflict as the best predictors of future marital distress is related to how well couples regulate and express affect within conflictual situations. Billings (1979) studied communicational interactions of distressed and non-distressed couples when engaged in conflict resolution behaviors. The results indicated that distressed couples make fewer positive and more negative cognitive and conflict resolution communications in conflict situations when compared to non-distressed couples. Moreover, distressed couples exhibited greater reciprocity of negative acts than non-distressed couples. Another finding revealed that distressed and non-distressed couples differ significantly according to their conflict behaviors, with distressed couples displaying more negative conflict behaviors, and non-distressed couples engaging in more positive conflict behaviors.

Furthermore, attributions to partner behaviors are also found to be closely related to distress (Baucom, 1987). The extent to which negative behavior is expected among couples with high levels of distress, it is more likely to attribution process begins in a negative manner. In fact, it is found that couples who experience frequent conflicts are less likely to engage in positive attributions due to the higher levels of distress they experienced (Snyder & Regts, 1982). More specifically researches focused on distinguishing partner's views on responsibility of the conflict levels of distress. Baucom, Sayers and Duke (1985; cited in Baucom, 1987) found that couples with higher levels of distress blamed their partners for conflicts and view the causes as stable and global. Likewise, in another study, Fincham and O'Leary (1983) revealed that distressed couples perceived the cause of negative behavior as more global than non-distressed couples, whereas positive behaviors are perceived more global and controllable within non-distressed couples than distressed ones. Consistently, distressed wives with low marital satisfaction blamed their husbands for the conflicts than non-distressed wives with high marital satisfaction (Madden & Janoff-Bulman, 1981).

These findings suggest that couples' relationship satisfaction is affected negatively by marital distress. However, specific distress experienced within conflictual situations received scant attention. Since conflict as a distress factor, causes negative affects following the interaction and as these negative feelings carried over to the subsequent conflictual situations, the problems could remain unresolved, which leads further distress, and over time result in lower relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Karney, 1993). Thus, distress which is specific to conflict

situations may have a cumulative effect which causes an overall distress within relationships and in turn, affect relationship satisfaction. As a result, investigation of conflict distress emerges as a crucial factor.

In sum, literature points out that distressed couples more frequently and more intensely engage in negative behaviors (Billings, 1979; Gottman, 1994; Markman, 1979, 1981), more likely exhibit negative behaviors, such as criticism, coercion, rejection, in resolving conflicts and produce less satisfaction with communication and the outcome of conflict discussions (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Newton & Burgoon, 1990). Furthermore, distress also affects couples' attributions, in a way that distressed couples view the cause of conflict in their partners (Baucom, 1987). However, researches mostly focused overall distress within relationships, with neglecting conflict distress. Thus, it appears that the direct of conflict distress needed to be investigated.

2.4. Studies on Conflict and Relationship Satisfaction in Turkey

As it is mentioned in above sections, quality of intimate relationships is an important aspect of individual well-being. Consequently, researches in this area paid great attention to clarify the relationship among conflict, distress, responsibility attributions for the cause of conflict and relationship satisfaction. However, a review of related literature point outs that studies in Turkey are newly developing, and therefore there have been few studies on these variables. In this section, studies found in related topics are summarized.

Tezer (1986) examined the relationship between conflict behaviors and relationship satisfaction. The results revealed a negative relationship between avoidance and relationship satisfaction. Moreover, it is found that in conflict situations, dissatisfied wives perceived more forcing and avoiding behavior on the part of their husbands, and men reported that they prefer compromising and collaborating with their wives even though their wives perceived that frequency of conflict and tension created by the conflicts were high in degree.

In another study Tezer (1996) investigated differences between individuals' conflict behaviors toward their spouses and gender differences. The findings revealed that women were more likely to behave competitively toward their spouse, whereas men preferred to behave more collaboratively. Based on these findings it is argued that women introduce disagreements in marriages in order to establish improvement in longer-term, but that behavior can be functional only if husbands do not prefer to avoid conflict.

Another study conducted (Tezer, 1999) investigated student's evaluations of conflict behaviors that are viewed as more effective in accomplishing goals. The results showed that students evaluated collaborating and compromising as more goal-oriented behaviors when compared to avoiding. Likewise, compromising was evaluated more effective than accommodating for accomplishing goals. In other words, the findings indicated that compromising viewed as more successful for achieving goals and in establishing interpersonal relationships.

Tutarel-Kislak (1997) investigated the association between causal and responsibility attributions of spouses and relationship adjustment. The findings

revealed a negative association between attributions to spouses' negative behaviors and marital adjustment. Moreover, responsibility attributions found to be the only significant variable in predicting marital adjustment.

Hatipoglu (1993) examined the effects of conflict prevalence and conflict frequency on relationship satisfaction. The results displayed that predictors of relationship satisfaction differed for wives and husbands. Accordingly, conflict prevalence predicted relationship satisfaction for men, and conflict prevalence and conflict frequency predicted relationship satisfaction for women.

Malkoc (2001) examined the relationship between communication patterns and relationship satisfaction among married couples. Findings revealed that marital relationship satisfaction predict communication patterns. In addition, couples with lower relationship satisfaction reported more destructive communication patterns than those couples with higher relationship satisfaction. In the same study, it is found that the duration of the relationship, gender, number of children and education level are the other variables, which predict relationship satisfaction.

Ugurlu (2002) examined the predictors of conflict resolution behaviors for women and men. The findings showed that negative-active conflict resolution behaviors are predicted by education level and conflict frequency among husbands, and who starts the conflict and who gets satisfied et the end of the conflict were the predictors for wives. In the same study, also the relationship between one partner's conflict resolution behavior and the other partner's relationship satisfaction was also investigated. These results displayed that as one partner engages in negative-

active conflict resolution more frequently, the other partner's relationship satisfaction decreases.

In sum, it appears that studies in Turkey focused on different aspects of conflict, such as conflict handling behaviors, gender differences, on causal and responsibility attributions and on communication patterns in relation with relationship satisfaction.

2.5. Connection between the Literature Review and the Aims of the Present Study

It seems apparent from the review of literature that conflict and conflict behaviors have an important impact on relationship satisfaction. However the direction of the relationship among these variables is not clear. In other words, whether negative conflict behaviors cause lower levels of relationship satisfaction or dissatisfaction leads partners to engage in destructive conflict management behaviors is an area in which further investigation is required. Thus, one aim of the current study is to contribute in understanding how dating couples' attributions, the ways they perceive their own and their partner's conflict behaviors and the distress level they experienced effect relationship satisfaction. In addition, researches focused different aspects of conflict variables, however the ways partners view each other has received scant attention. Hence, it is also aimed to examine effects of one partner's views about engaging in similar or different conflict management behaviors on the other partner's relationship satisfaction.

Another important factor influencing relationship satisfaction appears to be as distress experienced during conflictual situations and the partners' responsibility attributions for the cause of conflict. However, in Turkey these variables received less attention. Moreover, one of the units of analyses in related studies was married couples. When intimate relationships' importance taken into account, relationship nature of dating couples appear as an important area which requires further clarification with regard to relationship outcome. In other words, if dating relationships are considered as a platform to experience conflict and to learn how to manage with these conflicts, dating relationships are also appear to be an important analysis unit in order to understand how partners' conflict distress, responsibility attributions and conflict behaviors effect their relationship satisfaction. It may provide further understanding to prevent intimate relationships from break up. Therefore, this study aims to provide an understanding in dating couples' interaction patterns of conflict distress, conflict attributions (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference) and their effect on relationship satisfaction.

Another aim of the present study is to provide a reliable and valid instrument in order to measure multiple aspects of conflict in intimate relationships' multiple aspects.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

3.1 Participants

The participants of the present study were 58 dating couples (58 female and 58 male). The data gathered with purposive sampling method (Kerlinger, 1986). The inclusion criteria were being dating for at least 3 months, living in the same city with their partner, and both partners' voluntary participations. The age of the total sample ranged from 19 to 36 with a mean of 24.73 years ($SD = 3.67$). The average age of males was 25.76 ($SD = 4.16$), and varied from 19 to 36. Age of females ranged from 19 to 32 with a mean of 23.71 ($SD = 2.77$). The length of the participants' relationship varied from .25 (1.7%) to 10.1 (1.7%) years with a mean of 2.71 ($SD = 2.55$). 63.8% of the male participants were either undergraduate students or graduated from university, and 36.2% of them were graduate students. Female participants' 60.3 % were either undergraduate students or graduated from university, and 39.6% were graduate students.

3.2 Instruments

Four instruments were utilized in the current study. Participants were administered Relationship Conflict Inventory (RCI, Appendix A) for evaluating relationship conflict, Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Appendix B) for measuring couples' relationship adjustment, and for examining the criterion-related validity of the RCI, and Conflict Behaviors Questionnaire (Appendix C) for assessing each

couple's conflict behaviors. Demographic Information Form (Appendix D) was used to collect information related to various demographic characteristics and information regarding couples' relationships.

3.2.1 Relationship Conflict Inventory

The original version the Relationship Conflict Inventory (RCI) is a 120 item scale designed by Bodin (1996) to assess process and content of conflict. Process of conflict consists of two subscales: verbal conflict and physical conflict. Content of conflict is formed by topics of conflict subscale. All three subscales (verbal conflict, physical conflict, topics of conflict) are responded in four sections: occurrence, frequency, distress level of conflict experienced by the couples and the responsibility attributions for the cause of conflict each partner made. Verbal conflict subscale consists of 27 items, physical conflict subscale consists of 8 items, and topics of conflict subscale consist of 85 items. The RCI primarily utilizes a 5-point response format for the three sections (frequency, distress level, and responsibility attribution). One section (occurrence) is answered with either "yes" or "no" and one item with 7-point response format. In the latter version of the RCI one more item had been added in the verbal conflict subscale, with total 121 items. Total scores for four sections are calculated separately. The possible total scores obtained from process of conflict subscale ranges from 0 to 36 for occurrence of conflict; 0 to 144 for frequency of conflict, for distress level of conflict and for responsibility attributions of conflict. The possible total score obtained from content of conflict ranges from 0 to 85 for occurrence of conflict; 0 to 340 for frequency of

conflict, for distress level of conflict and for responsibility attributions of conflict. In all subscales, higher scores represent higher levels of conflict experience in occurrence and frequency of conflict sections. For conflict distress section, as total score increases, experienced distress level increases. For responsibility attribution section, higher scores represent partner blame and lower scores represent self blame for the cause of conflict. In the present study, conflict distress level scores are calculated from distress level of conflict, and conflict attribution (self/partner blame) scores are calculated from process of conflict subscale's responsibility attribution section.

In the present study, recent version of RCI has been administered. However, with the permission of Arthur Bodin, 11 questions which were related with marriage were modified into dating relations.

The construct validity of the RCI was assessed with Pearson product moment correlation coefficients between verbal and physical conflict subscales of the RCI and several scales' subscale scores, for women and men separately. Accordingly, the correlation for verbal conflict subscale of Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) and verbal conflict subscale of the RCI found to be $r = .69$, $p < .001$ for females and $r = .40$, $p < .05$ for males; for physical conflict subscale of CTS and physical subscale of the RCI found to be $r = .62$, $p < .001$ for women, and $r = .77$, $p < .001$ for men. The correlation coefficients for global distress subscale of Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI) and verbal conflict subscale of the RCI for females was $r = .85$, $p < .001$, and for males $r = .87$, $p < .001$; for global distress subscale of Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI) and physical conflict subscale of the RCI for females was $r = .57$,

$p < .01$, and for males $r = .38$, ns. The correlation coefficients for problem-solving communication subscale of the MSI and verbal conflict subscale of the RCI was found to be $r = .91$, $p < .001$ for females and $r = .92$, $p < .001$ for males; whereas correlations coefficients for physical conflict subscale of the RCI was $r = .65$, $p < .001$ for females, and $r = .34$, ns for males. The correlation coefficients for the subscale of cohesion of the FACESS-II and the verbal conflict subscale of the RCI was $r = -.72$, $p < .001$ for females, and $r = -.72$ for males; and physical conflict subscale of the RCI was $r = -.51$, $p < .01$ for females and $r = -.10$, ns for males. The correlation coefficients for the subscale of adaptability of the FACESS-II and the verbal conflict subscale of the RCI was $r = -.73$, $p < .001$ for females, and $r = -.83$, $p < .001$ for males; and physical conflict subscale of the RCI was $r = -.55$, $p < .01$ for females and $r = -.21$, ns for males. The correlation coefficients for Global Marital Satisfaction Scale and the verbal conflict subscale of the RCI found to be $r = .70$ for females, $p < .001$, and $r = .74$, $p < .001$ for males; whereas for physical conflict subscale of the RCI was $r = .61$, $p < .001$ for females, and $r = .35$, ns for males.

3.2.2 Dyadic Adjustment Scale

The DAS (Spanier, 1976) was developed in order to assess the perceived marital relationships and marital quality of married or cohabited couples. It contains 32 items, primarily utilizing the 5- and 6- point response format. Two items are answered with either “yes” or “no” and one item with 7-point response format. Factor analysis results yielded four factors: Dyadic Satisfaction, Dyadic Cohesion, Dyadic Consensus and Affectional Expression. DAS has satisfactory validity and

reliability with Cronbach Alpha's for the subscales ranging from .73 to .97, and a Cronbach Alpha of .96 for the entire scale. No test-retest reliabilities are reported. For content validity, items included in the scale were evaluated by three judges, and the correlation between the DAS and Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test for the criterion validity is reported as .86 among married couples (Spanier, 1976). It was used as a general satisfaction measure in intimate relationships by using its total score. Thus, in the present study also the total score of the DAS was used. The possible total score obtained from DAS ranges between 0 and 151. Higher scores reflect a higher perception of the quality of the relationship.

The translation of DAS into Turkish and its reliability study was conducted by Fıfılođlu and Demir (2000). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the DAS was .92. Split-half reliability was .85 and the alpha for part one was .89 and .73 for the other part. The criterion validity was assessed by the correlation between translated DAS and translated Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test, and DAS found to be correlated .82 with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test.

3.2.3 Conflict Behaviors Questionnaire

In order to determine each partner's conflict behaviors, a questionnaire which is developed by Tezer (1996) based on Thomas' (1976) definitions of conflict behaviors was used. The questionnaire consisted of descriptions of five conflict behaviors (competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating), which are usually asked to be ranked by the participants according to the aim of the researcher (Tezer, 1996, 1999, 2001). These conflict behaviors have

been validated in several empirical studies (e.g. Kabanoff, 1987; Rahim, 1983; Van de Vliert & Kabanoff, 1990). Additionally, conflict behavior questionnaire have been used in previous studies conducted in Turkey (Tezer; 1986, 1996, 1999, 2001; Tezer&Demir, 2001). Since there is no suggested specific scoring in the original instrument, these studies scored the questionnaire in different ways. For example in one study (Tezer, 1996) the participants were asked to rank the five conflict behaviors from most typical (1) to least typical (5), with low ranking numbers indicating high use. In another study Tezer (1999) asked participants to read a story about a five-person group and report their conflict behaviors. The participants then responded to two questions on a 5-point-Likert-type scale. The first question was related with evaluations of the effectiveness of conflict behavior of each group member in the story, and the second question was related with the degree to which participants would become friends with each group member. For each question five conflict behavior scores were calculated.

In the present study, each partner asked to respond two questions on a 5-point Likert-type scale. In the first question participants asked to evaluate their own conflict behaviors within two conflict situations and in the second question they were asked to report their partners' conflict behaviors in conflict situations. Perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) scores calculated from the scores of these two questions. Accordingly first, for each item, scores of own conflict behavior subtracted from scores of partner conflict behavior. Then, these subtracts added together, with lower scores representing perceptions of similar conflict behaviors and higher scores indicating perceptions of different conflict behaviors.

3.2.4 Demographic Information Form

Demographic Information Form was developed by the researcher in order to collect information regarding participant's age, gender, education level, occupational status, duration of relationship, time spent together within a week and future plans. The form has been prepared with open-ended, multiple choice questions or 5-point response format.

3.3 Procedure

In order to translate Relationship Conflict Inventory into Turkish and to determine the psychometric properties in a Turkish population, the permission was taken from Arthur M. Bodin who had developed the scale. The translation of the scale into Turkish was made by using a one-way translation method (Savaşır, 1994). Accordingly, the RCI was first translated from English to Turkish by two social scientists having a PhD. degree and obtained two different translation forms. These two separate forms were compared in terms of their similarities and discrepancies and combined into one form by the researcher. The selection criteria were high consensus on each item, comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the statements with regard to Turkish language. After this procedure, the original form of the RCI and translated version of the RCI were investigated by three judges from different educational backgrounds. The group consisted of one professor in Educational Sciences Faculty, one psychiatrist and one English language teacher, familiar with both languages. Each judge's suggestions with regard to translation

were evaluated and the final form of the RCI was established with the same selection criteria which were used in the first phase of translation procedure.

The instruments were administered between November 2004 and February 2005 to dating couples in Ankara and Istanbul. The population was recruited through snowball sampling procedure (Kumar, 1996). Before administering the instruments, verbal instructions were given to both of the couples who were contacted face-to-face by the researcher. Besides, an information form was attached at the beginning of the instruments which contains necessary information regarding the researcher, aim of the study and important points in filling the scales. The total administration time of the instruments was approximately 45 minutes. Because all of the participants completed instruments at their homes, instruments recruited in an envelope and they were informed not to see each other's responses. Each participant contacted by phone, and the instruments taken back when they informed that they have completed.

3.4 Data Analysis

In order to investigate the predictive power of demographic variables (age, gender), relationship variables (relationship duration, for how long they know each other, time spent together within a week and frequency of considering breaking up), conflict distress level, conflict attributions (self/partner blame) and perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference) on relationship satisfaction, stepwise regression analysis were conducted. In addition, in order to see gender differences

in the prediction of relationship satisfaction separate stepwise regression analysis were also carried out.

Moreover, separate cross intraclass partial pairwise correlations conducted after partialling out the effects of the relationship duration to examine the relationship between one partner's conflict distress level and the other partner's relationship satisfaction; one partner's conflict attribution (self/partner blame) and the other partner's relationship satisfaction; one partner's perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and the other partner's relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the relationship between one partner's conflict distress level and the other partner's perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference); and the relationship between one partner's conflict attribution (self/partner blame) and the other partner's perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) were also investigated.

Furthermore, in order to investigate demographic variables' (namely gender) effects on conflict distress, conflict attribution (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and relationship satisfaction four separate independent sample t-tests were carried out.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Validity of the Turkish Version of the RCI

One aim of the study was to assess the validity and the reliability of the Relationship Conflict Inventory (RCI) in the Turkish sample. The convergent validity of the RCI was examined by assessing the correlation between the frequency of conflict process scores of the RCI and the total score of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS); the correlation between the frequency of conflict topic scores of the RCI and the total score of the DAS; the correlation between the frequency of verbal conflict scores of the RCI and the total score of the DAS; the correlation between the frequency of physical conflict scores of the RCI and the total score of the DAS (see Table 1). Moreover, in order to assess the convergent validity, participants, who were grouped as satisfied and dissatisfied according to their total scores of the DAS, examined whether they significantly differ according to frequency of conflict process scores of the RCI; according to frequency of conflict topic scores of the RCI; according to the frequency of verbal conflict scores of the RCI; and according to frequency of physical conflict scores of the RCI (see Table 2).

Secondly, construct validity established through intercorrelations between the frequency of process of conflict and the frequency of conflict topics of the RCI. The construct validity was also assessed by correlations between couples' according to their verbal conflict frequency, physical conflict frequency, and conflict process frequency. Additionally, frequency of conflict process scores of the RCI were

grouped as highest and lowest, and examined whether participants differ significantly according to frequency of topics of conflict scores of the RCI (see Table 5). Finally, frequency of conflict topics scores of the RCI were grouped as highest and lowest, and examined whether participants differ significantly according to frequency of conflict process scores of the RCI (see Table 6).

The convergent validity of the Turkish version of the RCI was examined by assessing the correlations between the frequency of different subscales of the RCI and the total score of the DAS of the couples. The reason for selecting these criteria as evidence of convergent validity of the scale was theoretical. It was thought that as frequency of conflict process, conflict topics, verbal conflict and physical conflict increases, dyadic adjustment would decrease. Results indicated that conflict process frequency, conflict topics frequency and verbal conflict frequency are negatively correlated with total score of Dyadic Adjustment Scale. That is, an increase in frequency of process conflict, verbal conflict, and conflict topics was associated with a decrease in their adjustment. However, physical conflict frequency scores were not correlated with total score of Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Table 1).

Table 1. Correlations between the subscales of the RCI and the DAS

	Conflict Topics	Conflict Process	Verbal Conflict	Physical Conflict
DAS	-.425***	-.438***	-.392***	-.080

*** p < .001

Secondly, the convergent validity was examined through One-Way ANOVA. First, the data divided into two groups according to participants' total scores of DAS. The lowest (dissatisfied) and highest (satisfied) 25% of the responses were compared with frequency of conflict process, verbal conflict, physical conflict, and conflict topic scores. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2. The analysis of variance revealed a significant difference for conflict process ($F(1, 58) = 17.64, p < .001$); for verbal conflict frequency ($F(1, 58) = 17.54, p < .001$), for physical conflict frequency ($F(1, 58) = 4.41, p < .05$), and for conflict topics frequency ($F(1, 58) = 12.34, p < .001$). Results indicate that satisfied participants scored significantly higher on conflict process, verbal conflict, physical conflict, and conflict topics frequency compared to dissatisfied participants.

Table 2. The Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the subscales of the RCI

		Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Conflict Process	Mean	12.30	24.63
	SD	10.27	12.38
Verbal Conflict	Mean	12.17	23.97
	SD	10.25	11.54
Physical Conflict	Mean	.13	.67
	SD	.43	1.32
Conflict Topics	Mean	25.33	44.93
	SD	19.98	23.13

The construct validity assessed through correlation between frequency of the conflict process and the frequency of the conflict topics of the RCI; and couples' correlations on frequency of verbal and physical conflict, conflict process and

conflict topics scores of the RCI. It was assumed that as frequency of conflict process increases, frequency of conflict topics would also increase; and couples' scores would be positively correlated. Results indicated a positive correlation between frequency of conflict process and frequency of conflict topics, showing that as conflict frequency increases, the frequency of conflict topic frequency is also increased.

Moreover, as expected, couples' verbal and process conflict frequency scores were positively correlated. On the other hand, couples' physical conflict frequency scores showed no significant correlation.

Secondly, in order to assess construct validity, the data divided into two groups according to participants' scores obtained from conflict process frequency. The lowest and highest 25% of the responses were compared with conflict topics scores. The means and standard deviations are presented in table 3. The results revealed a significant difference, $F(1, 58) = 26.25, p < .001$, indicating that participants who reported highest frequency of conflict process scored significantly higher in conflict topics compared to participants who reported lowest frequency of conflict process.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the subscales of the RCI

		Highest Conflict Process Frequency	Lowest Conflict Process Frequency
Conflict Topics	Mean	48.16	18.63
	SD	26.50	17.44

Finally, the data divided into two groups according to participants' scores obtained from conflict topics frequency. The lowest and highest 25% of the responses were compared with conflict process scores. The means and standard deviations are presented in table 4. The analysis of variance results yielded a significant difference, $F(1, 58) = 16.57, p < .001$. The results indicate that the participants who reported highest frequency in conflict topics scored higher conflict process frequency compared to participants who reported lowest frequency in conflict topics.

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the subscales of the RCI

		Highest Conflict Topics Frequency	Lowest Conflict Topics Frequency
Conflict Process	Mean	27.38	11.28
	SD	12.55	8.68

4.2 Reliability of the Turkish Version of the RCI

For the internal consistency reliability of the RCI Cronbach Alpha Coefficients were computed for conflict process of the RCI, verbal conflict of the RCI, physical conflict of the RCI and conflict topics of the RCI.

Cronbach Alphas values for internal consistency of conflict process frequency are presented in Table 5 that are ranging from .68 to .90.

Table 5. Cronbach Alpha Values for the subscales of the RCI

Subscales	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha Coefficients
Conflict Process	36	.85
Verbal Conflict	28	.85
Physical Conflict	8	.68
Conflict Topics	85	.90

4.3. Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

The mean and standard deviations of the variables used in the present study are given in table 6.

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations for the Demographic Variables of the Study

Variables	M	SD	Min	Max
Age	24.57	4.14	19	36
Relationship Duration(Year)	2.71	2.54	.25	10.1
For how long they know each other (Year)	3.89	3.79	.42	23.59
Time spent together within a week (Hour)	38.32	26.34	8	110
Conflict Attribution (Self/Partner Blame)	28.64	18.19	0	95
Conflict Distress	30.48	21.31	0	107
Perceived Conflict Behaviors (Similarity/Difference)	2.07	2.06	-8	6
Relationship Satisfaction	117.79	13.95	69	150

4.4 Correlation Matrix of the Study Variables

The Pearson correlation coefficients of the variables used in the study are presented in Table 7. As can be seen from the table, age was significantly and positively correlated with relationship duration ($r = .35, p < .001$) and with for how long they know each other ($r = -.27, p < .01$). Relationship duration was significantly positively correlated with for how long they know each other ($r = .70, p < .001$), with conflict distress ($r = .27, p < .01$) and with conflict attribution (self/partner blame) ($r = .28, p < .01$). Time spent together within a week was only significantly correlated with conflict attribution (self/partner blame) ($r = -.20, p < .05$). Moreover, conflict distress found to be positively correlated with conflict attribution (self/partner blame) ($r = .91, p < .001$) and with perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) ($r = .39, p < .001$), whereas found to be negatively with relationship satisfaction ($r = -.44, p < .001$). Furthermore, conflict attribution (self/partner blame) was found to be significantly positively correlated with perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) ($r = .28, p < .01$) and negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = -.42, p < .001$). Finally, perceived conflict behavior (similarity/ difference) was negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = -.28, p < .01$).

Table 7. Correlation Matrix of the Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	1.00	-.35***	-.27**	.05	-.18	-.09	-.03	-.03	-.03
2		1.00	.70***	-.11	-.08	-.27**	.28**	-.03	-.03
3			1.00	-.01	-.01	.13	.12	-.06.	.08
4				1.00	.11	-.17	-.20*	-.03	.16
5					1.00	.01	.04	.15	-.05
6						1.00	.91***	.39***	-.44***
7							1.00	.28**	-.42***
8								1.00	-.28**
9									1.00

Note: 1: Age, 2: Relationship Duration (Year), 3: For how long they know each other (Year), 4: Time spent together within a week, 5: Whether they considered breaking up, 6: Conflict Distress, 7: Conflict Attribution(Self/Partner Blame), 8: Perceived Conflict Behaviors Similarity/Difference, 9: Relationship Satisfaction
 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

4.5 Results of Regression Analysis

In order to investigate the predictive power of demographic (age) and relationship variables (relationship duration, time spent together, for how long couples know each other, and frequency of considering breaking up), conflict distress, conflict attribution (self/partner blame) and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/ difference) on relationship satisfaction stepwise regression analyses was carried out. Additionally, two separate stepwise regression analysis were conducted in order to examine gender's effects on the variables (age, relationship duration, time spent together, for how long couples know each other, frequency of considering breaking up, conflict distress, conflict attribution (self/partner blame) and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference)).

The stepwise regression analyses resulted in two models containing two variables. Table 8 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standardized regression coefficients (β), the semipartial correlations (\underline{sri}^2), R^2 , and adjusted R^2 for each model. The first model was statistically significant, $F(1, 106) = 21.49, p < .001$. Only conflict distress level ($\underline{sri}^2 = -.41$) contributed significantly to prediction of relationship satisfaction. In the first model 41% of the variability in relationship satisfaction was predicted by conflict distress level. The second model was also statistically significant, $F(2, 105) = 13.57, p < .001$. Conflict distress level ($\underline{sri}^2 = -.31$) and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) ($\underline{sri}^2 = -.21$) contributed significantly to prediction of relationship satisfaction. In the second model 45% of the variability in relationship satisfaction was predicted by conflict distress level and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference).

Table 8. Stepwise Regression Results (Demographic and Relationship Variables and Conflict Distress, Conflict Attribution (Self/Partner Blame) and Perceived Conflict Behavior (Similarity/Difference) on Relationship Satisfaction

Variables	B	Beta	Partial correlation	R²	Adjusted R²
Model 1					
CNFDISTR***	-.25	-.41	-.41	.17	.16
R=.41***					
Model 2					
CNFDISTR**	-.20	-.32	-.31	.20	.19
PCB S/D*	-1.31	-.21	-.21		
R=.45*					

CNFDISTR: Conflict Distress Level, PCBS/D: Perceived Conflict Behavior (Similarity/Difference).

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

The stepwise regression analyses for men resulted in two models containing two variables. Table 9 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standardized regression coefficients (β), the semipartial correlations (sri^2), R^2 , and adjusted R^2 . The first model was statistically significant, $F(1, 54) = 7.60$, $p < .01$. In the first model, only perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) ($\text{sri}^2 = .35$) contributed significantly to prediction of relationship satisfaction. In the first model 35% of the variability in relationship satisfaction was predicted by perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference). The second model was also statistically significant, $F(2, 53) = 6.09$, $p < .01$. Perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) ($\text{sri}^2 = .30$) and conflict attribution (self/partner blame) ($\text{sri}^2 = .27$) contributed significantly to prediction of relationship satisfaction. In the second model 43% of the variability in relationship satisfaction was predicted by

perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and conflict attribution (self/partner blame).

Table 9. Stepwise Regression Results (Demographic and Relationship Variables and Conflict Distress, Conflict Attribution (Self/Partner Blame) and Perceived Conflict Behavior (Similarity/Difference) on Relationship Satisfaction for Men

Variables	B	Beta	Partial correlation	R²	Adjusted R²
Model 1					
PCBS/D**	-2.05	-.35	-.35	.12	.11
R=.35**					
Model 2					
PCB S/D*	-1.69	-.29	-.30	.19	.16
CA(S/PB)*	-.17	-.26	-.27		
R=.43*					

PCBS/D: Perceived Conflict Behavior (Similarity/Difference), CA(S/PB): Conflict Attribution (Self/Partner Blame)

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

The stepwise regression analyses for women resulted in one model containing one variable. Table 10 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standardized regression coefficients (β), the semipartial correlations (s_{ri}^2), R^2 , and adjusted R^2 . The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 50) = 12.95$, $p < .01$. Only conflict distress level ($s_{ri}^2 = .45$) contributed significantly to prediction of relationship satisfaction for women. Altogether, 45% of the variability in relationship satisfaction was predicted by conflict distress.

Table 10. Stepwise Regression Results (Demographic and Relationship Variables and Conflict Distress, Conflict Attribution (Self/Partner Blame) and Perceived Conflict Behavior (Similarity/Difference) on Relationship Satisfaction for Women

Variables	B	Beta	Partial correlation	R²	Adjusted R²
CNFDISTR**	-.28	-.45	-.45	.21	.19
R=.35**					

PCBS/D: Perceived Conflict Behavior (Similarity/Difference).

** p<.01

In summary, the findings showed that conflict distress level and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) predicted relationship satisfaction for all participants. However, conflict distress was the only variable in predicting relationship satisfaction for women, whereas perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and conflict attribution (self/partner blame) were found to be predicting relationship satisfaction for men.

4.6 Cross Intraclass Pairwise Partial Correlations

In order to calculate the correlation coefficients among conflict distress, conflict attributions (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and relationship satisfaction cross intraclass pairwise partial correlations were conducted (Hovardaoğlu, 2000). According to cross intraclass pairwise partial correlation analysis, in order to examine these variables within the same couples gender was statistically controlled. Moreover, for determining the significance of the results, Z scores were calculated.

4.6.1. Results of Cross Intraclass Pairwise Partial Correlations

In order to investigate whether there is a relationship between one partner's conflict distress level, conflict attribution (self/partner-blame) and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and the other partner's relationship satisfaction, after partialling out the effect of the relationship duration cross intraclass pairwise partial correlations were conducted. Moreover, the relationship between one partner's conflict distress level and the other partner's perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference), and one partner's conflict attribution (self/partner blame) and the other partner's perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) after partialling out the effect of relationship duration were also examined. The results indicated significant relationships. The Z values are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Z values of Cross Intraclass Pairwise Partial Correlations

Variables	r_{xy}	Z Value
Conflict Distress Level & Relationship Satisfaction	-.23	-2.04*
Conflict Attribution (Self/Partner Blame) & Relationship Satisfaction	-.24	-2.07*
Perceived CB Similarity/Difference & Relationship Satisfaction	-.40	-4.52*
Conflict Distress Level & Perceived CB Similarity/Difference	-.26	2.49*
Conflict Attribution (Self/Partner Blame) & Perceived CB Similarity/Difference	.26	2.62*

* $p < .05$

These results indicate that after partialling out the effect of relationship duration, as one partner's conflict distress level increases, the other partner's relationship satisfaction decreases; as one partner blames herself/himself, the other partner's relationship satisfaction increases; and as one partner perceives own conflict behaviors as similar with his/her partner, the other partner's relationship satisfaction increases. Furthermore after partialling out the effect of relationship duration, as one partner's conflict distress level increases, the other partner perceives his/her partner as more different with regard to perceived conflict behaviors, and as one partner blames his/her partner, the other partner perceives his/her partner's conflict behaviors as different.

4.6 Results of Demographic Variables' Effects on Conflict Distress, Conflict Attribution (Self/Partner Blame), Perceived Conflict Behavior (Similarity/Difference) and Relationship Satisfaction

To investigate demographic variables', namely gender's, effects on conflict distress level, conflict attribution (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and relationship satisfaction separate independent sample t-tests were carried out.

In the first independent sample t test, differences of men and women according to their conflict distress level were investigated. The results revealed no significant difference ($t = -1.74$, $df = 111.51$, $p = ns$). In the second independent sample t test, differences of men and women according to their conflict attributions (self /partner blame) were examined. The results yielded no significant difference ($t = -.85$, $df = 113.76$, $p = ns$). In the third independent sample t test, differences of

men and women according to their perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) were investigated. The results showed no significant difference ($t = -1.17$, $df = 113.04$, $p = ns$). In the final independent sample t test, differences of men and women according to their relationship satisfaction were investigated. The results showed no significant difference ($t = 1.31$, $df = 112.97$, $p = ns$) (Table 12).

Table 12. Results of Independent Sample t Test for Conflict Distress, Conflict Attribution (Self/Partner Blame), Perceived Conflict Behavior (Similarity/Difference) and Relationship Satisfaction

Variables	Men		Women	
	X	SD	X	SD
Conflict Distress Level	27.07	19.48	33.89	22.65
Conflict Attribution (Self/Partner Blame)	27.18	17.79	30.10	18.62
Perceived CB (Similarity/Difference)	1.84	1.96	2.29	2.15
Relationship Satisfaction	119.48	13.12	116.11	14.56

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, first of all, the results of the validity and reliability studies of the Turkish version of the Relationship Conflict Inventory (RCI) are presented. Then, the findings related with the main aims of the study are discussed. The main aims of the study were to investigate the predictive power of demographic variables, conflict distress level, conflict attribution (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behavior (similarity/ difference) on relationship satisfaction; to examine the relationship between one partner's conflict distress level and the other partner's relationship satisfaction and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference); the relationship between one partner's conflict attribution (self/partner blame) and the other partner's relationship satisfaction and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference); and the relationship between one partner's perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and the other partner's relationship satisfaction, after controlling relationship duration. It was also aimed to investigate gender differences effects on conflict distress level, conflict attribution (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and relationship satisfaction.

5.1 General Evaluation of the Results

In order to measure the sections of conflict frequency, conflict distress and conflict attributions (self/partner blame) for the conflict process and conflict topics, the Relationship Conflict Inventory was translated into Turkish by using a one-way

translation qualitative method (Savaşır, 1994). Afterwards, the psychometric properties of the scale in a Turkish population were examined. The validity and reliability findings supported the usage of the Turkish version of the RCI on the basis of the subscale scores for each category. In the light of the adaptation study, it might be asserted that the conflict processes and conflict topics' categories were similar between the Western and Turkish cultures. On the other hand, it should be taken into account that the dating couples were included in the current study. Thus, the RCI can be accepted as a valid and reliable instrument in the conceptualization and measurement of the Turkish dating couples' conflict processes and conflict topics.

After establishing the reliability and validity of the RCI, the main aims of the study were examined. First of all, the predictive power of conflict distress, conflict attribution (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference), and the demographic variables on relationship satisfaction was tested. It was expected that higher levels of conflict distress, partner blame and perceiving conflict behaviors as different would predict relationship satisfaction. However, results revealed that only conflict distress level and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) predict relationship satisfaction, with all variables having negative relations with relationship satisfaction. In other words, it is found that lower levels of distress (accounted higher variance) and similarity on perceptions of conflict behavior predicted higher levels of relationship satisfaction. These results are consistent with prior studies with indication of some differences on the

association between conflict attribution and relationship satisfaction. Thus, it would be useful to evaluate the findings separately.

As expected, partners who reported higher levels of conflict distress and perceived their own conflict behaviors and their partner's conflict behaviors as different reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction. This result was consistent with the literature. Billings (1979) stated that conflict emerges as a factor which leads to distress. In addition, since conflicts inevitably occur and lead to some degree of distress, higher levels of distress would have negative effects on relationship satisfaction (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). Despite the negative effects of conflict, it is also emphasized that the mark of a successful relationship is often not the absence of conflict, rather its successful management. According to Gottman and Krokoff (1989) the ability in solving conflict is a strong determinant for relationship satisfaction, and a deficit in effective conflict handling behaviors is a major causal factor for marital distress. Rusbult, Johnson et al. (1986a) demonstrated that when individuals perceive their partners exhibit greater tendencies to engage in exit and neglect, their distress level increased significantly. Thus, it is apparent that both conflict distress and conflict behaviors are correlated to each other and to relationship satisfaction. Moreover, Acitelli et al. (1993) examined the association between perceived similarity of conflict behaviors and relationship satisfaction. They found that perceived similarity on both constructive and destructive conflict behaviors predicted relationship satisfaction. The authors discussed the results on the basis of false consensus effect (Ross, Greene, House, 1977), where people assume that others are more like themselves than the others

report themselves to be. McFarland and Miller (1990, cited in Acitelli et al., 1993) offered an explanation for the false consensus effect, stating that people overestimate commonness to assure themselves for the appropriateness or correctness of their own response, to protect their self-esteem and to consensually validate their own preferences. In addition, believing that their own qualities are positive, individuals may believe that their partners also possess their characteristics. In the light of this view, current study's findings appears to be consistent with literature, indicating that as conflicts occur, and as these conflicts remained unresolved or tried to be handled unsuccessfully, partners feel distressed. Additionally, individuals tend to view their own conflict behaviors as positive, in order to protect their self-esteem. And when they perceive their partners engage in similar behaviors, their relationship satisfaction increases.

On the other hand, present study's findings have some differences with prior researches. Although no study examining all three aspects of conflict was found, in many studies attributions' effect on relationship satisfaction was examined with showing significant results. In a study Fincham and Bradbury (1987a) investigated a two-way relation between attributions and relationship satisfaction. That is, they examined whether attributions predict relationship satisfaction or whether marital satisfaction predicts later attributions. The results showed that only attributions predicted relationship satisfaction. They concluded that the failure of relationship satisfaction in predicting attributions show that attributions influence relationship satisfaction, and not vice versa. In another study Fletcher, Fincham, Cramer and Heron (1987) showed that attributing the maintenance of relationship to self

predicts relationship satisfaction in dating couples. However, in the present study, conflict attributions accounted a non-significant proportion of variance, whereas conflict distress found to be the variable with highest variance. Moreover, although non-significant, conflict attributions revealed a negative relation with relationship satisfaction, indicating that blaming partner increases relationship satisfaction. In the light of these, this difference could be interpreted as a result of the association between conflict distress and conflict attributions. That is, Fincham and Bradbury (1993) stated that attributions for relationship events initiate and maintain distress. In addition, locating the cause of negative events in the partner and tending to see the cause of the events as stable and global leads to distress. Thus, the present study's results suggest that as conflict occurs partners might be attributing the responsibility of negative events to their partners, which causes high levels of distress due to the view of stable and global nature of partner's acts. As a result, they believe that this pattern is far from change and ultimately their relationship satisfaction decreases. Moreover, the predictive power of perceived similarity for conflict behaviors also could be interpreted in this sense. That is, individuals' tendency to attribute negative events to partners implies that they view their own behaviors more positively, and consequently a discrepancy occurs between own and self conflict behaviors. Since perceived similarity predicts relationship satisfaction, perceiving behaviors as different lowers relationship satisfaction, whereas the opposite occurs for similarity of behaviors.

Furthermore, in many researches attributions and relationship satisfaction were examined with regard to distressed and non-distressed couples' relationship

satisfaction (Fincham, Beach, & Nelson, 1987) or in relation with depression (Fincham, & Bradbury, 1993; Fletcher, Fitness & Blampied, 1990). However, since there is consistent evidence for a substantial positive correlation between depression and distress (Fletcher, Fitness & Blampied, 1990) these studies could be discussed in relation with current study's findings. Accordingly, studies showed that attributions have accounted uniquely to relationship satisfaction after controlling the effects of depression both in distressed and non-distressed couples (Fincham and Bradbury; 1987a, 1993; Fletcher et al.1990). However, in the present study the highest variance accounted for conflict distress in the prediction of relationship satisfaction. This difference could be a consequence of different measurements of distress. In the present study distress within conflicts are measured, not the overall distress. But, since negative events such as conflict found to be initiate distress and has a maintaining effect (Fincham & Bradbury, 1993) the distress specific to conflict may lead to a more general distress within relationships. In the light of these it could be assumed that higher levels of distress specific to conflict situations accounts more proportion in prediction of relationship satisfaction, and this conflict-specific attributions for the responsibility of conflict shapes individuals' distress level and finally leads to a more general distress experience.

Additionally, the analyses on gender differences in predicting relationship satisfaction indicated that higher levels of conflict distress predict lower relationship satisfaction for women, whereas partner blame and perceiving conflict behaviors as different predict lower relationship satisfaction for men. Although literature contains research findings revealing gender differences on conflict

behaviors, no research pointing out gender differences on prediction of relationship satisfaction was found. However, based on the conflict behavior differences, present study's findings could be discussed. According to traditional stereotypes view, females are expected to be more expressive and accommodating, whereas males are expected to be more inexpressive and domineering. These suggest that women would have a more open and conciliatory style of discussion than men. Men, on the other hand, would utilize avoidance and confrontative styles of conflict more than women (Burggraf & Sillars, 1987). Similarly Canary and Cupach (1995) stated that according to sex-stereotype hypothesis, women are supposed to enact more positive and passive conflict behaviors, such as soliciting, disclosure and compromising, whereas men should rely on competitive and negative behaviors, including personal criticism and blaming. Much of the literature suggests, however, that women tend to be more confronting and coercive, and men, in contrast, have been described as placating, conflict-avoiding, and more likely to be compromising than their wives (Gottman, 1979; Margolin & Wampold, 1981). Likewise Hojjat (2000) found that women are more likely to assert themselves when attempting to resolve conflicts which indicate conflict-engaging acts, whereas men tend to avoid direct conflict. In the same study it is found that judges evaluated women's conflict behaviors as more negative active when compared men. One explanation for these differences is discussed on the basis of differences in demand/withdraw pattern, social structure and intimacy (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). That is, female partners demand change because they are dissatisfied with their positions in the social structure, whereas male partners are satisfied with their status quo, and thus, they avoid

discussion of the change. However, men and women have been socialized to seek differing degrees of intimacy, with women demanding closeness, men desiring autonomy. Although autonomy can be achieved unilaterally, closeness requires reciprocal effort. Thus, it appears that the nature of the basic needs and the way they presented are different for men and women and this difference could cause the danger of bringing up the same issues with remaining unresolved for women, and continuously avoiding the conflicts for men. In fact, it is found that if women perceive that a conflict remained unresolved, they tend to brought up them again (Lloyd, 1987). These findings implicitly explain why relationship satisfaction is predicted by conflict distress for women and by perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference) for men. That is, if women continue demanding or bringing up the same issues in order to create the kind of relationship and closeness they want, which refers to unresolved conflicts for women. As it is noted before, literature indicated that unresolved conflicts lead to distress and causes dissatisfaction for women. On the other hand, men tend to avoid conflicts in order to protect their status quo and autonomy. This action implicitly shows that although men view no problems, at least as much as the women view, continuing conflicts lower their relationship satisfaction.

The other variable in predicting men's relationships satisfaction was found to be blaming partners. It is stated that attributional activity specifically attempts to explain the causes of negative behaviors (Sillars & Scott, 1983; Orvis, Kelley & Butler, 1976). And how partner behaviors are explained within close relationships have an immense importance to sense of self. Therefore, one's causal attributions

serve several functions (Baucom, 1987). One function is that, attributions provide effective control over one's life, which implies the need to change the outside world to bring it into alignment with own desires (Hieder, 1958; Kelley, 1967, 1972; cited in Baucom, 1987). And the other function of attributions is protecting self-esteem. As it is mentioned above, individuals tend to attribute causes of behaviors in a self-biasing manner in order to protect their own self-esteem (Baucom, 1987). Moreover it is stated that, partners who are unhappy in their relationships more likely blame their partners for problems (Baucom, 1987) and view the causes as stable and global (Fincham & Bradbury, 1993). Such attributions imply that the circumstances will never change (Baucom, 1987). In fact, the perceived intentionality, blameworthiness, and selfish motivation of partner's behaviors are found to be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1988; Fincham, Beach & Nelson., 1987; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987a). When conflict behaviors' and conflict attributions' importance in predicting relationship satisfaction for men taken into account, it appears that men tend to perceive their own and partner conflict behaviors as different, put the blame on their partners, and consequently the implication of unchangeableness lead men to dissatisfaction.

To sum up, in the light of prior researches the present study's results imply that when women view that the conflicts remained unresolved they feel distressed and their relationship satisfaction decreases. Their attempts to change the situation are perceived negatively by their male partners and thus, men blame their partners

in order to control their own needs and to protect their self-esteem which leads them dissatisfaction.

Another aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between one partner's conflict distress level, conflict attribution (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and the other partner's relationship satisfaction; and one partner's conflict distress level, conflict attribution (self/partner blame) and the other partner's perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference). Since literature contains various studies indicating significant associations with these variables on individual level, but not on dyad level, it was aimed to investigate whether these findings would be parallel when the same couple is taken into account. For this purpose, different cross intraclass pairwise partial correlations were carried out. As it is mentioned above, all the studies found in this area conducted with different partner's views. Thus, the results of the present study will be discussed separately on the basis of these findings, in relation with differences and similarities of the prior studies and the present study on a dyad level.

In the first cross intraclass pairwise partial correlation analyses, it was hypothesized that as one partner scores higher on conflict distress category in the RCI, his/her partner would have lower scores in the DAS. The findings supported the hypotheses, indicating that as one partner's conflict distress level increases, the other partner's relationship satisfaction decreases. This result is consistent with the literature. Although in many studies the association between overall distress level and relationship satisfaction was investigated, prior research findings showed that

conflict emerges as a factor which leads to distress (Billings, 1979) and marital distress changes subsequent relationship satisfaction (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Markman, Flyod, Stanley, Storaasli, 1988). In this study, however, distress within conflict situations was measured. But as Bradbury and Karney (1993) suggested, it could be assumed that conflict as a distress factor causes negative affects following the interaction and as these negative feelings carried over to the subsequent conflictual situations, the problems could remain unresolved, which lead further distress, and over time would result in lower relationship satisfaction. Thus, distress which is specific to conflict situations may have a cumulative effect which causes an overall distress within relationships and in turn, affect relationship satisfaction. When it is taken into account that the findings of the present study were conducted within same couple, results indicate that conflict distress and relationship satisfaction are interrelated. That is, being distressed does not only effect the individual's relationship satisfaction, but also has a negative effect on his/her partner.

The second hypothesis which assumed that one partner's conflict distress and the other partner's perceptions on conflict behaviors would have negative relation was also supported. The results revealed that as one partner's conflict distress increases, the other partner perceives their conflict behaviors as different. Although the data does not directly indicate the exact pattern of difference in the conflict behaviors, it indirectly points out that if one partner engages in one of the conflict behaviors that Thomas (1976) has defined, his/her partner is perceived as engaging in another one. These findings are consistent with Ridley, Wilhelm and Surra's

(2001) study. In their study spouses were grouped into four groups under two profiles. The first group was engaging couples, which refers to couples who engage in some problem solving activities, and the second group was distancing couples, which refers to couples who avoid or withdraw from the conflict. These two groups named as symmetrical profile. The third and fourth groups were distancing husbands and distancing wives, which refer to asymmetrical profile. The results of the study revealed that engaging couples reported higher levels of relationship quality, and lower levels of distress. This finding infers that as couples report similar behaviors in conflict situations, they are happier with their relationships and feel less distressed. Another study conducted by Acitelli and her colleagues (1993) showed parallel findings. Although the aim of the study was to compare actual and perceived similarity of couples' conflict behaviors based on relationship satisfaction, they found that the association between relationship satisfaction and perceived similarity was greater than actual similarity and relationship satisfaction. Moreover, they concluded that this association was consistent with both destructive and constructive conflict behaviors. On the other hand, other studies indicated that distressed couples more likely engage in negative behaviors compared to non-distressed couples (Billings, 1979; Gottman, 1979; Markman, 1981). These behaviors are specified as sarcasm, criticism, hostility, and withdrawing, which are usually less effective in conflict resolution and ultimately produce lower levels of satisfaction (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Newton & Burgoon, 1990). On the other hand, non-distressed couples engage in positive behaviors more frequently, such as agreeing, approving, being humorous and engaging in compliant behaviors when

compared to distressed couples (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). In the light of these findings it appears that distressed couples more likely view their partners' behaviors more negatively than their own behaviors, which indicates perceptions of different conflict behaviors. Consistent findings were found by Orvis and his colleagues (1976) who asked couples to explain conflict of interests in their relationship. The findings revealed that individuals who behaved negatively tried to justify and excuse their own behaviors, whereas the partner behaviors are explained by responsibility-placing criticism. Similarly, Jones and Nisbett (1972) found that actors explained their own behaviors as having more situational requirements, while observers explained the same behaviors more to actor's stable personal dispositions. Consistent with these findings, Baucom (1987) stated that individuals explain success and failure in a self-biasing manner in order to protect their own self-esteem. In this sense, it can be assumed that distressed participants of the present study tend to view their partner's behaviors more negatively, and even if they are engaging in same behaviors they might report their own behaviors differently in order to protect their self-esteem. When taken all together, these findings indicate that partners' perceptions with regard to conflict behaviors are in a close relation with relationship satisfaction. And since, as it mentioned above, distress and relationship satisfaction is closely related, it can be inferred that couples who perceive their conflict behaviors as similar, feel less distress than couples who perceive different conflict behaviors. This difference may be a result of self-biasing explanations, which functions to protect self-esteem.

The other aim of the current study was to examine the association between one partner's conflict attribution (self/partner blame) and the other partner's relationship satisfaction; and one partner's conflict attribution (self/partner blame) and the other partner's perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference). It was expected that as one of the partners scores higher on conflict attribution category in the RCI, his/her partner would have lower scores on DAS, and would have higher scores on perceived conflict behaviors. The findings supported the hypothesis. Accordingly, results revealed a significant negative relation between conflict attributions (self/partner blame) and DAS, and a significant positive relation between conflict attributions (self/partner blame) and perceived conflict behaviors, indicating that as one of the partners blame his/her partner, the other partner's relationship satisfaction decreases and more likely perceives their conflict behaviors as different. Literature contains various studies on responsibility attributions and their relation to relationship satisfaction and conflict behaviors, which show concordance with the present study's results. Accordingly, Fincham and Bradbury (1993) found that both partners' attributions influence their relationship satisfaction. Similarly in another study, Fincham, Beach and Bradbury (1987) investigated distressed and non-distressed spouses' attributions and found that causal attributions (factors producing the behavior) and responsibility attributions (acceptability of the behavior) are strongly related to relationship satisfaction. Distressed couples found to be made less benign attributions for their partner's behavior than their own behavior, and such discrepancy found to be result in a strong affective response. Fincham, Beach and Nelson (1987) investigated the nature of attributions in

distressed and non-distressed couples and showed that distressed and non-distressed couples differ according to their attributions they make for the spouse behavior. The results showed that distressed couples attributed negative spouse behaviors to be more negative in intent, selfishly motivated, and blameworthy than did nondistressed couples, while the inverse pattern was found for positive behaviors. When all these findings taken together, it appears that individuals who view their partners' behaviors more negative in intent, and selfishly motivated tend to blame their partners and experience high levels of distress which leads to lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Similarly in the present study, partner-blame found to be related with a decrease in relationship satisfaction. However, the current study investigated the association between conflict attributions (self/partner blame) and relationship satisfaction within same couple. Thus, from prior studies' findings it can be inferred that when individuals blame their partners, they might be directly expressing or indirectly reflecting their thoughts with their negative attitudes. Since negativity and hostility found to be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction (Lloyd, 1987; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989), one partner's negative feelings or actions also effects his/her partner's relationship satisfaction. Although no research found which investigated the relation between perceived similarity of conflict behaviors and attributions, from the findings which point out that negative partner behaviors viewed in a more negative way, it can be inferred that if an individual blames his/her partner, they are tend to view their own behavior as more positive or constructive. As a result, viewing conflict behaviors as different indicates that their partners are engaging in negative or destructive manners. In fact,

Sillars (1980) noted individuals who blame their partner tend to use avoidance or competitive strategies rather than integrative or collaborative ones, whereas individuals who accept responsibility for their behaviors are more likely engage in behaviors which lead them further understanding of their partners. In this sense, attributing the cause of conflict to the partner might indicate an unchangeable situation or a situation in which they do not have control, and in turn the belief that their partners cannot be changed could be lowering both partners' relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, when they take responsibility they might feel that they have control over the behaviors, and can change them.

Moreover, the association between one partner's perceptions on conflict behaviors and the other partner's relationship satisfaction was also investigated. A positive correlation was expected. The findings supported the hypothesis, indicating that as one partner perceives that they are using similar ways to resolve conflicts, his/her partner's relationship satisfaction was increased. As it is mentioned above, the nature of similarity (whether both partners perceive each other as engaging in destructive or constructive conflict behaviors) is unclear. However, similarity in the present study indicates that if for example, one partner avoids conflict, the other partner is also viewed as avoiding the conflict, or if one partner tries to compromise the other partner viewed in a similar way. In relation with previous findings displaying that partner-blame decreases relationship satisfaction and is related with perceiving conflict behaviors as different, the reason why similar behaviors increase relationship satisfaction can be inferred. That is, as individuals tend to view negative events as a result of partner behaviors, they blame their partners for the

cause of conflict and as a result of negative events couples who become distressed more likely see their partner as the cause of marital difficulties (Fincham, 1985). And as it is discussed above, blaming their partners and viewing partner's behaviors in a negative way implies that they are apt to view their own behaviors in a more positive way. Thus, if they take responsibility for the cause of conflict and view the conflict behaviors as similar, this leads to higher levels of relationship satisfaction, whereas the opposite is valid for partner blame and perceived different conflict behaviors. That is, if they view their behaviors in a positive way, and if they perceive that their partners engage in similar conflict behaviors, they could not blame their partners and report higher levels of relationship satisfaction. More specifically, when individuals perceive that own and partner's conflict behaviors are constructive, then they would not experience low relationship satisfaction due to conflict behaviors. Rusbult, Johnson and Morrow (1986a) found that constructive behaviors (voice) are positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, and destructive behaviors (exit and neglect) are negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, if individuals view that they have destructive conflict behaviors and perceive their partners have similar behaviors, they can not only blame their partners, but should be blaming themselves also. And this implies that they share the responsibility for the cause of conflict, and ultimately, their relationship satisfaction would be higher than those who view own behaviors as constructive and partner behavior destructive. In fact, Baxter and Dindia (1990) found that withdrawal and avoidance are the most common strategies to maintain intimate relationships. Likewise, Canary and Cupach (1988) stated that avoidance

might be a positive way to deal with conflicts depending on who reports avoidance (self or partner). In this sense, even if similarity refers to avoidance, in the present study this will indicate that both partners reported avoidance, which means that if one partner does not want to discuss, s/he avoids the conflict situations, and his/her partner also avoids, so both partners get satisfied.

Moreover, gender differences on the variables were also investigated in order to see whether men and women differ according to their conflict distress, conflict attribution (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and relationship satisfaction. The expectation that there would no gender differences with regard to any variable was supported. These findings indicate that conflict distress, conflict attribution (self/partner blame) and perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference) are not differ due to gender effects, but are affected from the interaction of partners. In other words, merely being a men or women does not affect the relationship, but what is important for the intimate relationships is the interaction pattern of each partner. Thus these findings emphasize the importance of considering conflict distress, conflict attributions (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) and relationship satisfaction on a dyad level.

In addition, since vast majority of the studies examined the relationship among attributions, distress level, conflict behaviors and relationship satisfaction in married couples, the present study aimed to investigate these relations within dating couples. Findings of the present study found to be consistent with the literature. Hence, with regard to the results of this study it can be assumed that the relations

between the investigated variables do not differ according to married or dating couples. In other words, the effects of conflict distress, conflict attributions (self/partner blame), perceived conflict behaviors (similarity/difference) on relationship satisfaction appear to be similar in both dating couples and married couples.

To sum up, this study indicates that partner-blame for the cause of conflict, experiencing high levels of distress within conflict situations and perceiving conflict behaviors as different appear to be important in explaining dissatisfaction in dating relationships. These variables have reciprocal effects on each other, and when taken all together they explain an important variance of low relationship satisfaction levels.

5.2 Limitations of the Study and Future Suggestions

Although the present findings help to understand the factors that contribute relationship satisfaction/dissatisfaction for dating couples and clarify the importance of conflict distress, conflict attributions (self/partner blame) and the role of perceptions on conflict behaviors (similarity/difference), the limitations should be pointed out. The major limitation appears to be the homogeneity of the sample. That is, homogeneous sample prevented further understanding of the relationships among conflict distress, conflict attributions, and perceived conflict behavior (similarity/difference) in more details in two different ways. The first prevention of the homogeneous sample was that participants could not be grouped according to their views on conflict behaviors with regard to negativity/positivity. In other

words, since the sample was not heterogeneous, the participants could not be grouped in order to clarify whether they consider their own conflict behavior and their partner's conflict behavior in a positive or negative manner. The results only yielded whether they perceive the conflict behaviors similar or different. However, the direction of the relationship could only be assumed based on prior literature. More specifically, it is not clear whether similarity refers to partners' views on own and partner behavior are for example, avoiding, compromising, competing, accommodating or collaborating. Similarly, the combination of perceived difference of conflict behaviors is not clear. More specifically, the data does not suggest the combination with regard to self concern and other concern. The difference may refer to different variations of high, low and moderate self and other concern.

Secondly, conflict attribution could only be grouped as self blame and partner blame due to the homogeneous sample. However, a third situation, which is equally blaming self and partner, may provide a wider view in understanding relationship satisfaction. In other words, the data revealed information about relationship satisfaction when the partners blame themselves or their partners. On the other hand, in some relationships partners' may take equal responsibility for the cause of conflict, which may lead to different outcomes with regard to relationship satisfaction and conflict behavior perceptions.

Another limitation of the study was that only participants' self-reports with regard to conflict behaviors were asked. Thus, the results indicating similarity or difference with regard to conflict behaviors are only a representation of partners' recognitions. However whether they are actually similar/different or is it only a

distorted version of the reality is not clear. Thus, comparison of actual and perceived conflict behaviors could both clarify the way they think about each other and also, the effects of these thoughts on their relationships, which would lead to further understanding the role of perceptions in relationship satisfaction.

To sum up, when these limitations considered, it appears that future research is needed with a heterogeneous sample in order to gain a more detailed understanding on perceived conflict behaviors' (similarity/difference) directions and in order to clarify the effects of taking equal responsibility for the cause of conflict. And additionally, in the future studies, distinguishing perceived and actual conflict behaviors could clarify the role of perceptions in a more detailed way.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Örnek Maddeler:

A	B	C	D
Bu cümlede yer alan ifade daha önce HİÇ gerçekleşti mi?	Son 1 ay içerisinde bu olay KAÇ KEZ gerçekleşti?	Bu olay olduğunda NE KADAR rahatsızlık hissettiniz?	Kimin tarafından/yüzünden gerçekleşmişti?

Sözel Çatışma:

	A	B	C	D
	Evet Hayır	0 Kez 1-2 Kere 3-9 Kere 10-20 Kere 20'den fazla Kez	Hiç Biraz Oldukça Çok Çok Fazla	Ben Genellikle Ben İkimiz de Eşit Genellikle Partnerim Partnerim
1. En azından birimiz cevapsız kaldığımız, dinlenmediğini ya da anlaşılmadığını hissediyor.	E H	A B C D E	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
2. İkimizden biri şikayet edince, o şikayetin tartışılması yerine diğeri de şikayetlerini belirtir.	E H	A B C D E	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
3. En azından birimizin odaklandığı şey, sorunu çözmeye çalışmak yerine karşıdakini suçlamaktır.	E H	A B C D E	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4

Fiziksel Çatışma:

4. En azından birimiz bir hayvanı, arkadaşı ya da aile bireyini fiziksel olarak incitmek gibi öfkeyle yapılmış hareketler olduğunu söyler.	E H	A B C D E	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
5. En azından birimiz tartışmalarda bıçak ya da silah çekildiğinden bahseder	E H	A B C D E	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4

Konu Başlıkları:

1. Boş zamanlar: eğlence, oyunlar, spor, dinlenme, hobiler	E H	A B C D E	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
2. Arkadaşlar	E H	A B C D E	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
3. Önemsemek ve/veya saygı göstermek; isteklerin dikkate alınması ya da umursanmaması	E H	A B C D E	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4

Yazışma Adresi: İ.Sine Egeci, sineegeci@yahoo.com

APPENDIX B

Örnek Maddeler:

Lütfen aşağıda verilen maddelerin her biri için siz ve eşiniz (eşiniz sözcüğü evli iseniz karınız ve ya kocanız, evli değilseniz birlikte olduğunuz kişi anlamında kullanılmaktadır) arasındaki anlaşma veya anlaşamama ölçüsünü aşağıda verilen altı düzeyden birini seçerek belirtiniz.

	Hemen hemen			Hemen hemen		
	her zaman	Her zaman	Nadiren	Sıkça	her zaman	Her zaman
	anlaşırız	anlaşırız	anlaşırız	anlaşamayız	anlaşamayız	anlaşamayız
1. Dini konular						
2. Muhabbet- sevgi gösterme						
3. Arkadaşlar						

Yazışma Adresi: Doç Dr. Hürol Fışiloğlu, ODTÜ- Psikoloji Bölümü, fisil@metu.edu.tr

APPENDIX C

Örnek Maddeler:

BEN

1. Kendi isteđimi kabul ettirinceye kadar tartıřmayı sürdürürüm.
2. Ben bir taviz (ödün) veririm, onun da isteklerinden biraz taviz vermesini isterim.
ve uzlaşacak bir orta yol bulmaya çalışırım.

O

3. Kendi isteđini kabul ettirinceye kadar tartıřmayı sürdürür.
4. O bir taviz (ödün) verir, benim de isteklerimden biraz taviz vermemi ister ve
uzlaşacak bir orta yol bulmaya çalışır.

Yazıřma Adresi: Prof. Dr. Esin Tezer, ODTÜ- Eđitim Bilimleri Fakóltesi,
esin@metu.edu.tr

APPENDIX D

Tarih:/...../.....

-----Demografik Bilgiler-----

1. Doğum Tarihiniz:/..../19.....
2. Cinsiyetiniz:
3. Eğitim durumunuz: a. İlkokul b. Ortaokul c. Lise
d. Üniversite (Bölümünüzü belirtiniz)-----
e. Yüksek Lisans (Bölümünüzü belirtiniz)-----
f. Doktora (Bölümünüzü belirtiniz)-----
g. Diğer(belirtiniz)-----
4. Aşağıdakilerden hangisi sizin için geçerli:
a. Öğrenciyim.
b. Çalışıyorum.
c. Hem okuyorum, hem çalışıyorum.
d. Ne çalışıyorum, ne de okuyorum.
e. Diğer (Belirtiniz-----)
Lütfen işaretlediğiniz seçeneğin ne kadar süredir devam ettiğini belirtiniz---Ay---Yıl
5. Aşağıdakilerden hangisi sizin için geçerli:
a. Ailemle yaşıyorum
b. Ailemden ayrı, evde yaşıyorum.
c. Yurttan kalıyorum.
d. Birlikte olduğum kişi ile yaşıyorum.
e. Diğer (Belirtiniz)-----

Birlikte Olduğunuz Kişinin

6. Doğum Tarihi:/..../19.....
7. Eğitim durumu: a. İlkokul b. Ortaokul c. Lise
d. Üniversite (Bölümünüzü belirtiniz)-----
e. Master (Bölümünüzü belirtiniz)-----
f. Doktora (Bölümünüzü belirtiniz)-----
g. Diğer(belirtiniz)-----

8. Aşağıdakilerden hangisi birlikte olduğunuz kişi için geçerli:

- Öğrenci.
- Çalışıyor.
- Hem okuyor, hem çalışıyor.
- Ne çalışıyor, ne de okuyor.
- Diğer (Belirtiniz-----)

Lütfen işaretlediğiniz seçeneğin ne kadar süredir devam ettiğini belirtiniz---Ay--Yıl

9. Aşağıdakilerden hangisi birlikte olduğunuz kişi için geçerli:

- Ailesi ile yaşıyor.
- Ailesinden ayrı, evde yaşıyor.
- Yurtta kalıyor.
- Birlikte yaşıyoruz.
- Diğer (Belirtiniz)-----

-----**İlişki ile İlgili Bilgiler**-----

Aşağıdaki soruları şu anda birlikte olduğunuz kişi ile yaşadığınız ilişkiyi düşünerek cevaplayınız.

- Ne kadar zamandır birliktesiniz? -----Yıl-----Ay
- Birlikte olmaya başlamadan önce tanışıyor muydunuz?
 - Hayır, tanışır tanışmaz birlikte olmaya başladık.
 - Evet, -----Yıl-----Aydır tanışıyorduk.
- Bir hafta* içinde ortalama kaç saat birlikte zaman geçirirsiniz? (Saat olarak belirtiniz)---

- Görüşme sıklığınızdan ne kadar memnunsunuz?
 - Çok memnunum.
 - Memnunum, yeterli buluyorum.
 - Memnun değilim; daha sık görüşmeyi tercih ederdim.
 - Memnun değilim; daha az görüşmeyi tercih ederdim.

5. Birlikte geçirdiğiniz zamanın kalitesinden ne kadar memnunsunuz? İşaretleyiniz.

1	2	3	4	5
Hiç memnun				Çok
Değilim				memnunum

6. Aşağıdakilerden size uygun olan seçeneği işaretleyiniz:

- Birlikte olduğum kişi ile evlenmeyi planlıyoruz.
- Birlikte olduğum kişi ile birlikte yaşamayı planlıyoruz.
- Nişanlıyız.
- Sözlüüz.
- Geleceğe yönelik planlarımız yok.
- Diğer (Belirtiniz-----)

7. Birlikte olduğunuz kişiden, herhangi bir sebeple uzun süre ayrı kaldığımız oldu mu?

- Hayır
- Evet

Cevabınız "Evet" ise

- Bu ayrılığın nedeni ne idi?-----
- Bu ayrılık ne kadar sürdü? (Ay olarak belirtiniz)-----

8. Birlikte olmayı düşündüğünüz kişiden ayrılmayı hiç düşündünüz mü?

- Hayır
- Evet

Cevabınız "Evet" ise

I: Nedeni:-----

II. Ne sıklıkla düşündünüz:

1	2	3	4
Nadiren	Bazen	Sıkça	Sık Sık

III. Düşüncelerinizi birlikte olduğunuz kişi ile paylaştınız mı?

- Hayır
- Evet

Cevabınız "Evet" ise

III. Nasıl sonuçlandı? a. Bir süre görüşmeme kararı aldık.

b. İlişkimizi bitirmeye karar verdik; ancak sonradan yeniden bir araya geldik

c. Ayrılık yaşamadık.

IV. Eğer böyle bir deneyiminiz olduysa, bu ayrılık ne kadar sürdü?

-----Ay-----Yıl

APPENDIX E

Değerli Katılımcı,

Bu araştırmayı, devam etmekte olduğum Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Psikoloji Bölümü yüksek lisans programı kapsamında yürüttüğüm tez çalışmasının bir parçası olarak yapmaktayım. Araştırmanın amacı, ilişkilerde karşılaşılan çatışma konularını ve çiftlerin bu çatışmalarla nasıl baş ettiğini kapsamlı olarak incelemektir.

İlişikteki 4 ankette geçen “birlikte olduğunuz kişi”, “eş” ya da “partner” ifadeleri ile yakın ilişki içinde olduğunuz kişi kastedilmektedir. Tüm sorulara, şu anda birlikte olduğunuz kişiyi düşünerek yanıt vermeniz beklenmektedir.

Bu soruların yanıtlanması yaklaşık 40-50 dakika sürmektedir. Anketlerde isminiz sorulmamakta ya da kimliğinizi ortaya çıkaran herhangi bir soru yer almamaktadır. Bu ankette vereceğiniz her tür bilgi tamamen gizli kalacaktır. Araştırmanın objektif olması ve elde edilecek sonuçların güvenilirliği açısından soruları içtenlikle yanıtlamanız; anketi, tek başınıza doldurmanız, sizi ve birlikte olduğunuz kişi ile yaşadığınız ilişkiyi tam olarak yansıtacak şekilde yanıtlamanız çok önemlidir.

Araştırmaya katılım tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayalıdır. Şayet, cevaplamak istemediğiniz sorularla karşılaşırsanız bunları atlayabilir veya anketi doldurmayı bırakabilirsiniz. Ancak, yarım kalmış ya da çoğu soruların cevapsız bırakıldığı anketlerden elde edilen verilerin kullanılması mümkün olmadığından, anketi mümkün olduğunca boş bırakmadan tamamlamanız çok önemlidir.

Araştırmaya katıldığınız için çok teşekkür ederim.

İ.Sine EĞECİ