

INSECURE ATTACHMENT AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION:
TESTING THE BUFFERING ROLES OF MINDFULNESS, SELF-
COMPASSION, AND COGNITIVE DEFUSION

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ABSTRACT

INSECURE ATTACHMENT AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION: TESTING THE BUFFERING ROLES OF MINDFULNESS, SELF- COMPASSION, AND COGNITIVE DEFUSION

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This study aims to test a multiple-mediation model which examines mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion as possible mediators of the relationship between attachment insecurity and romantic relationship satisfaction. The sample consisted of 521 emerging adults in a romantic relationship for at least one month (70% female, 27% male, and 3% non-binary). Their ages ranged from 19 to 29 years old ($M = 22.52$, $SD = 2.45$). In data collection, Relationship Assessment Scale, Experiences in Close Relationships- Revised, Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, Relationship Mindfulness Measure, Self-Compassion Scale Short Form, Drexel Defusion Scale, and demographic information form developed by the researcher were used.

To test the proposed model, structural equation modeling was used. Since the proposed model did not fit the data, insignificant paths and cognitive defusion variable were trimmed from the model. The trimmed model revealed a good model fit. Although self-compassion and trait mindfulness did not predict relationship satisfaction

significantly, relationship mindfulness acted as a mediator in the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction. Discussions were made on the importance of context-specific relationship mindfulness measure as well as the distinct effects of attachment anxiety and avoidance in romantic relationships. Also, cognitive defusion was evaluated in the context of romantic relationships. Lastly, recommendations for future research and implications of the study were indicated.

Keywords: relationship satisfaction, attachment insecurity, mindfulness, self-compassion, cognitive defusion.

ÖZ

GÜVENSİZ BAĞLANMA VE İLİŞKİ DOYUMU: BİLİNÇLİ FARKINDALIK, ÖZ-ŞEFKAT VE BİLİŞSEL AYRIŞMANIN AZALTICI ETKİSİ

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Bu çalışma, güvensiz bağlanma ile romantik ilişki doyumu arasındaki ilişkide; bilinçli farkındalık, ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık, öz-şefkat ve bilişsel ayrışmanın aracılık rollerini inceleyen bir çoklu aracılık modelini test etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Örneklem, beliren yetişkinlik döneminde ve en az bir aydır romantik ilişki içerisinde olan 521 üniversite öğrencisinden oluşmuştur (%70 kadın, %27 erkek ve %3 non-binary). Katılımcıların yaşları 19 ile 29 arasında değişmektedir ($M = 22.52$, $SD = 2.45$). Veri toplama sürecinde, İlişki Doyumu Ölçeği, Yakın İlişkilerde Yaşantılar Envanteri, Bilinçli Farkındalık Ölçeği, İlişkide Bilinçli Farkındalık Ölçeği, Öz-Şefkat Ölçeği Kısa Formu, Drexel Ayrışma Ölçeği ve araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen demografik bilgi formu kullanılmıştır.

Önerilen modeli test etmek için yapısal eşitlik modellemesi kullanılmıştır. Önerilen model örnekleme iyi uyum sağlamadığı için istatistiksel olarak anlamsız olan regresyon yolları ve bilişsel ayrışma değişkeni modelden çıkarılmıştır. Düzenlenen yeni modelin uyum istatistikleri iyi uyum göstermiştir. Öz-şefkat ve bilinçli farkındalık, ilişki doyumunu anlamlı bir şekilde yordamasa da ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık, bağlanma kaygısı ile ilişki doyumu arasındaki ilişkide aracılık rolü

oynamıştır. Kaygılı bağlanma ve kaçınan bağlanmanın romantik ilişkilerdeki özgün etkilerinin yanı sıra romantik ilişki bağlamına özgü ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık ölçeğinin önemi üzerine tartışılmıştır. Ayrıca bilişsel ayrışma romantik ilişkiler bağlamında değerlendirilmiştir. Son olarak, uygulamaya yönelik çıkarımlardan ve gelecek araştırmalara yönelik önerilerden bahsedilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ilişki doyumu, güvensiz bağlanma, bilinçli farkındalık, öz-şefkat, bilişsel ayrışma

*For those looking for their safe haven
and realize the haven in themselves*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

“When I was your age, I had been married for five years and had two children.”

This statement might be familiar to most in their 20s. Compared to prior generations, today's young generation postpones life events such as marriage, childbirth, or having a steady job. Instead, endless possibilities are explored in work, love, and worldviews. Lacking the dependency of childhood and adolescence as well as the responsibilities brought by adulthood, this period of life, *emerging adulthood*, shows distinct characteristics, becoming ideal for independent exploration of diverse areas (Arnett, 2000). Feeling in between adolescence and adulthood, individuals explore their identities during this developmental stage. Also, they frequently contemplate questions related to romantic relationships, such as *What kind of person should I spend my life with?* (Fincham & Cui, 2010).

However, when researching young individuals, romantic relationships were pointed out way before the 2000s. In the 1930s, when the reporter asked Freud, what a normal person should do to feel well, he answered: *“Lieben und arbeiten* (to love and to work)” (Erikson, 1977, p. 238). Similarly, Erik Erikson (1977) pointed out the importance of having a functioning intimate relationship for young adults after the age of 19. He named the sixth stage of his famous Theory of Psychosocial Development: *Intimacy versus Isolation*. According to Erikson (1977), the significant goal of this stage was to develop a committed romantic relationship with a loved partner, built on mutual trust.

More recent researchers have continued to attach importance to the same argument. Numerous current research studies have shown that romantic relationships are

prominent in emerging adults' lives. After the initial propositions of Arnett (2000), Meier and Allen (2008) supported the idea that transition to adulthood can be a useful frame to study romantic relationships. Later, in their book, Fincham and Cui (2010) stated that exploration of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood can be beneficial for not only several aspects of well-being and behavioral adjustment (Davila, 2010; Manning et al., 2010), but for also demonstrating long-term implications in favor of later development such as marriage functioning or learning to terminate an abusive relationship (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007).

The importance of romantic relationships created many frameworks to examine this issue from diverse viewpoints, but attachment theory is probably the most popular and long-standing theory explaining individual differences and functioning in romantic relationships. It is based on the "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194). According to this theory, children form attachment relationships with their primary caregivers from an early age, and these attachment relationships affect individuals' romantic relationship functioning later in life (Bowlby, 1969).

More detailly, it assumes that the internal working models, including cognitive and affective mental representations (Bretherton, 1985), are formed in childhood owing to the interactions between the infant and the caregiver (Bowlby, 1969). When the caregiver is available, warm, and responsive, infants learn that others can be trusted and develop secure working models. However, in the case of a cold or threatening interaction, infants learn that other people are not a source of protection and comfort, so they develop secondary attachment strategies, insecure attachments, to cope with psychological distress (Bowlby, 1969).

Since these mental representations appear out of conscious awareness, they are largely accepted as stable over time (Bowlby, 1980; Main et al., 1985; Waters et al., 2000), especially with people holding insecure attachment dimensions (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Internal working models and attachment dimensions are still active during adulthood, and they shape the course of our relationships (Bowlby, 1980; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Researchers have proposed different attachment models for adult relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Brennan et al. (1998)

suggested that the two-dimensional approach, including attachment anxiety and avoidance, is the most valid model since different subscales of other models measured the same construct (see also Fraley et al., 2000). Since then, with a commonly accepted model, anxiety and avoidance have been the two key factors in understanding attachment dimensions in romantic relationships (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

The existing research on adult attachment suggests that anxious attachment, linked to hyperactivating strategies in romantic relationships, is associated with the desire for closeness, dependency on romantic partners, need for reciprocation, sexual attraction, fear of abandonment, jealousy, emotional fluctuations, and being highly emotional and overly sensitive to signs of acceptance or rejection (Berant et al., 2005; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). On the other hand, avoidant attachment, linked to deactivating strategies in romantic relationships, is associated with fear of intimacy and commitment, avoidance of dependency on others, low acceptance of the partner's faults, and holding a grandiose self (Berant et al., 2005; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In numerous studies, these insecure attachment styles are linked to lower romantic relationship satisfaction in adulthood (Candel & Turliuc, 2019; Hadden et al., 2014; Li & Chan, 2012; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). However, the unique effects of both dimensions on relationships are investigated relatively less (Li & Chan, 2012).

The internal working model that we form through attachment relationships during childhood is such a decisive factor that changes the course of our romantic relationships as adults by affecting how we cope with emotional pain, the fear of abandonment by a loved one, or the fear that we will get tangled up in a dependent relationship. As powerful as it is, the theory is also interpreted as a deterministic one (Diamond & Kotov, 2003). If researchers consider attachment styles, especially the insecure ones, as mostly stable throughout life (see Fraley et al., 2011 for a review), how can one take a step further to be nourished, to feel contentment and satisfaction in their romantic relationships? Is the course of individuals' romantic relationships, maybe the most important life aspect of emerging adults, expected to be as deterministic if they have insecure attachment as adults? The answers to these questions might be on the current trend in psychology literature: *Psychological flexibility*.

More recently, research has been originating to investigate attachment theory in conjunction with more contemporary concepts such as *psychological flexibility* (Salandé & Hawkins, 2017), which appears in the *third wave* behavioral approach, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Third wave approaches have a functional and contextual comprehension of human behaviors (Hayes, 2004). The focus is on keeping a more flexible behavioral repertoire and changing the *function* of the mental and behavioral phenomena rather than changing their structure (Hayes, 2004). On the way of psychological wellness, the focus is not on the reasons, suppression, change of the painful events, negative thoughts, or feelings, but the focus is on having an accepting, compassionate, and flexible reaction towards life challenges (Hayes et al., 2006).

This flexible and awakening view toward our internal experiences is believed to bring wellness to not only our intrapersonal relationships but also interpersonal ones (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). In parallel with this perspective, Buddhist traditions such as meditation and mindfulness are appreciated in the ACT (Hayes, 2004). Mindfulness, as one of the key constructs under psychological flexibility, namely present moment awareness, is proposed to help with negative internal experiences by providing us with the observation of our thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations as it is, whether they are pleasing, unpleasing, or neutral, without reacting to them or overidentifying with them (Bishop et al., 2004).

Mindfulness increases emotion regulation skills and diminishes the adverse effects of external stressors in romantic relationships (Goyal et al., 2014; Grossman et al., 2004). It helps couples to be in contact with their partner by sharing, getting emotional support (Karremans et al., 2017; Wachs & Cordova, 2007), and communicating better during and after conflict (Barnes et al., 2007). Higher mindfulness in both men and women leads to higher relationship satisfaction for both parties in the relationship (McGill et al., 2020), regardless of age, gender, or marital status (Quinn-Nilas, 2020).

Recently, another concept related to but separate from mindfulness has been discussed in the psychology literature: Relationship mindfulness. Kimmes et al. (2018) showed that context-specific mindfulness predicts romantic relationship outcomes better than trait mindfulness (see also Stanton et al., 2021), partly because it is more successful at

targeting deeper relationship problems such as attachment insecurity. Their study revealed that insecure attachments are significantly and negatively related to relationship mindfulness (Kimmes et al., 2018). Other recent dyadic and longitudinal studies supported their arguments. Relationship mindfulness was significantly associated with individuals' positive and negative relationship outcomes (Stanton et al., 2021), their partners' psychological well-being (Kimmes et al., 2020), more daily positive behaviors in relationships (Gazder & Stanton, 2020), and higher sexual satisfaction (Fincham, 2022). All the recent evidence suggests that it is important to examine relationship mindfulness along with trait mindfulness in relation to insecure attachments and relationship satisfaction.

Like relationship mindfulness, self-compassion is conceptually related to but is distinct from mindfulness (Bluth & Blanton, 2014). While mindfulness is concerned with a non-reactive awareness regarding internal experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), self-compassion is concerned with reactions toward oneself in the face of suffering (Bluth & Blanton, 2014). Self-compassion was suggested to come after mindfulness (Bergen-Cico et al., 2013) because, to have a compassionate attitude toward whatever arises in mind, individuals must be mindful of these mental representations first (Neff, 2003a; Neff & Germer, 2013).

Mindfulness is known to increase compassion toward oneself, and self-compassion brings kindness, acceptance, and non-defensive communication within oneself and in relationships (Neff & Beretvas, 2013; Neff & Tirsch, 2013). Without self-compassion, people are more likely to exhibit hostile behaviors toward their partners (Zuroff & Duncan, 1999). They are more controlling and dictatorial in relationships (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). On the other hand, when they are self-compassionate, significant others described them as more affectionate, warm, and considerate (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Overall, studies show that self-compassion affects one's relationship satisfaction positively (Baker & McNulty, 2011; Barutçu-Yıldırım et al., 2021; Lathren et al., 2021).

Just like mindfulness and relationship mindfulness, one of the important indicators of self-compassion was found to be attachment security (Neff & Beretvas, 2013; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Raque-Bogdan et al., 2011). Insecurely attached individuals found it

harder to be compassionate toward themselves and act with present moment awareness (Raque-Bogdan et al., 2011). Neff and McGehee (2010) interpreted their similar results by discussing that securely attached individuals can reflect their warm family environment on their relationship with themselves, while insecurely attached individuals cannot.

In this study, cognitive defusion is another variable that is achieved by distancing from thoughts instead of merging with cognitions and letting them dominate behaviors (Hayes et al., 2011). These flexible attitudes toward internal experiences, without repressing them or gripping and overidentifying with them can be associated with the characteristics of attachment security (see Bishop et al., 2004; Ryan et al., 2007; Shaver et al., 2007; 2017). The meta-analysis of Daks and Rogge (2020) supports a part of this hypothesis by showing that cognitive defusion is significantly and negatively linked to attachment anxiety, but not avoidance (see also Baran et al., 2021).

It was also associated with better interpersonal functioning, higher perceived partner support, higher relationship satisfaction (Daks & Rogge, 2020), and fewer inaccurate evaluations of the couple interactions (Baran et al., 2021). On the other hand, lower levels of cognitive defusion were linked to negative conflict behaviors such as shouting, insulting, or calling names (Daks & Rogge, 2020). Overall, cognitive defusion can be expected to be related to both relationship satisfaction and insecure attachment.

To sum up, by having hyperactivating or deactivating internal working models, insecurely attached individuals exhibit compulsive self-reliance, repression of negative thoughts/feelings, anxiety, obsession, and dependency on others (Mikulincer et al., 2003). On the other hand, securely attached individuals are known to hold favorable views of themselves and show better self-regulation, reflection, awareness (Fonagy & Target, 1997), mindfulness (Cordon & Finney, 2008), relationship mindfulness (Kimmes et al., 2018), self-compassion (Raque-Bogdan et al., 2011), and cognitive defusion skills (Daks & Rogge, 2020). According to Ryan et al. (2007), a supportive family environment promotes attachment security in the same way it enhances mindfulness in relationships by “open, receptive attention to relationship partners” (p. 180). Also, although it is examined far less compared to mindfulness and

self-compassion in the context of romantic relationships, cognitive defusion is associated with attachment dimensions and relationship satisfaction as well (Daks & Rogge, 2020).

All in all, the concepts of mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion might hold a buffering effect by acting as a safe haven while coping with relationship challenges that were increased by insecure attachments (Saavedra et al., 2010). It can also help with the view on the deterministic side of attachment theory by showing that individuals can have satisfying romantic relationships despite insecure attachments by increasing their mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion levels.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The current study aims to examine whether mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion mediate the relationship between attachment insecurity and romantic relationship satisfaction of emerging adults one a multiple mediation model.

1.3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The main research question of the current study is “To what extend do mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion mediate the relationship between insecure attachment dimensions (attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance) and relationship satisfaction?” This research question is tested with the hypothesized structural model illustrated in Figure 1.1. Specific hypotheses of the study are stated below.

1. Hypotheses related to direct relationships:

H1: Attachment anxiety will be directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction (Path A).

H2: Attachment avoidance will be directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction (Path B).

H3: Attachment anxiety will be directly and significantly associated with relationship mindfulness (Path C).

H4: Attachment anxiety will be directly and significantly associated with mindfulness (Path D).

H5: Attachment anxiety will be directly and significantly associated with self-compassion (Path E).

H6: Attachment anxiety will be directly and significantly associated with cognitive defusion (Path F).

H7: Attachment avoidance will be directly and significantly associated with relationship mindfulness (Path G).

H8: Attachment avoidance will be directly and significantly associated with mindfulness (Path H).

H9: Attachment avoidance will be directly and significantly associated with self-compassion (Path I).

H10: Attachment avoidance will be directly and significantly associated with cognitive defusion (Path J).

H11: Mindfulness will be directly and significantly associated with relationship mindfulness (Path K).

H12: Mindfulness will be directly and significantly associated with self-compassion (Path L).

H13: Relationship mindfulness will be directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction (Path M).

H14: Mindfulness will be directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction (Path N).

H15: Self-compassion will be directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction (Path O).

H16: Cognitive defusion will be directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction (Path P).

2. Hypotheses related to indirect relationships:

H17: Relationship mindfulness will mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction.

H18: Relationship mindfulness will mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction.

H19: Mindfulness will mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction.

H20: Mindfulness will mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction.

H21: Self-compassion will mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction.

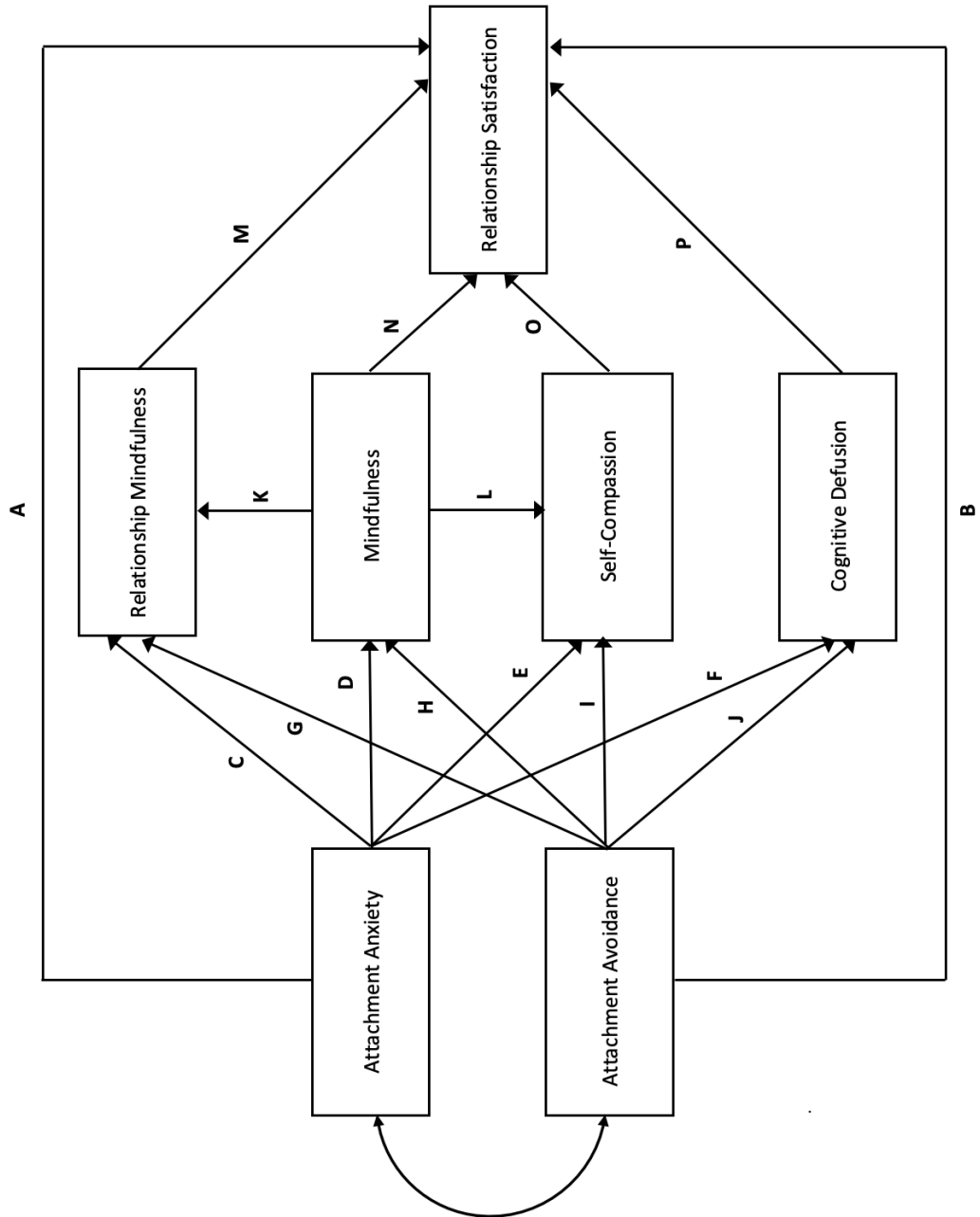
H20: Self-compassion will mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction.

H21: Cognitive defusion will mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction.

H22: Cognitive defusion will mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction.

Figure 1.1

The Hypothesized Model



1.4. Significance of the Study

The enormous importance of romantic relationships in an individual's life was pointed out by countless researchers (Erikson, 1977; Fincham & Cui, 2010). Romantic relationships are considered significant not only for the successful reproduction and continuity of the human race (Maner & Miller, 2010) but also for overall life satisfaction (Be et al., 2013), better physical health (Robles et al., 2014; Umberson et al., 2006), and longer lifespan (Coyne et al. 2001; Whisman et al., 2018). The importance of examining the secrets of satisfying romantic relationships with research increases, especially for the emerging adulthood period, since having a functioning, committed romantic relationship is considered as one of the unique goals for the psychosocial development of young individuals (Erikson, 1977). They are at the peak of their reproductive fertility (Eskenazi et al., 2003), learn social skills for behavioral adjustment and well-being (Davila, 2010; Manning et al., 2010), and set the base for later marital relationships at this stage by benefiting from their romantic relationships in which they learn to cope with relational challenges (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007).

The main intention of this study is to shed light on romantic relationship satisfaction. However, the study aims to specify the issue, especially for individuals with insecure attachment styles, since their detrimental effects on interpersonal relationships have been widely researched (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Since insecure attachment styles are accepted mostly stable throughout life (Bowlby, 1980; Diamond & Kotov, 2003, Chapter 6), acquiring psychological flexibility skills such as mindfulness, self-compassion, or cognitive defusion can intervene in the strong relationship between insecure attachments and relationship satisfaction. This might bend this deterministic side of attachments and instill hope to many emerging adults who are struggling in their romantic relationships.

To give a more specific significance to this study, consideration of mindfulness in romantic relationships with a context-specific measurement can be considered. Mindfulness was previously shown to be an important facilitator for positive romantic relationship outcomes (Barnes et al., 2007; McGill et al., 2020), but research focusing on romantic relationship-specific mindfulness is far less prevalent in literature

(Kimmes et al., 2018). Romantic relationship mindfulness was recently proven to be a distinct concept (Kimmes et al., 2018; 2020). This study aims to fill the gap in the body of literature, especially in the Turkish context. To the researcher's knowledge, it's the first study that measures romantic relationship mindfulness of emerging adults in Türkiye.

In addition, the current study can potentially offer further understanding of distinct insecure attachment dimensions in romantic relationships. Limited research showed that anxious and avoidant attachments affect romantic relationships differently (Li & Chan, 2012). The current study can provide more information regarding the possible differences and similarities of these attachment dimensions in the functioning of romantic relationships.

Moreover, although the relationship between psychological flexibility constructs and insecure attachment was examined before (Cordon et al., 2009; Daks & Rogge, 2020), studies testing a specific model by considering the nature of these correlations regarding romantic relationship satisfaction are far less (e.g., Jones et al., 2011). The current study aims to shed light on how these attachment styles might lead to more satisfying romantic relationships using the possible buffering effects of mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion.

Lastly, as a construct of psychological flexibility, cognitive defusion was examined far less in the context of romantic relationships despite its theoretical consistency. Few studies investigated its role in romantic relationships (Daks & Rogge, 2020), and it became the focus of attention quite recently (e.g., Baran et al., 2021). Therefore, it's important to understand the effect of cognitive defusion in the current model of romantic relationship satisfaction.

1.5. Definitions of the Terms

Emerging adulthood is a unique developmental stage between the ages of 18 and 29, in which individuals explore their identities and endless possibilities in work, love, and worldviews (Arnett, 2015).

Relationship satisfaction is the subjective evaluation of individuals' overall satisfaction in romantic relationships (Keizer, 2014).

Anxious attachment is the uncertainty regarding the availability of attachment figures (Bowlby, 1969). It is associated with being highly emotional and overly sensitive to the signs of acceptance or rejection in romantic relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

Avoidant attachment is withdrawing from interaction to avoid devastation and distress caused by the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1978). It is associated with fear of intimacy and commitment in romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Mindfulness is “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4).

Relationship mindfulness is “the tendency to be mindful in the context of romantic relationships” (Kimmes et al., 2018, p. 577).

Self-compassion is “being touched by and open to one’s own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one’s suffering and healing oneself with kindness” (Neff, 2003a, p. 87).

Cognitive defusion is distancing from thoughts instead of merging with cognitions and letting them dominate behaviors. It involves looking *at* thoughts instead of looking *from* thoughts (Luoma et al., 2007, p. 65).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes the literature review in relevance to the proposed model of the study. The theoretical framework, definitions, and history of the variables - mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, cognitive defusion- and the related empirical research are presented in the general and the romantic relationship contexts.

2.1. Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory dwells upon the "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194) by explaining the details of the early relationships between the child and the primary attachment figure, who is mostly the mother, and its long-lasting behavioral effects on individuals. At the outset, psychoanalytic and social learning theorists believed that satisfying hunger drives was the underlying reason behind a child's bond with the mother. They also believed that the child associated the mother with positive feelings during the feeding process (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Attachment behaviors were also examined in some animals that have strong bonds with their caregivers, but the same rationale was not supported, showing that geese were attached to the parents who did not feed them (Lorenz, 1935, as cited in Cassidy & Shaver, 2016), and similarly, rhesus monkeys preferred a warm touch over a cold feeding machine (Harlow, 1958, as cited in Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Later, it was revealed that also infants became attached to humans who did not feed them (Ainsworth, 1967, as cited in Van Rosmalen et al., 2015; Schaffer & Emerson, 1964, as cited in Cassidy & Shaver, 2016).

John Bowlby, who is accepted as the founder of the basic principles of attachment theory, noted that secondary drive theories were not adequate in explaining the bond

between the caregiver and the child (Bowlby, 1980), so he created attachment theory drawing on the fields such as evolutionary biology, ethology, developmental psychology and control systems theory in his trilogy of *Attachment and Loss* (Bowlby, 1969/1982; 1973; 1980). He touched upon the long-lasting behavioral effects of the phenomenon on individuals, stating that it's a foundation that shapes future interpersonal relationships (1969).

A developmental psychologist in Bowlby's research team, Mary Salter Ainsworth, who is now referred to as the co-founder of the theory, realized different attachment patterns during fieldwork in Uganda, where infants were generally separated from their caregivers throughout the day. The results supported Bowlby's teachings that attachment between the child and the mother was based on interaction rather than the child's basic needs, such as food (Ainsworth, 1967, as cited in Van Rosmalen et al., 2015).

After returning to the United States, Ainsworth and her colleagues created the *Strange Situation*, an empirical assessment tool, to characterize attachment styles by observing mothers and infants in a laboratory setting (Ainsworth et al., 1978). They separated infants from their mothers and tested how the baby reacted in gradually increasing distress: when left with a stranger, when left alone, and finally when reunited with the mother. The idea was to activate the *attachment behavioral system* with stress and observe different behavioral patterns.

As Bowlby (1969/1982) mentions, this system involves an attachment figure, namely a primary caregiver, who provides a physical and emotional *safe haven* for the infant. They explore the world to develop their personality in this *secure base*, believing that they can return to their safe haven, the caregiver, in times of need. When distressed, the infant displays *proximity seeking* as a *primary attachment strategy* to obtain protection and comfort from the attachment figure. When the attachment figure cannot be reached easily, they demonstrate *separation protest* (Bowlby, 1969/1982).

By activating the attachment behavioral system, Ainsworth and her colleagues (1978) observed and defined three different attachment styles for infants: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-ambivalent/anxious. Securely attached children were distressed after the separation but approached the mom after the reunion, and they calmed down

with the mothers' soothing. Avoidant children did not show any sign of distress after the separation and ignored their caregivers after the reunion. Anxious children were preoccupied with their mother before separation, displayed distress with separation, and continued to show anger or chose to cling to the mother after the reunion despite the trials of soothing (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Ainsworth (1979) carried on observing infants and their caregivers at home to realize reoccurring themes in uncontrolled environments as well.

After plenty of years from the initial work of Ainsworth, another attachment style, disorganized/disoriented, was identified by Main and Solomon (1990). In the *Strange Situation*, these infants would express unusual behaviors such as lying face down or freezing when reunited with the caregiver (Ainsworth et al., 1978). It was interpreted that the attachment figure is considered as both a safe haven and a source of distress by the child. In reunion, the children experienced uncertainty between approaching or avoiding the mother, so they generally endorsed the best behavior targeting momentary comfort (Main & Solomon, 1990, Chapter 4).

After repeated interactions with the caregiver, infants develop *internal working models* which reflect their experiences and knowledge from these interactions (Bretherton, 1985). Infants learn to regulate their behavior according to the characteristics of these interactions. In the case of a generally responsive, consistent, and warm attachment figure, children develop secure working models of attachment as an inner psychological resource (Ainsworth et al., 1978). They learn to consider other individuals as dependable and confidently explore the world where they interact and form authentic social relationships with others. However, if the primary caregiver is cold, threatening, insensitive towards the infant's needs, or displays unpredictable behavior, children develop insecure working models of attachment (Bowlby, 1973, as cited in Bretherton & Munholland, 2008, Chapter 5). They learn that others cannot be relied on for protection and comfort, so they develop *secondary attachment strategies*.

Main and Solomon (1990) described these strategies under two categories: *hyperactivation* and *deactivation*. Hyperactivating strategies include increased attention toward potential threats, intensified proximity-seeking attempts, and obsession with closeness to the attachment figure. When the attachment figure

displays unpredictable availability, children tend to develop hyperactivating strategies and overly demand attention and support from their attachment figure to ensure closeness. A hyperactivated attachment system was adopted by children with anxious attachment in the *Strange Situation*. On the other hand, deactivating strategies generally emerge when the caregiver is unresponsive or responds with disapproval or punishment to the desire for closeness. A deactivated attachment system includes suppression and diminishing of the threats. Children who develop deactivating strategies tend to withdraw from interaction to avoid devastation and distress caused by the attachment figure. They try to accomplish a high self-sufficiency level, or as Bowlby called, compulsive self-reliance (Bowlby, 1978). Deactivated attachment strategies were observed in children with avoidant attachment styles in the *Strange Situation* (see Bowlby, 1973, as cited in Bretherton & Munholland, 2008, Chapter 5; Main & Solomon, 1990, Chapter 4).

2.1.1. Adult Attachment

Towards adolescence, individuals going through developmental challenges restrain themselves from the primary attachment figures to become autonomous and go through cognitive and emotional transitions in conjunction with formal operational thinking (Allen & Land, 1999, Chapter 15). They can compare other potential attachment figures to realize others may fulfill attachment needs better than parents. Although the process of decreased reliance on parents starts way earlier than adolescence- during infancy, when the child begins exploration in the secure base- it reaches a peak when the developmental task becomes finding and sustaining a long-term romantic relationship during late adolescence and adulthood (Allen & Land, 1999, Chapter 15).

Hazan and Zeifman (1999, Chapter 16) questioned the nature of this attachment transition from parents to partners. They stated that the fundamental behavioral system involved in these bonds is quite similar (see also Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The proximity-seeking behavior from the primary attachment figure during emotionally challenging times is transferred to romantic partners in adulthood, and the intimate physical contact between a mother and the infant is distinctively observed between romantic partners (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999, Chapter 16). Humans release oxytocin,

frequently called the *hormone of attachment*, during and after sexual intercourse (Carter, 1992), just like it is released when the newborn is placed on the mother's chest after birth and during breastfeeding/sucking (Scatliffe et al., 2019). Just as infants display separation protest when separated from their primary protectors for external dangers, adults react with anxiety and depression when separated from their romantic partners (Sbarra & Hazan, 2008). Hofer (1984, as cited in Sbarra & Hazan, 2008) compared the loss of a romantic partner (bereavement) with the loss of light -the primary regulator of bodily functions in mammals- stating that both result in sleep disturbance, malaise, lower vigilance, depression, hostility, and cognitive impairment. This evidence supports Bowlby's definition of attachment: "from cradle to the grave" (Bowlby 1982, p. 208).

To conceptualize the link between love and attachment, different models of love have been tested within the attachment perspective (see Feeney & Noller, 1990; Levy & Davis, 1988; Shaver & Hazan, 1988). However, widely accepted attachment styles remained parallel with the work of Ainsworth et al. (1978) on infant-mother dyads. In the leading empirical study of Hazan and Shaver (1987) on adults, three attachment styles were described: anxious (ambivalent) attachment and avoidant attachment as insecure attachment styles, and lastly, secure attachment style. Later, a fourth attachment model was proposed by dividing the avoidant attachment style into two: fearful-avoidant and dismissive-avoidant (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This division was because researchers believed that the *model of self* differs for individuals with fearful-avoidant and dismissive-avoidant attachment types.

Each of the four attachment types was explained by Bowlby's concepts of *models of self* and *models of others*. The model of self was labeled as either positive or negative according to seeing "the self as worthy of love and support or not" (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991, p. 227). Similarly, the model of others was labeled as either positive or negative according to seeing "other people as trustworthy and available vs. unreliable and rejecting" (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991, p. 227).

The internal working models of securely attached individuals include both positive views of self and others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins, 1996; Hazan and Shaver, 1987). The preliminary study of Hazan and Shaver (1987) showed that secure

adults describe their romantic relationship experiences as happy, friendly, and trusting, and they are linked with lengthy relationships. On the other hand, avoidant individuals are linked with fear of intimacy and commitment and low acceptance of their partner's faults. They hold positive self-views but negative views of others (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Just as in infancy, they deactivate the attachment behavioral system by suppressing or down-regulating emotions in the face of distrust towards the availability of romantic figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

Finally, anxious individuals report jealousy, sexual attraction, emotional fluctuations, and the need for reciprocation in their romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Unlike the avoidant types, anxiously attached individuals do not repress or try to disguise feelings of insecurity, so they hold negative self-views and positive views of others (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In the face of distrust towards the availability of romantic figures, they hyperactivate the attachment behavioral system by being highly emotional and overly sensitive to the signs of acceptance or rejection (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). This type of attachment style is linked with love at first sight (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

2.2. Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction refers to the subjective evaluation of individuals' overall satisfaction in romantic relationships (Keizer, 2014). The term has been used interchangeably with several others, such as relationship happiness, relationship quality, or marital satisfaction, without necessarily excluding unmarried couples (Kluwer, 2010). It is one of the most rooted, long-standing research outcomes that have been shown interest (e.g., Bernard, 1933; Katz et al., 1963) in determining thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in a romantic relationship (Hendrick, 1988). It has also been critically important in clinical settings on account of its popularity in assessing the success of therapy and treatment outcomes (e.g., Lundblad & Hansson 2006; Stephenson et al., 2013).

Higher satisfaction in romantic relationships indicates individuals' belief that their needs are satisfied by their partner (Fincham & Rogge, 2010). It is identified with positive feelings and attitudes towards the significant other (Fincham & Rogge, 2010) and lower relationship instability and termination (Gottman & Levenson, 1992).

Countless research has demonstrated its relationship with subjective well-being and health (e.g., Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Roberts & Davis, 2016). Higher satisfaction in relationships is linked to overall life satisfaction and positive feelings (Be et al., 2013; Erol & Curun, 2021; Heller et al., 2004) more than other predictors such as job satisfaction, health, or finances (Fleeson, 2004; Heller et al., 2004). Also, it has been linked to better physical health (Robles et al., 2014; Umberson et al., 2006) and a longer lifespan (Coyne et al., 2001; Whisman et al., 2018).

In explaining the development of relationship satisfaction, attachment theory is a long-standing theoretical framework that offers beneficial points (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Secure attachment is proven to foster relationship satisfaction countless times, targeting behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects, whereas insecure attachment dimensions are shown to be related to lower relationship satisfaction in both individuals and their partners, and it's expected to decrease even more in time (Candel & Turliuc, 2019; Hadden et al., 2014; Li & Chan, 2012; Pintado & Mendoza, 2016; Vollmann et al., 2019). Securely attached adults describe their romantic relationships as happy, friendly, trusting (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These relationships last longer and give higher satisfaction to individuals (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). However, since insecurely attached adults are more likely to experience relationship problems such as fear of intimacy and commitment, having difficulty accepting their partners' mistakes or reporting higher levels of jealousy, these relationships have lower levels of satisfaction (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

More recently, relationship satisfaction is also studied in conjunction with acceptance-based approaches' therapeutic targets (e.g., Acceptance and Commitment Therapy; ACT). Increasing psychological flexibility dimensions such as mindfulness, cognitive defusion, and self-as context is linked to higher relationship satisfaction in the meta-analysis of Daks and Rogge (2020). Also, self-compassion was studied as another critical factor that affects positive romantic relationship outcomes. It predicted higher relationship satisfaction in both men and women in different age groups (Baker & McNulty, 2011; Barutçu-Yıldırım et al., 2021a; Lathren et al., 2021).

2.3. Mindfulness

Once upon a time, a princess hurt her feet by stubbing her toe while walking on the pavements of the kingdom. The king heard this and immediately ordered the entire kingdom to be covered in leather so that his daughter would not have to suffer again. The prime minister at the time suggested a clever solution and used leather to cover the princess' feet instead of the entire kingdom. This led to the invention of shoes. In this way, her feet were protected wherever she went without the unrealistic mission of changing the whole world. This tale is used by Kabat-Zinn (2005), a pioneer in the field, when explaining how mindfulness works (p. 55).

When we stub our toes and feel hurt, when things “go wrong,” we might develop strong emotional reactions and form a negative stream of thoughts, which leads to more suffering. Just like leather shoes, mindfulness can protect our mental health at the place of contact and in the moment of contact. We cannot cover the whole world with leather, but we can protect our mental health with mindfulness by "paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Mindfulness is observing our thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations as it is, whether they are pleasing, unpleasing, or neutral, without reacting to them or overidentifying with them (Bishop et al., 2004), but just accepting them as mental phenomena appearing in mind and resting ourselves in the moment of what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, thought or felt (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). While a mindless state refers to being lost in thoughts or experiences and complying with an *automatic pilot* (Smalley & Winston, 2010), the awareness in a mindful state and the space between our perception and response (Bishop et al., 2004) offers us a safe haven, not in the past or ambiguous future when “things are better” and “under control,” or when we have “improved ourselves,” but *here and now*, in the time we have (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 24).

The concept of mindfulness involves two forms: formal and informal mindfulness. Although researchers and specialists have not yet agreed on the definitions of these two, it is possible to state that formal mindfulness practices involve allocating specific time to practice mindfulness meditations such as sitting meditation, body scan, or simple body movements through yoga, tai chi, etc. (Birtwell et al., 2019). Using an

anchor such as the breath, the attention is brought back to the present moment whenever the mind lingers. On the other hand, informal mindfulness is intertwined with everyday activities such as eating, walking, teaching, or engaging in interpersonal relationships (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Regardless of the characteristics of the internal experiences, relating to any experience and possessing mindful awareness is embodied in the informal mindfulness practices (Birtwell et al., 2019; Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

As it lies in the definitions, the concept of mindfulness involves various constructs such as nonreactivity/calmness (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000a), patience/letting things progress in their natural time (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), trust/believing the power of one's own ability to contact with inner experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1998), compassion/empathy towards self (Reibel et al., 2001), acceptance/being open to current private experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2005), and wisdom/self-knowledge (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000b). Some of these constructs and the concept of mindfulness might evoke different terminologies such as self-monitoring, self-awareness, self-regulation, or flow. However, there are some differences between these concepts and mindfulness. Unlike self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-regulation, mindfulness is not concerned with goal formation and completion. It is not about forming an image of self, and it does not deal with how others see one. Instead, a space is created between one's perception and response by giving only direct attention to what is happening in the body and mind now (Bishop et al., 2004). When it comes to how it differs from flow, a state of joyful and fully focused attention on a task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), mindfulness is not concerned with the activity at hand but with one's meta-cognitive processes about *private experiences* such as thoughts, feelings, or memories (Bishop et al., 2004).

Although mindfulness arose from ancient Buddhist spiritual practices 2600 years ago, its popularity in the world of science is relatively new. In the last two decades, mindfulness has begun to be seen as an alternative treatment to pharmacology, and the underlying reasons for its therapeutic improvement have been widely investigated (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2016). Jon Kabat-Zinn, perceived as the person who introduced mindfulness to the West, built an 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program in 1979, which was implemented in the Stress Reduction Clinic at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Afterward, the program started to be

applied in hospitals worldwide and became very popular during the '90s (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Today, there are more than 1000 implementers of the program worldwide (i.e., Mindfulness Institute Turkey, 2021). Since 2010, *Mindfulness*, a scientific journal, has been dedicated to establishing and prospering the science and practice of mindfulness (Springer, 2021). In 2020, more than a hundred peer-reviewed journal articles were published under the title of mindfulness, which is ten times more than a decade ago (American Mindfulness Research Association [AMRA], 2021). This might indicate a growing awareness of the importance of mindfulness among scholars.

The existing research in the literature involves qualitative, experimental, and longitudinal studies where the effects of formal mindfulness practices and interventions such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program are investigated, and correlational studies where mindfulness is evaluated as a trait and measured using diverse scales (Atkinson, 2013; Fossati et al., 2011; Pickut et al., 2013; Pruitt & McCollum, 2010; Shonin & Van Gordon, 2016; Taren et al., 2013).

Shonin and Van Gordon (2016) concluded that extensive evidence-based literature on how mindfulness improves mental health could be summarized in ten passages. Mindfulness creates structural brain changes such as increases in gray matter concentration in the left hippocampus and left-sided anterior activation, which is linked to improved learning, memory capacity, and positive emotional experiences along with higher efficacy in self-regulation and interoceptive awareness (Davidson et al., 2003; Hölzel et al., 2011a; Lazar et al., 2005). It causes reduced autonomic arousal, which can be explained by a high physical and psychological relaxation response (Hites & Lundervold, 2013; Khanna & Greeson, 2013). The practice of mindfulness helps us to create a safe distance from painful experiences and observe our mind and body by stepping back from these experiences, which in turn, might lead to a decreased tendency toward anger and help with urge control (e.g., in addiction) (Ludwig & Kabat-Zinn, 2008). Mindfulness increases spirituality which can be seen as a useful tool to manage feelings of loneliness in life and boost resilience (Temme & Kopak, 2016; Van Gordon et al., 2017). By increasing situational awareness, self-awareness, and value clarification in individuals, mindfulness, in turn, can help with job performance (Glomb et al., 2011) to clarify meaning in life (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Directly or indirectly, all titles lead to better mental health outcomes in individuals by

targeting biological, psychological, and social aspects (see Shonin & Van Gordon, 2016). Among these social aspects, romantic relationships hold great importance by affecting the well-being in adolescence and emerging adulthood (Gómez-López et al., 2019). Therefore, context-specific relationship mindfulness and the role of mindfulness in the context of romantic relationships in detail are discussed in the upcoming section.

2.3.1. Mindfulness in the Context of Romantic Relationships

Working in a big company, Claire had a stressful day at work. While going home after a long meeting, her body is tense, along with the feelings of anxiety, frustration, and anger piled up inside. Without awareness, she ruminates about the stressful meeting she had earlier. At home, although her partner put a pair of candles on the dinner table next to her favorite dish, her mind still lingers at work, this time worrying about tomorrow's meeting, without the awareness of the beauty at the moment. The delicious taste of the meal, the charming smells from the candle, and her partner's joy fall behind the vicious cycle in her head. Her mindless state about the troubling feelings, tense body, and worrying thoughts cause aggressive impulses that get in the way between them at the dinner table, leading to an unpleasant fight. Now, the troubled feelings and sensations doubled, along with the breakage in her romantic relationship.

When we ask what it means to be mindful in the context of romantic relationships, this little story can be a concrete example of a mindless state affecting one's relationship. In a mindful state, Claire realizes her bodily sensations and feelings. Without judging her private experiences, she becomes aware of her aggressive behavioral tendencies and irritable current state. She knows that these can turn into automatic destructive behaviors toward her partner outside of conscious awareness. With this awareness, she does not ruminate on work stress but can focus on accepting her thoughts and feelings. She guides her attention to the dinner table. Whenever her mind lingers, she becomes aware of her thoughts, but without evaluating the content, she directs her attention to the taste in her mouth, the smells around, and her partner's loving face. She focuses and refocuses her attention. Her impulses do not affect her responses to her partner automatically. More likely, her partner feels her true presence at the dinner table, and they enjoy the night in a more relaxed state.

When we closely examine the path between mindfulness and relationship functioning, various factors contribute to this connection. To begin with, similar to the case of Claire, individuals bring external stressors to the relationships called stress spillovers that inhibit relationship satisfaction, such as work stress, finances, health issues (Neff & Karney, 2004; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009), and in the case of a same-sex couple, discrimination and harassment (see Totenhagen et al., 2012; 2017). To deal with these stressors, first, it is critical to be aware of them by giving mindful attention to the present experiences and our implicit responses. This way, the external stressors are not intertwined with our relationship with the partner; as a matter of fact, they give us a space to be in contact with our partner by sharing, disclosing and getting emotional support from our partner (Karremans et al., 2017; Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Also, since mindfulness works as a preventive factor with its stress and emotion regulatory effects (Goyal et al., 2014; Grossman et al., 2004), external stressors such as the ones originating from work and illness tend to be experienced less in the first place (Bohlmeijer et al., 2010; Ledesma & Kumano, 2009; Lomas et al., 2017; 2019; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2017; Virgili, 2015).

Moreover, mindfulness relates to internal dyadic processes by changing how people respond to relational conflicts originating from diverse issues (e.g., sexual problems). These conflicts have been shown to deflate relationship satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2006). Individuals high in mindfulness have shown fewer negative emotions and better communication during the conflict with their partners (Barnes et al., 2007). Also, they had higher love/commitment, support, and respect for their partner after the conflict (Barnes et al., 2007).

It is possible to express that how we channel relationships depends on both conscious efforts (Shafer et al., 2014) and automatic internal processes formed by genetics and experiences (Adolphs, 2009). Internal processes operate out of conscious awareness and play a significant role in one's social aptitude, regulating mood and processing experience and information related to relationships (Goleman, 2006). Due to the brain's neuroplasticity, meaning the ability to reorganize itself after specific experiences (Pascual-Leone et al., 2005), teaching our brain how to regulate mood, how to process and accurately interpret experience, what to pay attention to, and what to ignore might certainly be advantageous in relationship improvement (Goleman,

2006). Mindfulness, in fact, is shown to be a source of structural and functional changes in the specific areas of the brain which are involved in regulating social, emotional experience, and behavior, such as empathy or emotion regulation (Baltruschat et al., 2021; Davidson & Begley, 2012; Hölzel et al., 2011a, 2011b; Siegel, 2007a). The ability to focus attention and obtain open awareness through the teachings of mindfulness (Hölzel et al., 2011b) might help individuals to be attentive and open toward their partner. Recognizing the favorable actions and qualities of the partner, being attentive to the details regarding each other's emotional states, likes, and dislikes, avoiding rumination, and redirecting attention from distressful thoughts leads to higher relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 2011). For instance, a recent study on 847 unmarried heterosexual couples explored the dyadic impacts of different mindfulness aspects (McGill et al., 2020). Results showed significant outcomes related to aspects of noticing feelings and thoughts without reacting compulsively and acting with awareness. Higher mindfulness in both parties was significantly a higher relationship quality for both individuals themselves and their partners. Also, higher mindfulness in men and women was shown to be significantly linked to the sexual satisfaction of women (McGill et al., 2020).

Mindfulness is used in educational programs and therapies for couples to promote relationship satisfaction. Mindfulness-Based Relationship Enhancement course, adapted from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program by Carson et al. (2004), uses daily mindfulness meditations, yoga poses, and exercises for couples; and significantly increases relationship satisfaction, partner acceptance, autonomy, and lowers personal and relationship stress. Emotionally Focused Therapy (Beckerman & Sarracoe, 2011), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Harris, 2009), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (Fruzzetti & Iverson, 2004), and Pragmatic/Experiential Therapy (Atkinson, 2010) are other examples of implementations of mindfulness which are used with couples to improve relationships.

The recently increased attention toward the role of mindfulness in romantic relationships also brought two meta-analytical studies to date (see McGill et al., 2016; Quinn-Nilas, 2020). Firstly, McGill et al. (2016) statistically assessed ten published and unpublished studies in total and found that the increased mindfulness level is related to higher satisfaction in romantic relationships. Later, Quinn-Nilas (2020)

criticized this study's selection methods and transparency; therefore, he analyzed studies from 5541 participants in total and found similar results. Mindfulness was positively and significantly related to relationship satisfaction regardless of gender, age, and marital status. However, the direction of this relationship was stated as unknown (Quinn-Nilas, 2020). Future studies with diverse designs can help shape the understanding of this direction.

2.3.2. Relationship Mindfulness

Recently, the number of studies examining mindfulness in the romantic relationship context increased, some presenting mixed results (e.g., Gambrel & Piercy, 2015; Karremans et al., 2020). Therefore, Kimmes et al. (2018) addressed the gap in the body of literature and conceptualized a context-specific phenomena: Relationship mindfulness. Though related, it is a separate construct from trait mindfulness and refers to “the tendency to be mindful in the context of romantic relationships” (Kimmes et al., 2018, p. 577). According to the authors, mindfulness may not be sufficient to understand the ability to pay attention to thoughts or feelings related to romantic relationships; since interpersonal mindfulness, especially in the romantic relationship context, might be related to deeper relational problems such as attachment related pain (Kimmes et al., 2018; 2020).

Relationship mindfulness predicted positive and negative relationship outcomes better than mindfulness, and it was also significantly and negatively related to insecure attachments (Kimmes et al., 2018). A recent longitudinal dyadic study showed that higher levels of relationship mindfulness in insecurely attached individuals buffered their partner’s insecure attachments and helped them to decrease their daily negative behaviors in the relationship (Gazder & Stanton, 2020). In another longitudinal study, relationship mindfulness, but not trait mindfulness predicted individuals’ positive relationship quality (Stanton et al., 2021), and it led to higher sexual satisfaction through relationship satisfaction (Fincham, 2022). Similar to the studies of Kimmes et al. (2018; 2020), relationship mindfulness predicted short-term and long-term relationship satisfaction better than trait mindfulness.

2.4. Self-Compassion

“If you want others to be happy – focus on compassion; if you want to be happy yourself – focus on compassion” (Dalai Lama, 1995; 2001, as cited in Gilbert, 2009, p. 199).

Just like mindfulness, self-compassion is a concept at the intersection of ancient Eastern Buddhist philosophy and Western psychology. Almost 50 years ago, psychiatrist Theodore Rubin (1975) created a theory that justifies self-hate as the primary source of psychoneurosis. Stating, “All neurotic manifestations are in fact incarnations of self-hate” (p. 133), he believed salvation was in the compassionate attitude toward the self. However, this might be called an exception because self-compassion was not recognized well (as much as compassion for others) in the Western world, and it was not conceptualized until more recently. Neff (2003a, 2003b) drew attention to the understanding of this Eastern concept by conceptualizing it in psychological functioning, and the interest in self-compassion in the psychology literature has overgrown since. Self-compassion is defined as “being touched by and open to one’s own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one’s suffering and heal oneself with kindness” (Neff, 2003a, p. 87). It involves perceiving one’s own pain, incompetencies, and mistakes as a part of the experience of all humanity. This non-judgmental stance toward self brings forgiveness, and it involves knowing that just like other people, one is worthy of love and compassion (Neff, 2003a, 2003b).

According to Neff (2003a, 2003b), this compassionate attitude towards self involves three different but related components: self-kindness (vs. self-judgment), common humanity (vs. isolation), and mindfulness (vs. over-identification with painful emotions and thoughts). Self-kindness is defined as being kind and understanding toward self rather than being judgmental and mean. Common humanity involves seeing one’s experiences as a part of being human. It is related to perceiving negative experiences as unifying and not isolating from the rest of society. Lastly, the component of mindfulness in self-compassion is defined as holding negative and positive experiences with a balanced awareness and not overidentifying with them.

Self-compassion is seen as a skill that can be improved with training, so numerous therapies and interventions focus on enhancing self-compassion, such as Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT; Gilbert, 2009), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT; Segal et al., 2002), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes et al., 2011) and Mindful Self-Compassion Program (MSC; Neff & Germer, 2013). A systematic review and meta-analysis explored the effectiveness of 22 randomized control trials to find that self-compassion related therapies lead to decreases in depressive and anxiety-related symptoms and increases in self-compassion (Wilson et al., 2019). However, the authors noted that these improvements in psychopathology that were also demonstrated in several other studies (e.g., Armstrong & Rimes 2016; Hoffart et al., 2015) might not be specific to self-compassion, considering that when some studies used active control groups, there were no significant differences in outcomes (Wilson et al., 2019). On the other hand, a more recent study comparing the effectiveness the of Mindful Self-Compassion Program (MSC) with traditional Cognitive Behavior Therapy on chronic pain patients found that MSC intervention was more effective in increasing self-compassion and pain acceptance, as well as decreasing pain interference, catastrophizing and anxiety (Torrijos-Zarcero et al., 2021). Also, Neff and Germer (2013) found that MSC leads to more significant developments in self-compassion, mindfulness, and well-being than the control group.

Also, Zessin et al. (2015) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis comprising 16,416 adult participants. They found moderate and strong correlations between self-compassion and different forms of well-being. Self-compassion was shown to be positively and strongly correlated with psychological well-being. There was a moderate and positive correlation between self-compassion and (a) cognitive well-being, (b) positive affective well-being. Self-compassion was also found to be moderately and negatively correlated with negative affect. They concluded that there is a causal relationship between self-compassion and well-being. These results are in line with the meta-analytic work of MacBeth and Gumley (2012) and a systematic review of Brown et al. (2019), demonstrating that higher levels of self-compassion in individuals are associated with lower levels of mental health symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and stress. Also, self-compassion was significantly and positively correlated with forgiveness by diminishing anger and rumination (Wu et al., 2019). However, a recent longitudinal study by Li et al. (2022) on socioeconomically

disadvantaged university students showed that the overall self-compassion score did not play a protective role in the development of psychological distress for individuals with high perceived discrimination.

Researchers also investigated self-compassion with its relation to physical health. In their large-sampled meta-analysis, Phillips and Hine (2021) found that self-compassion was positively correlated with both physical health (i.e., functional immunity, global health) and health behavior (i.e., sleep, danger avoidance, nutrition, and exercise). Brown et al. (2019) showed that self-compassion is a resilience factor that helps older adults to preserve their well-being despite their health issues. For younger individuals aged 14 to 18, self-compassion was significantly and negatively linked with body dissatisfaction and suicidal ideation (Fan et al., 2022). Moreover, the relationship between body dissatisfaction and suicidal ideation was significantly moderated by self-compassion, meaning that it might reduce the risk of suicidal ideation in adolescents with high body dissatisfaction.

Lastly, self-compassion was assessed as a protective factor for the perceived threat of COVID-19 on mental health in 21 different countries on diverse continents (Matos et al., 2022). Self-compassion was negatively related to psychological distress and higher social safety. Also, it moderated the relationship between the perceived threat of COVID-19 and depression, anxiety, and stress in all countries, meaning that it develops resilience in response to the destructive effects of the pandemic on mental health (see also Kavaklı et al., 2020).

To conclude, although it's a relatively new concept for Western psychology (Neff, 2003a), self-compassion has been explored immensely in the last 20 years in relation to diverse mental and physical health issues. One of these topics is romantic relationships, which is explained in the upcoming section.

2.4.1. Self-Compassion in the Context of Romantic Relationships

The role of self-compassion in intimate relationships is a more recent focus of researchers. Being kind toward oneself and perceiving failures and sufferings as a part of common human experience bring kindness, acceptance, and non-defensive communication to romantic relationships (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). As it lies in the

definition of self-compassion, seeing oneself as worthy as well as others (see Neff, 2003a) helps to hold compromising solutions in relational conflicts (Yarnell & Neff, 2013). It might be because when individuals criticize themselves more, they are also more likely to have negative relational schemas, in turn, behaving in a more hostile manner towards their partners (Zuroff & Duncan, 1999).

The study of Neff and Beretvas (2013) showed that self-compassionate people are described as more affectionate, warm, and considerate by their partners. They also feel more emotionally connected with and accepting of their partners than individuals with lower levels of self-compassion, who are more controlling and dictatorial in relationships (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). This is interpreted as an important factor affecting romantic relationship functioning since Rankin-Esquer et al. (1997) displayed that balancing autonomy and connectedness in relationships predicts better marital adjustment for both males and females. Also, when individuals have higher self-compassion, they are more likely to compromise in relational conflicts not only with mothers, fathers, and friends but also significantly with romantic partners (Yarnell & Neff, 2013). During conflicts, they feel greater authenticity, relational well-being, and less emotional turmoil (Yarnell & Neff, 2013).

As one of the pioneer researchers in interpersonal self-compassion studies, Baker and McNulty (2011) conducted several studies, including an experimental, a longitudinal, and two correlational studies assessing the role of self-compassion in relationships. Correlational studies showed that self-compassionate women are more motivated to correct their interpersonal mistakes in relationships, and they have lower marital problems. Men with higher self-compassion and conscientiousness were also more motivated to correct their interpersonal mistakes. This result was supported in their experimental study as well. Additionally, newlywed couples' level of self-compassion was positively correlated with each other. Their longitudinal study displayed that couples' marital satisfaction declines over time, but the satisfaction of self-compassionate women was more stable. Similar to their correlational study, men with both higher self-compassion and conscientiousness also had more stable marital satisfaction over time. These results prove that although different pathways might exist in romantic relationship outcomes for men and women, self-compassion is a crucial factor affecting emotional benefits and negative and positive relationship outcomes

(Baker & McNulty, 2011; Lathren et al., 2021). Similarly, a recent study with young adults living in Türkiye demonstrated that self-compassion is a significant predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction in this context as well (Barutçu-Yıldırım et al., 2021a).

2.5. Attachment Theory in the Understanding of Mindfulness and Self-Compassion in the Context of Romantic Relationships

In their writing, Shaver et al. (2007; 2017) draw attention to the conceptual convergence of attachment theory and approaches in Buddhist psychology, such as mindfulness and self-compassion. In both Buddhist and Western literature, mindfulness is based on concepts related to love and compassion. Giving an example from Chödrön (2008), mindfulness is related to:

Placing our fearful mind in the cradle of loving-kindness... A mother bird who protects and cares for her young until they are strong enough to fly away. People sometimes ask, “Who am I in this image—the mother or the chick?” The answer is both... We stay with ourselves, and others, when we are screaming for food and have no feathers, and also when we are more grown-up and more appealing by worldly standards... Without loving-kindness for ourselves, it is difficult, if not impossible, to genuinely feel it for others. (p. 9-10) (see Shaver et al., 2007)

Chödrön (2008) opens the door for the relational side of mindfulness and self-compassion with these lines and reminds us of both sides of the attachment relationships- caregiver and receiver. Just as mindfulness includes understanding and acceptance of whatever arises in our mind and life with self-compassion, without repressing or gripping it (Bishop et al., 2004), attachment security represents holding a positive view of oneself and being comfortable with both intimacy and interdependence, unlike insecurely attached individuals who show either compulsive self-reliance, repression of negative thoughts/feelings, or individuals who show anxiety, obsession and dependency on others (Mikulincer et al., 2003). As Chödrön stated (2008), “We fear losing our illusion of security—that’s what makes us so anxious... The mind is always seeking zones of safety... and we spend all our energy... trying to re-create these zones of safety” (p. 23-24). The concept of *zones of safety* mentioned by Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön is linked with the *felt security* -

secure attachment- concept in the attachment theory (Shaver et al., 2007). Developmental influences such as growing up in a caregiving and supportive environment present opportunities for better self-regulatory, reflective, and awareness skills (Fonagy & Target, 1997) accompanied by secure attachments, higher mindfulness, and being compassionate towards oneself in adulthood (Cordon & Finney, 2008).

2.5.1. Attachment Security and Mindfulness

Although the nature of mindfulness is portrayed as an isolated experience, unlike the nature of attachment theory (Shaver et al., 2017), after the initial pinpoints by Ryan et al. (2007) and Shaver et al. (2007), researchers focused on the relationship between attachment and mindfulness. They presented valuable information regarding romantic relationships as well. When explaining mindfulness in a social context, Attachment Theory is proposed to be the most suitable conceptual framework (Shaver et al., 2007).

As indicated previously, mindfulness is connected to being interpersonally responsible and receptive (Siegel, 2007b), and it affects romantic relationship satisfaction in relation to adult attachment. In their mediational analysis, Jones et al. (2011) found that the significant relationship between mindfulness and romantic relationship satisfaction can be explained by individuals' secure attachments. Also, attachment anxiety is related to rumination and intensified negative emotions (Shaver et al., 2007), while attachment avoidance is linked with suppression and rejection of emotions (Mikulincer et al., 2003). These nonadaptive coping techniques are seen less in individuals with higher mindfulness scores (Goodall et al., 2012). Moreover, although insecurely attached individuals experience more distress, they benefit from mindfulness interventions more compared to those securely attached (see Cordon et al., 2009). Overall, what increased mindfulness and attachment security relates to is highly correlated: greater mental and physical health, better relationship conflict resolution, and increased relationship satisfaction (Shaver et al., 2007).

The direction of this relationship between mindfulness and attachment is still debated because correlational studies are dominant in the literature. Ryan et al. (2007) stated that a supportive family environment promotes attachment security as well as mindfulness and enhances "open, receptive attention to relationship partners" (p. 180).

Saavedra et al. (2010) found that anxiously attached individuals are likely to break up with their romantic partners in one year unless they have higher trait mindfulness. It was explained that the hyperactivation strategies in distressed situations -observed in anxiously attached individuals- may be reduced with mindfulness because mindfulness itself can act as a safe haven to effectively cope with relational challenges (Saavedra et al., 2010). Moreover, Shaver et al. (2007) stated that the relationship between mindfulness and attachment security could also be bidirectional, meaning that secure attachment may lead to an increase in mindfulness, and also, individuals higher in mindfulness can facilitate better attention, thus secure attachments in their relationships (see also Ryan et al., 2007). Later on, their statement is supported by Stevenson et al. (2017). Their research was the first systematic synthesis and meta-analysis study investigating the relationship between adult attachment dimensions and mindfulness. Both attachment anxiety and avoidance were found to be significantly and negatively correlated with mindfulness, and the direction of the relationship is predicted to be bidirectional due to a lack of relevant research proving otherwise.

2.5.2. Attachment Security and Self-Compassion

Although related theoretical discussions have been taken place in the literature regarding attachment and compassion for others (see Gillath et al., 2005, Chapter 4) as well as an attachment in relation to self-compassion (see Shaver et al., 2007), the relationship between self-compassion and attachment styles was initially examined by Neff and McGehee (2010) in a correlational study with adolescents and young adults. They found a significant positive relationship between self-compassion and secure attachment as opposed to significant negative correlations regarding insecure attachments. Their study was in a family context, so the results are interpreted that a compassionate, warm family environment that constitutes secure attachment leads to individuals who have a compassionate attitude towards themselves. Later, Raque-Bogdan et al. (2011) also showed that self-compassion had the same significant relationship with adult attachment dimensions concerning romantic relationships. Authors stated that insecurely attached individuals find it harder to be kind toward themselves and act with mindfulness to cope with stress. However, a recent pilot study demonstrated that Attachment-Based Compassion Therapy (ABCT) helped individuals to shift from insecure attachments to secure attachments in their romantic

relationships (Navarro-Gil et al., 2020). Increased self-compassion mediated these shifts.

The dyadic study of Neff and Beretvas (2013) had also similar arguments by showing that self-compassion is significantly and positively related to secure attachment styles, whereas it is significantly and negatively correlated with insecure attachment styles in both men and women in romantic relationships (see also Bolt et al., 2019; Joeng et al., 2017). Their participants included couples ranging between 18 and 44 years of age, so it might be said that the study of Neff and McGehee (2010) is shown to be valid for older age groups as well. Furthermore, in a more recent study, low self-compassion mediated the relationship between attachment anxiety and low relationship quality, but the same effect was not observed for relationship satisfaction (Bolt et al., 2019). Nevertheless, self-compassion was still significantly and positively related to relationship satisfaction. Similarly, low levels of self-compassion mediated the relationship between insecure attachments and (a) depression as well as (b) low quality of life (Brophy et al., 2019).

A recent literature review supported the points presented in this chapter by indicating that self-compassion is positively related to both secure attachment and romantic relationship functioning across numerous studies (Lathren et al., 2021). A recent study with young adults living in Türkiye also demonstrated that insecure attachments in romantic relationships are significant predictors of low self-compassion in this context (Başer Baykal et al., 2019).

2.6. Cognitive Defusion

“I used to think that the brain was the most powerful organ in my body. Then I realized who was telling me this.”

In their book, Luoma et al. (2007, p. 57) open the chapter for cognitive defusion with these lines of Emo Philips, the comedian. Growing as one of the core concepts of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT; Hayes et al., 2011) and relational frame theory (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2001), cognitive defusion is achieved by distancing from thoughts instead of merging with our cognitions and letting them dominate our behaviors (cognitive fusion). It involves looking *at* thoughts instead of looking *from*

thoughts (Luoma et al., p. 65). On the contrary, cognitive fusion refers to the “pouring together of verbal/cognitive processes and direct experience such that the individual cannot discriminate between the two” (Hayes et al., 2011, p. 244). In this case, verbalization dominates behaviors (Hayes et al., 2011), and the language causes psychological damage (Blackledge, 2015).

A widespread intervention from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is cognitive restructuring which involves disputing thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, and schemas using logic and empirical evidence from the individual’s life. Thoughts that are labeled as irrational are evaluated as the core component of mental illnesses, so exercises such as *thought-stopping* or *reframing* target changing the irrational thoughts or to simply put, learning to think more accurately (Blackledge, 2015). On the contrary, through the acceptance-based technique of cognitive defusion, ACT focuses on our relationship with thoughts/feelings and their functionality- whether they are helpful or not- instead of the content of these private experiences (Assaz et al., 2018; Harris, 2009; Luoma et al., 2007). It’s believed that thoughts or feelings are not the causes of behaviors. The maladaptive behaviors result from cognitive fusion. Behaviors can be changed without changing the content of our thoughts by observing them as just thoughts instead of taking them literally and facilitating action in line with one’s values despite these private experiences (Assaz et al., 2018).

Hearing the voice in our mind, “My partner does not love me,” is different from “I am having a thought that my partner does not love me.” To express it clearly, when explaining and exercising cognitive defusion, researchers and practitioners use the following metaphor named *hands as thoughts* to help readers and clients to understand the process better:

Imagine for a moment that your hands are your thoughts... hold your hands together, palms open, as if they’re the pages of an open book. Then... slowly and steadily raise your hands up toward your face. Keep going until they’re covering your eyes. Then take a few seconds to look at the world around you through the gaps in between your fingers and notice how this affects your view of the world... So what would it be like going around all day with your hands covering your eyes in this manner? How much would it limit you? How much would you miss out on?

How would it reduce your ability to respond to the world around you? This is like fusion: we become so caught up in our thoughts that we lose contact with many aspects of our here-and-now experience, and our thoughts have such a huge influence over our behavior that our ability to act effectively is significantly reduced. Now once again, ...cover your eyes with your hands, but this time, lower them from your face very, very slowly. As the distance between your hands and your face increases, notice how much easier it is to connect with the world around you... What you just did is like defusion. How much easier is it to take effective action without your hands covering your eyes? How much more information can you take in? How much more connected are you with the world around you? (Harris, 2009, p. 20)

As Blackledge (2015, Chapter 3) explains in detail, not only acceptance and commitment therapy but also other mindfulness-based interventions use similar defusion techniques in their practices. For example, (a) using *what skills to unglue* from words in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993, p. 121), (b) *tape in the mind* exercise from Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT; Segal et al., 2002, p. 252-255), and (c) likening thoughts to “a radio broadcast or to a tiny creature on your shoulder delivering a running commentary” in Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP; Bowen et al., 2010, p. 131). The literature is expanding with correlational studies, mediational analyses, meta-analyses, and studies using experimental methods to assess the effects of cognitive defusion.

A randomized control trial on undergraduate students assessing the effectiveness of cognitive defusion treatment versus the experiential avoidance group and control group showed that cognitive defusion was significantly more effective in reducing smoking behavior than the other two groups (Hooper et al., 2018). The authors suggested that cognitive defusion techniques can be effectively implemented to brief interventions targeting smoking addiction. Also, Hesser et al. (2009) found that after two sessions of cognitive behavior therapy using cognitive defusion techniques for individuals experiencing tinnitus distress, clients showed the highest level of cognitive defusion, and it predicted a decrease in the negative impact of tinnitus even after six months of follow-up.

Moreover, Arch et al. (2012) showed that cognitive defusion is a crucial source of therapeutic change in both ACT and CBT. Using a longitudinal 10-session treatment for anxiety disorders, they found that cognitive defusion significantly mediated quality of life, secondary depression outcomes, and behavioral avoidance. It also decreased worry in participants. Additionally, in their correlational study, Butryn et al. (2013) found a significant relationship between eating disorders and cognitive defusion. Individuals with higher scores on scales measuring various eating disorders and body dissatisfaction received significantly fewer scores on cognitive defusion.

Since cognitive defusion is relatively a new concept, it is only recently included in the thesis studies. In recent doctoral dissertations from the University of Edinburgh, cognitive defusion was found as a predictor of recovery after a mental health workshop (Davidson, 2018), but it did not predict well-being after retirement in another dissertation (Stuart, 2019). Nevertheless, cognitive defusion was found to be highly correlated with the construct of psychological flexibility, which was the strongest predictor of well-being in retired adults (Stuart, 2019).

Another context that cognitive defusion might offer beneficial points is the context of romantic relationships. However, it has been barely examined in the relationship literature. The upcoming section will discuss cognitive defusion in the context of romantic relationships.

2.6.1. Cognitive Defusion in the Context of Romantic Relationships

The following example shows how cognitive defusion might benefit romantic relationships:

One morning, Mitchell's alarm does not go off, and he wakes up late. He instantly thinks of his partner: "He set the alarm wrong." He doesn't realize that this is just a thought and acts as if it is a fact. He says to his partner: "I'm late for work because you set the alarm wrong!" His partner feels accused, and the argument goes on. In this example, if Mitchell could observe this thought as a thought and defuse (unhook) from it, he could respond more flexibly and in line with his values. He could alternatively say, "Love, do you know why the alarm did not work? I thought you might have forgotten to set it last night." Starting a dialogue with these sentences would help

Mitchell to be kind and open toward his partner, and it could foster an effective interaction. Cognitive defusion could lead to stepping out of chronic patterns and acting more flexibly.

Recently, Daks and Rogge (2020) conducted the first comprehensive meta-analysis study to link different concepts of psychological flexibility to dimensions of family/child functioning and romantic relationships. As one of the concepts of psychological flexibility, cognitive defusion appeared along with different romantic relationship functioning correlates in 23 different samples. Results of the meta-analysis showed that cognitive defusion is significantly linked to individuals' relationship satisfaction, negative conflict behaviors (i.e., shouting, insulting, calling names), and attachment anxiety. On the other hand, it was not significantly linked to perceived partner support and attachment avoidance.

As Daks and Rogge stated (2020), these results suggest that cognitive defusion, along with other psychological flexibility constructs can be seen as essential life skills for interpersonal functioning. Authors suggested that future studies could focus on mediational analyses using different psychological flexibility concepts regarding romantic relationships to understand their dynamics. Compared to other concepts such as lack of present moment awareness (mindfulness), cognitive defusion has barely been examined in the context of romantic relationships (Daks & Rogge, 2020). Also, since most of the studies involve cross-sectional data, the direction of these relationships is vague.

In a recent ongoing project, Baran et al. (2021) analyzed the relationship between relationship schemas, cognitive fusion, and interactions in romantic relationships in 133 heterosexual couples. Results showed that cognitive fusion moderates the relationship between schemas and interpersonal relating. In participants with low levels of cognitive fusion, the relationship between schemas and their behaviors in close relationships was negative and stronger than in individuals with higher levels of cognitive fusion. Authors suggested that this might be explained that when individuals' fusion is higher, they become fused with their schemas and have a strict sense of perceiving their own and partner's behaviors, resulting in inaccurate evaluations of the couple interactions (Baran et al., 2021).

2.7. Summary of Literature Review

Relationship satisfaction holds a prominent part of the romantic relationship research in the body of literature. Until now, countless factors have been examined to understand the factors affecting couples' satisfaction in relationships, but probably the most popular and long-standing framework used is *Attachment Theory*. The theory assumes that the nature of the early relationships formed between a child and the primary attachment figure has long-lasting behavioral effects (Bowlby, 1969/1982; 1973; 1980). Details of these early relationships form individuals' internal working models, and they mostly stay stable through adulthood, affecting one's romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1980).

Attachment in adulthood is mostly evaluated using the differences between secure and insecure attachment constructs. Secure adult attachment originates from consistent and warm interactions with the caregiver(s), while insecure attachment emerges from such situations in which the child hesitates about the availability of the caregiver or feels threatened (Bowlby, 1969). Insecure attachment is also separated into two as anxious attachment and avoidant attachment. While secure adult attachment is associated with higher satisfaction in relationships, insecure attachment dimensions are linked to lower relationship satisfaction (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

When the attachment behavioral system is threatened, anxiously attached individuals show hyperactivated attachment strategies, which are linked to excessive rumination, sensitivity to the signs of acceptance and rejection, exaggeration of negative emotions, and intolerance of ambiguity in relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). On the other hand, avoidantly attached individuals tend to suppress their thoughts, emotions, and withdraw from interaction (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). These coping mechanisms are theoretically relevant to some constructs under Buddhist psychology.

More recently, the body of literature has focused on concepts such as mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion with the increasing popularity of Buddhist psychology. Mindfulness is defined as the skill of paying non-judgmental attention to the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Self-compassion is the ability to approach one's pain and inadequacies with kindness and knowing that it is a shared experience

of the human race (Neff, 2003a). It is indicated that secure attachments lead to higher mindfulness and self-compassion (Shaver et al., 2007; 2017). However, insecure adult attachments are linked to lower levels of mindfulness, self-compassion, and relationship satisfaction (Jones et al., 2011; Lathren et al., 2021; Neff & McGehee, 2010).

Moreover, cognitive defusion is defined as the ability to distance from thoughts instead of merging with them (Hayes et al., 2011). Although the literature on the relational side of cognitive defusion is not as extensive as mindfulness and self-compassion, higher cognitive defusion is linked to positive relationship outcomes in several studies (Daks & Rogge, 2020). On the other hand, lower levels of cognitive defusion are associated with insecure attachments (Daks & Rogge, 2020).

Therefore, considering the relevant research in the body of literature, this study aims to test a structural equation model that trait mindfulness, relationship specific mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion are the mediators in the relationship between insecure adult attachment dimensions and relationship satisfaction.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The chapter intends to demonstrate the methodological steps followed in order to conduct the present study. Design of the study, participants and sampling, data collection instruments, data collection procedure, description of the variables, data analysis, and limitations of the study were presented, respectively.

3.1. Design of the Study

The research design used in this study was quantitative and correlational, which explores the possible relationships between two or more quantitative variables by employing a correlation coefficient (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In this process, the researcher does not control, intervene, or manipulate this relationship (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The present study aimed to test a multiple mediation model via structural equation modelling. Possible mediator roles of mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion were investigated in the association between insecure attachment dimensions and relationship satisfaction.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The target population of the study was unmarried emerging adults who have been in a committed romantic relationship for at least one month in Türkiye, but the accessible population is Middle East Technical University students who met the inclusion criteria for the study, which were being aged between 18 and 29 years old; being unmarried and in a committed romantic relationship for at least one month. The convenient sampling method was used to recruit participants. Convenient sampling is used when the random selection of participants is hard to achieve, so the researcher reaches participants who are conveniently available (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

In total, 578 people completed the questionnaires. However, 57 of them were excluded from the study for several reasons. Twenty individuals were excluded since they did not meet the age range criterion. Twenty-seven of the participants were excluded since they were married. Lastly, ten participants were excluded due to their outlier status. In the end, the study carried out with 521 participants. Demographic information of the participants was presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Demographics of the Participants

		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender	Female	367	70.44		
	Male	141	27.06		
	Non-binary	13	2.50		
Age				22.52	2.45
Education Level	Bachelor	458	87.91		
	Master	58	11.13		
	Ph.D.	5	.96		
Faculty	Engineering	166	31.86		
	Arts and Sc.	116	22.26		
	Education	70	13.43		
	Architecture	54	10.36		
	Eco. and Adm. Sc.	48	9.21		
	Missing	7	1.34		
Graduate School	Natural and Applied Sc.	49	9.40		
	Social Sc.	14	2.69		

Note. Sc. = Sciences, Eco. and Adm. Sc = Economics and Administrative Sciences.

Out of 521 participants, 367 were female, 141 were male, and 13 were non-binary. Their ages ranged from 19 to 29 years old ($M = 22.52$, $SD = 2.45$). Their relationship length ranged from 1 month to 96 months ($M = 20.66$, $SD = 19.32$). Majority of the participants were bachelor students who were representing various faculties (see Table 3.1).

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments used in this study are Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendrick, 1988; Curun, 2001), Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised (ECR-R) (Fraley et al., 2000; Selçuk et al., 2005), Mindful Attention Awareness Scale

(MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Özyeşil et al., 2011), Relationship Mindfulness Measure (RMM) (Kimmes et al., 2018; Taşkesen & Barutçu-Yıldırım, 2021), Self-Compassion Scale - Short Form (SCS-SF) (Raes et al., 2011; Barutçu-Yıldırım et al., 2021b), Drexel Defusion Scale (DDS) (Forman et al., 2012; Aydın & Yerin Güneri, 2021) and demographic information form that was developed by the researcher. Psychometric properties of all the scales were presented.

3.3.1. Demographic Information Form

A demographic information form was developed by the researcher in order to collect data on personal (i.e., age, gender, educational level, and faculty/institute) and relational (i.e., romantic relationship status, length of the relationship) information of the participants (see Appendix B).

3.3.2. Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

The Relationship Assessment Scale was developed by Hendrick (1988) and adapted into Turkish by Curun (2001) in order to measure relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships. The Turkish RAS includes seven items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). A sample item from the scale can be stated as “How well does your partner meet your needs?” Item 4 and item 7 are reverse coded. Greater total scores obtained from the scale indicate higher satisfaction in one’s romantic relationship (see Appendix C).

Both the original RAS and Turkish scale have unidimensional factor structures (Curun, 2001; Hendrick, 1988). For the current study, one-factor structure of RAS was checked with a confirmatory factor analysis on the sample data. Results did not yield good model fit indices, so an error covariance added between the 6th and 7th error terms according to suggestions on modification indices. Unidimensional factor structure of RAS with a good fit to the sample data was confirmed [$\chi^2(13) = 52.36, p = .00, \chi^2/df = 4.03; SRMR = .03, RMSEA = .07; CFI = .98; TLI = .96$]. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .46 and .81.

The original scale has a Cronbach’s alpha of .86 (Hendrick, 1988). Curun (2001) stated that the Turkish RAS has a good internal consistency with the Cronbach's alpha of .86.

For the current study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .88, indicating high internal consistency.

3.3.3. Experiences in Close Relationships - Revised (ECR-R)

The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (see Appendix D) was developed by Fraley et al. (2000) and adapted into Turkish by Selçuk et al. (2005) in order to measure adult attachment dimensions. The scale includes 36 items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The original and the Turkish ECR-R have bidimensional factor structures with the subscales of attachment anxiety (18-item) and attachment avoidance (18-item). Items under the anxiety dimension evaluate individuals' fear of abandonment and rejection along with their inclination to be dependent on the attachment figure, who is the romantic partner in this case. A sample item from the anxiety subscale can be stated as "I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me." On the contrary, the avoidance dimension evaluates individuals' level of discomfort with dependency and intimacy in romantic relationships. A sample item from the avoidance subscale can be stated as "I do not feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners." Fourteen items are reverse coded which are items 4, 8, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 30, 32, 34, and 36. Higher mean scores in each subscale refer to higher attachment anxiety or attachment avoidance

For the current study, two-factor structure of ECR-R was checked with a confirmatory factor analysis on the sample data. Results did not yield good model fit indices, so random sampling item parceling technique was used. Item parceling is a technique used to increase fit indices for the scales with more than five items (Kline, 2016). Six parcels with three items in each parcel were formed for both subscales. Then, an error covariance added between the 7th and 9th error terms in avoidance subscale according to suggestions on modification indices. Bidimensional factor structure of ECR-R with a good fit to the sample data was confirmed [$\chi^2(52) = 248.77, p = .00, \chi^2/df = 4.78, SRMR = .06, RMSEA = .08; CFI = .93; TLI = .91$]. Standardized regression weights of the anxiety subscale were between .55 and .84 while they were between .61 and .85 for the avoidance subscale.

In the original scale, anxiety subscale had Cronbach's alpha value of .91 whereas avoidance subscale had .94 (Fraley et al., 2000). Selçuk et al. (2005) have shown that

the Turkish version of ECR-R had high internal consistency (anxiety, $\alpha = .86$; avoidance, $\alpha = .90$) and high test-retest reliability (anxiety, $\alpha = .82$; avoidance, $\alpha = .81$) for both subscales. For the current study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .88 for the anxiety subscale and .86 for the avoidance subscale, indicating high internal consistency for both.

3.3.4. Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (see Appendix E) was developed by Brown and Ryan (2003) and adapted into Turkish by Özyeşil et al. (2011) in order to measure the tendency to be mindful. Participants are expected to rate their ability to be present and aware of what occurs at the moment. In congruence with the original scale, the Turkish MAAS includes 15 items rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *almost always*, 6 = *almost never*). There are no reverse-coded items on the scale. A sample item from the scale is “It seems I am running on automatic, without much awareness of what I’m doing.”

As the original scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003), the Turkish scale has a unidimensional structure in which higher total scores reflect more mindfulness. For the current study, one-factor structure of MAAS was checked with a confirmatory factor analysis on the sample data. Results did not yield good model fit indices, so random sampling item parceling technique was used to form five parcels with three items in each parcel. Unidimensional factor structure of MAAS with a good fit to the sample data was confirmed [$\chi^2(5) = 6.62$, $p = .25$, $\chi^2/df = 1.32$, SRMR = .01, RMSEA = .02; CFI = .99; TLI = .99]. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .62 and .81.

Brown and Ryan (2003) stated that the original scale has Cronbach’s alpha value of .82 for student sample and .87 for general adult sample. Test-retest reliability value of the original scale was stated as .81 (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Özyeşil et al. (2011) stated the Cronbach’s alpha value of the Turkish scale as .82 and the test-retest reliability value as .81. For the current study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .83, indicating good internal consistency.

3.3.5. Relationship Mindfulness Measure (RMM)

The Relationship Mindfulness Measure (see Appendix F) was developed by Kimmes, Jaurequi, May, Srivastava, and Fincham (2018) and adapted into Turkish by Taşkesen and Barutçu-Yıldırım (2021) in order to measure the tendency to be mindful in the context of romantic relationships. Consistent with the original scale, the Turkish RMM includes five items rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *almost always*, 6 = *almost never*). A sample item from the scale is “I get so focused on what I want my relationship with my partner to be like that I lose touch with what I’m doing right now to get there.” All items are reverse coded so that higher scores reflect higher relationship mindfulness.

Both the original and the Turkish scale has unidimensional factor structures (Kimmes et al., 2018; Taşkesen & Barutçu-Yıldırım, 2021). For the current study, one-factor structure of RMM was checked with a confirmatory factor analysis on the sample data. Results did not yield good model fit indices, so an error covariance added between the 3rd and 4th error terms according to suggestions on modification indices. Unidimensional factor structure of RMM with a good fit to the sample data was confirmed [$\chi^2(4) = 10.38, p = .03, \chi^2/df = 2.59; SRMR = .02, RMSEA = .05; CFI = .98; TLI = .97$]. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .35 and .73.

The original scale has the Cronbach’s alpha value of .86 (Kimmes et al., 2018). Taşkesen and Barutçu-Yıldırım (2021) calculated the Cronbach’s alpha value of the Turkish scale as .78 and the test-retest reliability value as .67. For the current study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .76, indicating good internal consistency.

3.3.6. Self-Compassion Scale - Short Form (SCS-SF)

Short Form of the Self-Compassion Scale (see Appendix G) was developed by Raes et al. (2011) to measure the level of compassion individuals have toward themselves. It was adapted into Turkish by Barutçu-Yıldırım et al. (2021b). Consistent with the original scale (Raes et al., 2011), the Turkish SCS-SF includes 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = almost never, 5 = almost always) (Barutçu-Yıldırım et al., 2021b). A sample item from the scale is “When I’m going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.” Six items are reverse coded which are

items 4, 8, 9, 11, and 12. Greater total scores obtained from the scale indicate higher self-compassion.

The original scale and the Turkish scale have unidimensional factor structures (Barutçu-Yıldırım et al., 2021b, Raes et al., 2011). The unidimensional factor structure was checked with a confirmatory factor analysis on the current sample data. Results did not yield good model fit indices, so random sampling item parceling technique was used to form four parcels with three items in each parcel. Then, an error covariance added between the 1st and 4th error terms according to suggestions on modification indices. One-factor structure of SCS-SF with a good fit to the sample data was confirmed [$\chi^2(1) = 3.88, p = .04, \chi^2/df = 3.88, SRMR = .01, RMSEA = .07; CFI = .99; TLI = .99$]. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .79 and .85.

Researchers stated the Cronbach's alpha value of the Turkish scale as .85 whereas the test-retest reliability value as .85 (Barutçu-Yıldırım et al., 2021b). For the current study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .88, indicating high internal consistency.

3.3.7. Drexel Defusion Scale (DDS)

The Drexel Defusion Scale (see Appendix H) was developed by Forman et al. (2012) in order to measure the ability of achieving psychological distance from negative internal experiences while inholding thoughts, feelings, and physiological sensations. DDS was adapted into Turkish by Aydın and Yerin Güneri (2021). DDS has ten items scored on a 6-point Likert-type scale (0 = not at all, 5 = very much).

A sample item from the scale can be stated as follows:

You are feeling sad and stuck in a difficult situation that has no obvious end in sight. You experience thoughts such as “Things will never get any better.” To what extent would you normally be able to defuse from thoughts of hopelessness? (Forman et al., 2012, p. 64)

There are no reverse items in the scale. Higher total scores obtained from the scale indicate higher cognitive defusion. The original DDS and the Turkish DDS have unidimensional factor structures. For the current study, one-factor structure of DDS was checked with a confirmatory factor analysis on the sample data. One-factor structure of DDS with a good fit to the sample data was confirmed [$\chi^2(35) = 126.62, p = .00, \chi^2/df = 3.62, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .07; CFI = .90; TLI = .88$]. Standardized factor loadings were between .13 and .72. Similar to the study of Aydın and Yerin

Güneri (2021) the first three items had relatively low standardized factor loadings (.14, .13, and .18 respectively). However, the items were retained due to their significant t-values just as Aydın and Yerin Güneri (2021) decided upon.

The original scale has Cronbach's alpha value of .83 (Forman et al., 2012). Aydın and Yerin Güneri (2021) stated the Cronbach's alpha value of the Turkish scale as .80 and the test-retest reliability value as .81. For the current study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .73, indicating good internal consistency.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Before data collection, permission to use the scales was obtained from the authors via e-mail. Later, necessary approvals to conduct the study were attained from the Middle East Technical University Human Subjects Ethics Committee on 15 April 2021 with the protocol number 133-ODTU-2021. Due to small changes, the ethical permission was obtained again on 20 May 2022 with the protocol number 0301-ODTUİAEK-2022 (see Appendix A).

The data were collected via the online survey platform, METU Survey, between May 2021 and January 2022. The survey link included the data collection package, and it was distributed to Middle East Technical University (METU) students via online courses and institution e-mails with the help of the academicians teaching in a variety of departments at METU. In addition, handouts were prepared, including the necessary introduction for the study and a QR code that can be scanned through smartphones to reach the online survey link. These handouts were distributed in several locations at METU, such as the dormitories, the cafeteria, and the library.

After clicking the survey link, participants were encountered with the consent form that included the information regarding confidentiality, anonymity, broad topic of the study, average duration to complete the survey, and the possibility of leaving the link at any time if desired. To be able to count as a valid datum, participants had to approve the consent form. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

3.5. Description of the Variables

3.5.1. Exogenous Variables

Insecure attachment dimensions (attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance) were exogenous variables in the current study.

Attachment anxiety was measured by calculating the mean scores of the 18-item anxiety subscale of Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised.

Attachment avoidance was measured by calculating the mean scores of the 18-item avoidance subscale of Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised.

3.5.2. Mediator Variables

Mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion were mediator variables in the current study.

Mindfulness was measured by calculating the mean scores of the 15-item Mindful Attention Awareness Scale.

Relationship mindfulness was measured by calculating the mean scores of the 5-item Relationship Mindfulness Measure.

Self-compassion was measured by calculating the mean scores of the 12-item Self-Compassion Scale – Short Form.

Cognitive defusion was measured by calculating the mean scores of the 10-item Drexel Defusion Scale.

3.5.3. Endogenous Variables

Relationship satisfaction was the endogenous variable of the current study.

Relationship satisfaction was measured by calculating the mean scores of the 7-item Relationship Assessment Scale.

3.6. Data Analyses

Before the main analysis, a set of preliminary analyses were conducted via the software program, SPSS version 28 (IBM Corp., 2021). Firstly, data were screened by using the frequencies, minimum and maximum scores. Data were cleaned by considering missing values and univariate and multivariate outliers. For each scale, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to test the factor structure, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to check the reliability. Then, assumptions of the structural equation modeling (SEM); normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were checked. Descriptive analyses were performed as well as Pearson correlation analyses between the study variables.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was utilized to test the measurement model. Lastly, as the main analysis, SEM was conducted to test the model which examines the nature of the association between insecure attachment dimensions and romantic relationship satisfaction through mediator roles of mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion by using the software program, AMOS version 26 (Arbuckle, 2021).

3.7. Limitations of the Study

In the interpretation of this study, some limitations should be taken into account. Firstly, the sampling method of this study was convenient sampling. Since it is one of the non-random sampling methods, it might affect the generalizability of the results. Secondly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the data were collected using an online survey platform only. Therefore, participants did not have the opportunity to ask questions regarding the survey questions, and the researcher could not control the environment in which the survey was completed. Also, the survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete due to the high number of items, so the boredom effect might be prevalent, and this might affect internal validity. However, the researcher added a simple attention question to eliminate the unattended participants, and all the participants in the data set answered it correctly.

Moreover, the pandemic might have created a history threat by affecting the participants' romantic relationship dynamics, such as decreasing the relationship

satisfaction or causing many other confounding factors. Additionally, the study was comprised of self-report scales, which might affect the internal validity of the results. Albeit anonymity, participants might have been inclined to choose socially desirable answers. Lastly, since the study was correlational and cross-sectional, the data were collected at one specific point in time, and the cause-and-effect relationship cannot be derived from the results.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this section, the results of the data analyses were provided. Firstly, the results of the preliminary analyses were presented. Missing data, univariate and multivariate outliers were checked. After data cleaning, assumptions of structural equation modelling were checked and presented. Then, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations between the study variables were conducted and presented. Later, primary analyses results were provided. The measurement model, the hypothesized structural model and the trimmed model were presented. Model fit indices were explained. The results of the specific mediation test were presented. Lastly, a summary of the results was included.

4.1. Preliminary Analyses

4.1.1. Missing Data and Outlier Analyses

Data collected through METU survey were transferred to SPSS version 28 (IBM Corp., 2021). All the scale items were forced response, so after data screening, no missing data were observed, with 578 participants in total. However, 57 individuals were excluded for three reasons. Firstly, 20 individuals were excluded since they did not meet the age range criteria. Secondly, 27 participants were excluded since they were married. Thirdly, 10 participants were excluded because they were outliers. Univariate outliers were checked using the standardized Z scores. Using the instructions given by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), cases with z scores exceeding ± 3.29 were detected. Data from 9 participants were excluded as univariate outliers. Later, multivariate outliers were checked by calculating the Mahalanobis distances. Only one case was detected with a critical chi-square value ($p < .001$), so it was regarded as a multivariate outlier and deleted. In total, 521 cases remained for further analysis.

4.1.2. Assumptions of the Structural Equation Modelling

Before the main analysis, the assumptions of the structural equation modelling which are normality, multicollinearity, linearity, and homoscedasticity were checked (Munro, 2005). Firstly, the adequate sample size for confirmatory factor analysis is 200 (Kline, 2016). Since the current study has 521 participants, sample size assumption was met. The normality assumption was ensured by visually examining the normal Q-Q Plots and histograms. Also, the skewness and kurtosis values were observed between ± 2 (see Table 4.1), so the normality assumption was met (Kline, 2016).

Table 4.1

Indices of Normality for Study Variables

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
Attachment Anxiety	0.378	-0.037
Attachment Avoidance	0.706	0.123
Relationship Satisfaction	-1.331	1.505
Mindfulness	-0.401	-0.169
Relationship Mindfulness	-0.570	-0.376
Self-Compassion	-0.060	-0.643
Cognitive Defusion	-0.096	-0.321

The multicollinearity assumption was checked by examining the Tolerance values and Variance Inflation Factor values. Tolerance values were greater than .20 (Menard, 2002), and VIF values were lower than 3 (Field, 2009). Also, as Kline (2016) indicated, correlation coefficients were not greater than .85 (see Table 4.3). Therefore, the multicollinearity assumption was not violated in the current study.

The normal P-P plot of regression standardized residuals was examined for the linearity assumption. As can be observed in Figure 4.1, there is a linear relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable of the study. Therefore, the linearity assumption was met. For the homoscedasticity assumption, the scatterplot of regression standardized predicted value was examined (see Figure 4.2). No explicit

outliers can be observed from the figure. The variance of the residuals is mostly constant, and by a majority, the dots are equally separated around the presumptive line in the scatterplot. Hence, the homoscedasticity assumption was met (Field, 2009).

Figure 4.1

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

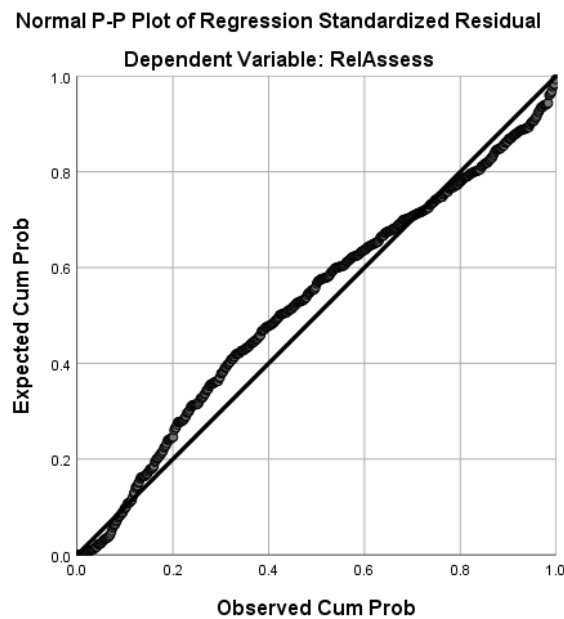
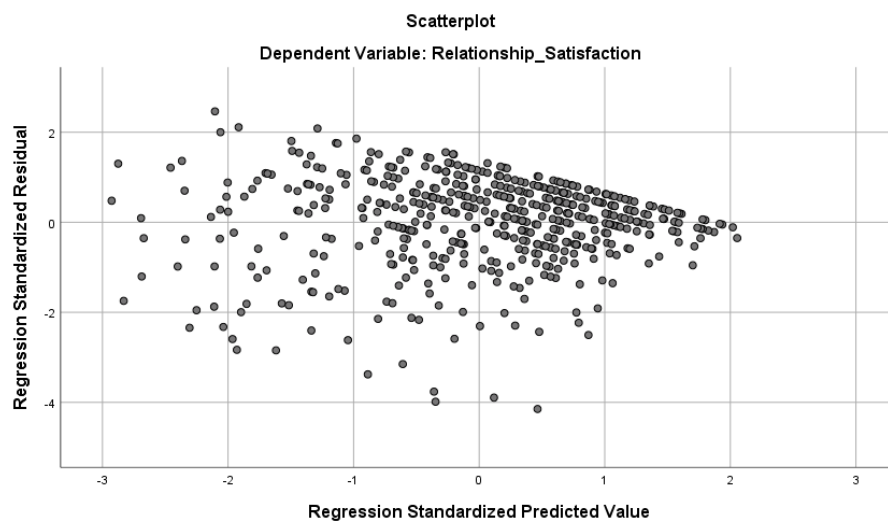


Figure 4.2

Scatterplot of Regression Standardized Predicted Value



4.1.3. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were conducted for the main study variables. Mindfulness ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.80$), relationship mindfulness ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.00$), and parallelly, relationship satisfaction ($M = 6.10$, $SD = 0.82$) of the participants were generally high. On the other hand, participants reported low levels of attachment avoidance ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.79$), and moderate levels of attachment anxiety ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.01$). Self-compassion ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.82$) and cognitive defusion ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.80$) were generally reported on moderate levels as well. Descriptive statistics of the main variables were illustrated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variables	M	SD	Possible	
			Range	Actual Range
Attachment Anxiety	3.43	1.01	1 – 7	1.28 – 6.67
Attachment Avoidance	2.26	0.79	1 – 7	1.00 – 4.83
Relationship Satisfaction	6.10	0.82	1 – 7	3.29 – 7.00
Mindfulness	4.01	0.80	1 – 6	1.53 – 5.73
Relationship Mindfulness	4.59	1.00	1 – 6	1.60 – 6.00
Self-Compassion	2.85	0.82	1 – 5	1.00 – 4.75
Cognitive Defusion	2.49	0.80	0 – 5	0.30 – 4.50
Relationship Length	20.66	19.32	-	1.00 – 96.00

Note. $N = 521$. Values for relationship length were based on months. For other variables, possible range and actual range values were based on total mean scores.

4.1.4. Bivariate Correlations

The Pearson correlation analyses were conducted between the study variables. Firstly, the correlation between main study variables and relationship length showed that relationship length ($M = 20.66$, $SD = 19.32$) was significantly but weakly related to both attachment anxiety ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$) and attachment avoidance ($r = -.15$, $p < .01$). On the other hand, it was positively and significantly correlated with mindfulness ($r = .11$, $p < .01$) and age ($r = .32$, $p < .01$). There was no significant correlation of

relationship length in relation to relationship satisfaction ($r = .06, p > .05$), relationship mindfulness ($r = -.02, p > .05$), self-compassion ($r = .080, p > .05$), and cognitive defusion ($r = .023, p > .05$) (see Table 4.3).

In addition, age ($M = 22.52, SD = 2.45$) was negatively related to attachment anxiety ($r = -.16, p < .01$), but not attachment avoidance ($r = -.028, p > .05$). It was positively and significantly related to mindfulness ($r = .11, p < .01$), relationship mindfulness ($r = .09, p < .05$), and self-compassion ($r = .09, p < .05$). There was no significant correlation of age in relation to relationship satisfaction ($r = .00, p > .05$) and cognitive defusion ($r = .07, p > .05$), see Table 4.3.

In respect to Pearson correlational analyses between the main study variables, relationship satisfaction was significantly and negatively correlated with attachment anxiety ($r = -.37, p < .01$) and attachment avoidance ($r = -.53, p < .01$), but positively and significantly correlated with mindfulness ($r = .17, p < .01$), relationship mindfulness ($r = .33, p < .01$), self-compassion ($r = .21, p < .01$), and cognitive defusion ($r = .13, p < .01$).

Like relationship satisfaction, all other study variables were negatively and significantly associated with insecure attachment styles. Attachment anxiety was negatively linked to mindfulness ($r = -.35, p < .01$), relationship mindfulness ($r = -.36, p < .01$), self-compassion ($r = -.48, p < .01$), and cognitive defusion ($r = -.39, p < .01$); but positively with attachment avoidance ($r = .38, p < .01$). Similarly, attachment avoidance was negatively linked to mindfulness ($r = -.25, p < .01$), relationship mindfulness ($r = -.23, p < .01$), self-compassion ($r = -.28, p < .01$), and cognitive defusion ($r = -.16, p < .01$). Finally, all other remaining study variables (relationship mindfulness, cognitive defusion, mindfulness, self-compassion) were positively correlated with each other. All the correlations were shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3*Bivariate Correlations Between the Study Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Anxiety	-							
2. Avoidance	.382**	-						
3. R. Satis.	-.372**	-.530**	-					
4. Mind.	-.347**	-.254**	.174**	-				
5. R. Mind.	-.360**	-.226**	.334**	.412**	-			
6. S. Com.	-.477**	-.283**	.209**	.374**	.230**	-		
7. Cog. Def.	-.395**	-.160**	.129**	.274**	.203**	.584**	-	
8. Age	-.157**	-.028	.004	.113**	.087*	.092*	.069	-
9. R. Length	-.167**	-.153**	.056	.114**	-.021	.080	.023	.324**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed. Anxiety = Attachment Anxiety, Avoidance = Attachment Avoidance, R. Satis. = Relationship Satisfaction, Mind. = Mindfulness, R. Mind. = Relationship Mindfulness, S. Com. = Self-Compassion, Cog. Def. = Cognitive Defusion, R. Length = Relationship Length.

4.2. Primary Analyses**4.2.1. Testing the Measurement Model**

In the measurement model, the relationship between observed and latent variables were examined by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (Figure 4.3). Latent variables in this study were attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, cognitive defusion, and relationship satisfaction. Observed variables were specific items some of which previously parceled. Confirmatory factor analysis results for the measurement model indicated an acceptable fit of the measurement model [$\chi^2 (35) = 126.62, p = .00, \chi^2 / df = 2.28, SRMR = .06, RMSEA = .05; CFI = .89; TLI = .88$]. All the regression weights were significant, and the factor loadings ranged between .13 and .90 (Table 4.4). There was no multicollinearity problem since the correlation coefficients between latent variables did not exceed .85 (Table 4.5) (Kline, 2016).

Table 4.4*Standardized Factor Loadings of the Measurement Model*

Variable 1		Variable 2	Estimate
RAS7	←-	REL.SAT.	.62**
RAS6	←-	REL.SAT.	.47**
RAS5	←-	REL.SAT.	.81**
RAS4	←-	REL.SAT.	.54**
RAS3	←-	REL.SAT.	.75**
RAS2	←-	REL.SAT.	.90**
RAS1	←-	REL.SAT.	.79**
avd_p6	←-	AVOIDANCE	.65**
avd_p5	←-	AVOIDANCE	.83**
avd_p4	←-	AVOIDANCE	.72**
avd_p3	←-	AVOIDANCE	.60**
avd_p2	←-	AVOIDANCE	.71**
avd_p1	←-	AVOIDANCE	.61**
anx_p1	←-	ANXIETY	.84**
anx_p2	←-	ANXIETY	.78**
anx_p3	←-	ANXIETY	.68**
anx_p4	←-	ANXIETY	.74**
anx_p5	←-	ANXIETY	.75**
anx_p6	←-	ANXIETY	.56**
RMM1	←-	REL.MINDF.	.66**
RMM2	←-	REL.MINDF.	.64**
RMM3	←-	REL.MINDF.	.41**
RMM4	←-	REL.MINDF.	.67**
RMM5	←-	REL.MINDF.	.70**
sc_p4	←-	SELFCOMP.	.88**
sc_p3	←-	SELFCOMP.	.82**
sc_p2	←-	SELFCOMP.	.82**
sc_p1	←-	SELFCOMP.	.83**
DDS10	←-	COG.DEF.	.40**
DDS9	←-	COG.DEF.	.36**
DDS8	←-	COG.DEF.	.64**
DDS7	←-	COG.DEF.	.66**
DDS6	←-	COG.DEF.	.75**
DDS5	←-	COG.DEF.	.68**
DDS4	←-	COG.DEF.	.58**

Table 4.4 (cont'd)

DDS3	←-	COG.DEF.	.16*
DDS2	←-	COG.DEF.	.13*
DDS1	←-	COG.DEF.	.17**
mnd_p5	←-	MINDF.	.64**
mnd_p4	←-	MINDF.	.74**
mnd_p3	←-	MINDF.	.61**
mnd_p2	←-	MINDF.	.81**
mnd_p1	←-	MINDF.	.77**

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

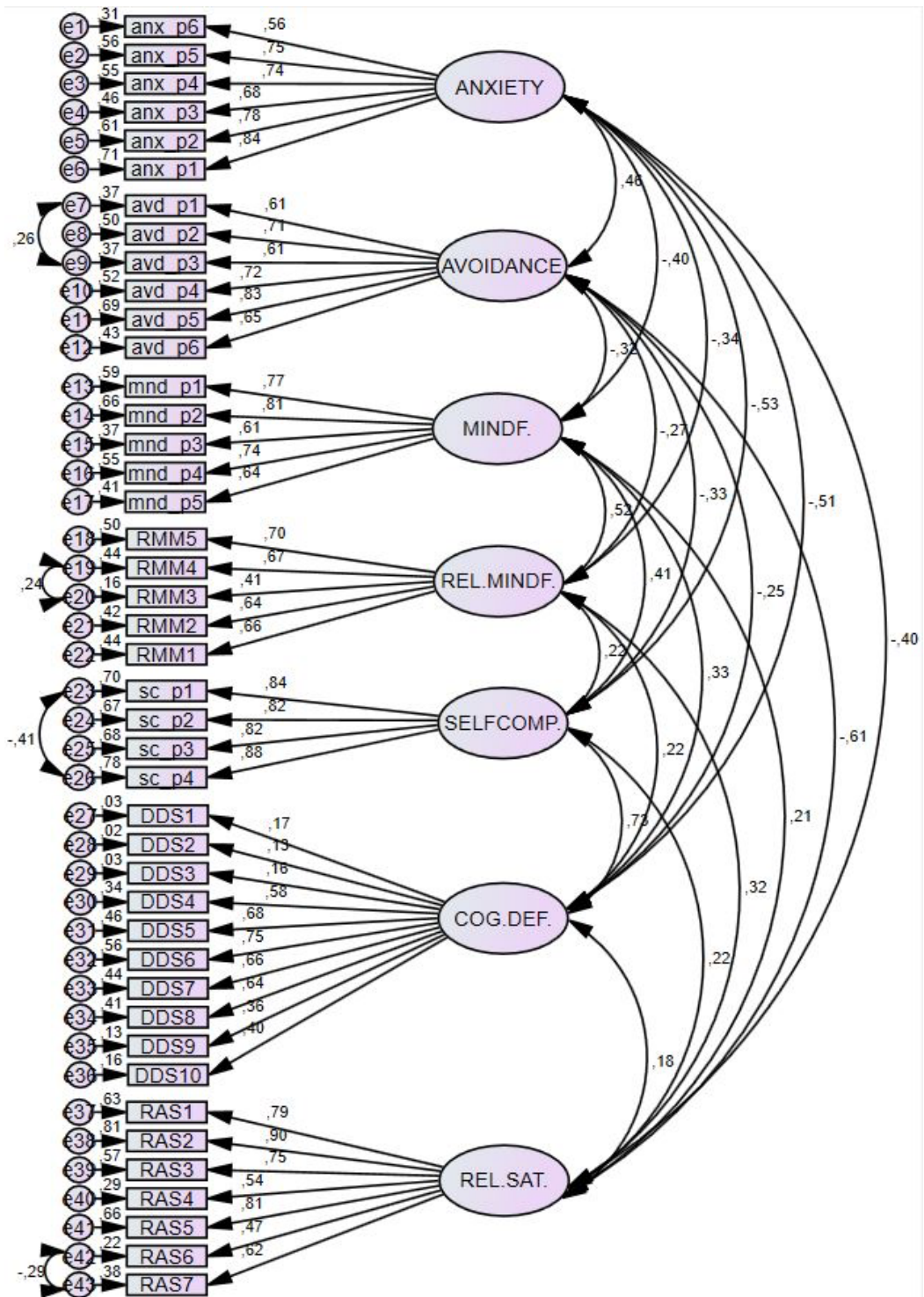
Table 4.5*Bivariate Correlations between the Latent Variables in the Measurement Model*

Latent Variable 1		Latent Variable 2	Estimate
ANXIETY	←	MINDF.	-.36*
ANXIETY	←	SELFCOMP.	-.6*
ANXIETY	←	COG.DEF.	-.38*
REL.SAT.	←	ANXIETY	-.43*
AVOIDANCE	←	MINDF.	-.12*
AVOIDANCE	←	SELFCOMP.	-.16*
AVOIDANCE	←	COG.DEF.	-.08*
REL.SAT.	←	AVOIDANCE	-.28*
SELFCOMP.	←	MINDF.	.24*
COG.DEF.	←	MINDF.	.12*
REL.SAT.	←	MINDF.	.11*
REL.MINDF.	←	MINDF.	.37*
AVOIDANCE	←	REL.MINDF.	-.16*
ANXIETY	←	REL.MINDF.	-.47*
REL.MINDF.	←	SELFCOMP.	.19*
REL.MINDF.	←	COG.DEF.	.13*
REL.SAT.	←	SELFCOMP.	.16*
SELFCOMP.	←	COG.DEF.	.35*
REL.SAT.	←	COG.DEF.	.08*
REL.SAT.	←	REL.MINDF.	.27*
AVOIDANCE	←	ANXIETY	.35*

Note. * $p < .001$

Figure 4.3

The Measurement Model and the Standardized Estimates



4.2.2. Testing the Hypothesized Structural Model

In the present study, in order to test the hypotheses related to the main study variables (attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, cognitive defusion, relationship satisfaction), a structural equation model was examined by using IBM AMOS 26 software (Arbuckle, 2021). The hypothesized structural model is given in Figure 4.4.

In the structural model, previously created parceled items were used. The maximum likelihood estimation method was benefitted. Moreover, in the evaluation of the model fit indices for the proposed model, chi-square (χ^2), the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df), the goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) were used. Critical cut-off values and obtained values were presented in Table 4.6.

The squared multiple correlations (R^2) were investigated for the hypothesized structural model to examine the percentage of variance in relationship satisfaction that can be explained by the relations in the model. Results showed that 41% of the variance in relationship satisfaction was explained by attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion.

Table 4.6

Cutoff Values for the Goodness of Fit Indices and the Model-Fit Statistics for the Hypothesized Model

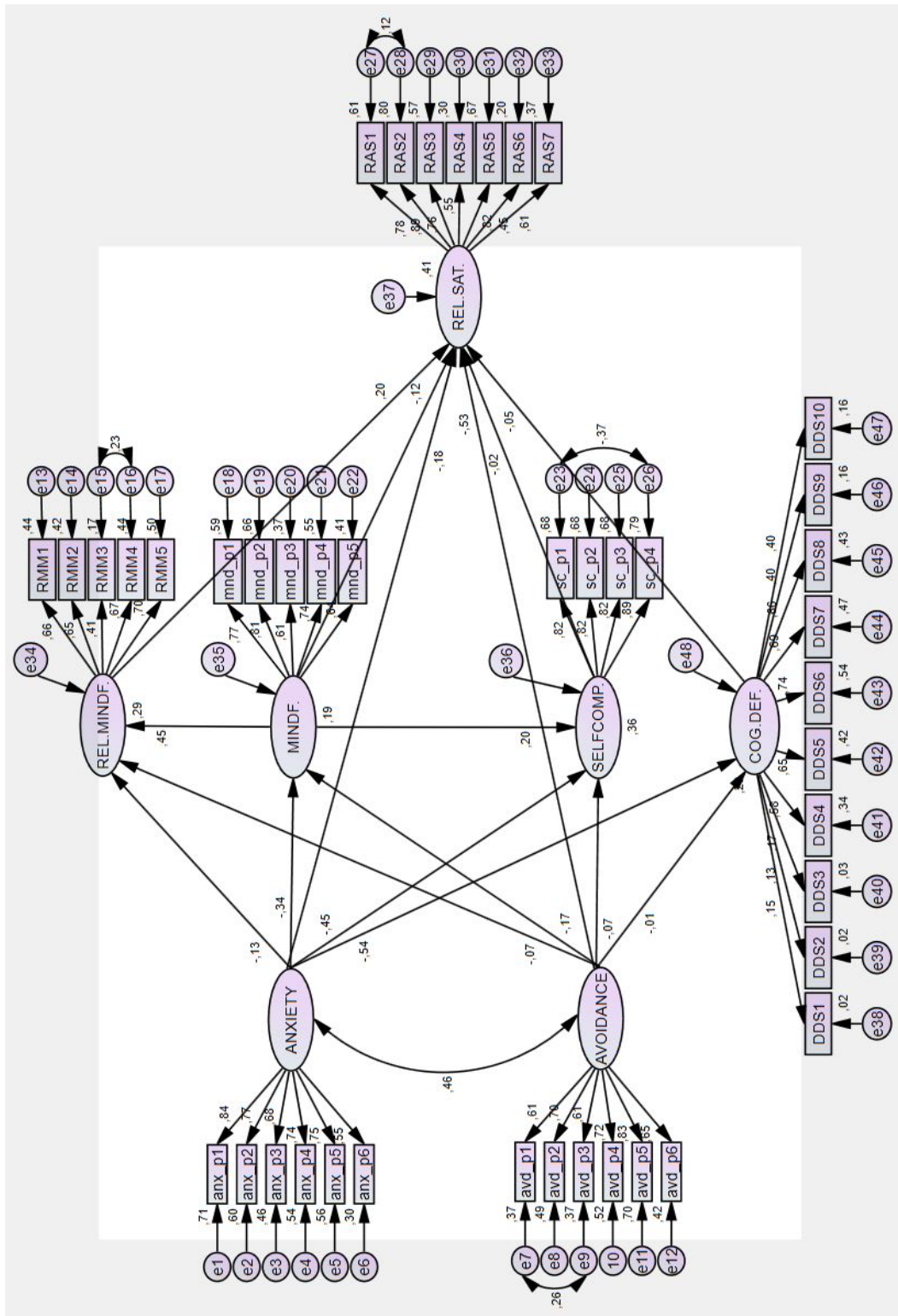
	Goodness of Fit Indices							
	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Cutoff Values*	-	-	< 3.0	> .95	> .90	> .90	< .06	< .08
Proposed Model	2111.51	839	2.52	.84	.87	.86	.54	.08

Note. * Bentler (1992); Hu and Bentler (1999).

When the model fit indices were evaluated in the initial trial, the data did not fit the model well: $\chi^2(839) = 2111.51, p < .05, \chi^2/df = 2.52, GFI = .84, CFI = .87, TLI = .86, RMSEA = .54, SRMR = .79$ (see Table 4.6). However, to improve the model's power and increase its explanatory potential, the parsimony principle was used (Gauch, 1993).

Figure 4.4

The Hypothesized Structural Model and the Standardized Estimates



All the insignificant paths were removed from the model (Wuensch, 2016). These were the paths from attachment avoidance to relationship mindfulness and self-compassion, from mindfulness to relationship satisfaction, and from self-compassion to relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$). Paths from attachment avoidance to cognitive defusion and from cognitive defusion to relationship satisfaction were insignificant ($p > .05$). Since cognitive defusion did not predict relationship satisfaction and was only correlated with attachment anxiety in the whole model, the cognitive defusion variable and its related paths were removed from the model by considering the theoretical framework.

4.2.3. Testing the Trimmed Structural Model

After removing cognitive defusion, its related paths, and other insignificant paths, the remaining final model was retested. When the new model fit indices were evaluated, a good model fit was observed: $\chi^2(481) = 1255.03$, $p = .00$, $\chi^2/df = 2.61$, GFI = .86, CFI = .91, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .056, SRMR = .07 (see Table 4.7). Only GFI did not reach the conservative standards of Hu and Bentler (1999). However, Baumgartner and Homburg (1996), and Doll and Xia (1994) set the threshold value for GFI as .80. Therefore, the trimmed model is accepted to show a good fit.

Table 4.7

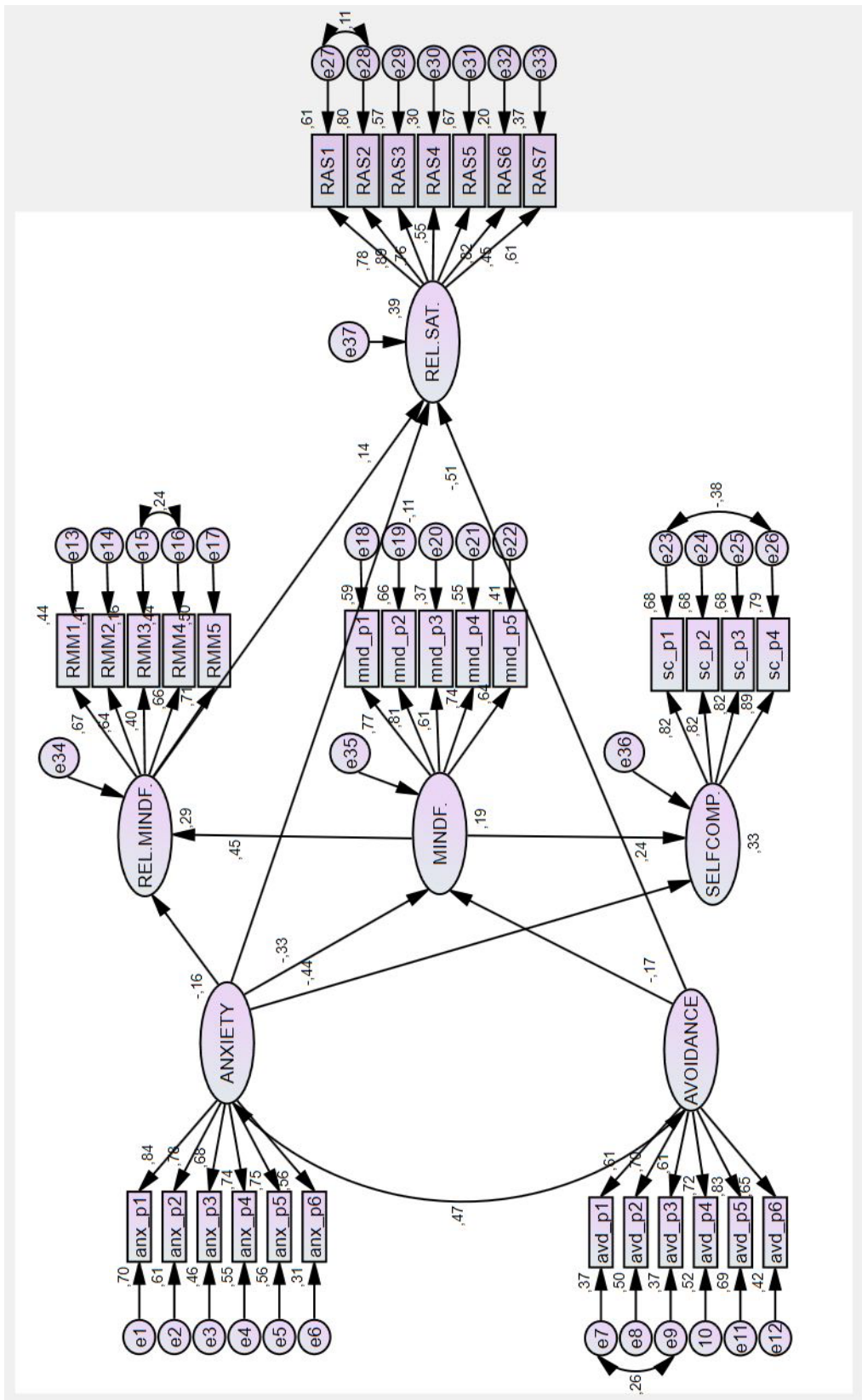
Summary of the Model-Fit Statistics for the Trimmed Model

	Goodness of Fit Indices							
	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Trimmed Model	1255.03	481	2.61	.86	.91	.90	.56	.07

As can be seen from the trimmed model in Figure 4.5, all regression paths from attachment anxiety to other endogenous variables were negatively significant [mindfulness ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .01$), relationship mindfulness ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .01$), self-compassion ($\beta = -.44$, $p < .01$), relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$)]. While attachment avoidance significantly and negatively predicted mindfulness ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .01$) and relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.51$, $p < .01$); it did not significantly predict relationship mindfulness and self-compassion ($p > .05$).

Figure 4.5

The Trimmed Structural Model and the Standardized Estimates



In addition, mindfulness was significantly and positively related to relationship mindfulness ($\beta = .45, p < .01$) and self-compassion ($\beta = .24, p < .01$), but no significant association was observed with relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$). Finally, relationship mindfulness significantly and positively predicted relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .14, p < .01$). However, self-compassion did not predict relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

The squared multiple correlations (R^2) were investigated for the trimmed structural model to examine the percentage of variance in relationship satisfaction that can be explained by the relations in the model. Results showed that 39% of the variance in relationship satisfaction was explained by attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, and self-compassion.

Also, in the trimmed model, the only possible indirect effect between exogenous variables (attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance) and relationship satisfaction can be tested between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction through relationship mindfulness. Therefore, a specific mediation test was only specified for this indirect effect.

4.2.4. Mediation Analysis

To test the specific mediation hypothesis for the mediating role of mindfulness and relationship mindfulness in the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction, user defined specific indirect effect was estimated. Bootstrapping technique with 5000 bootstrapped samples and 95% confidence interval was used. Results revealed that the indirect path from attachment anxiety to relationship satisfaction through relationship mindfulness was statistically significant ($\beta = -.14, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.211, -.082]$).

4.2.5. Hypothesis Testing

In this section, the results of the hypothesis testing are presented considering the structural models. Ten out of sixteen hypotheses regarding direct relationships were supported, and six of them were rejected. One out of eight hypotheses regarding indirect relationship was supported and seven of them were rejected.

1. Hypotheses related to direct relationships:

H1 was accepted. Attachment anxiety was directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.11, p < .05$).

H2 was accepted. Attachment avoidance was directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.51, p < .01$).

H3 was accepted. Attachment anxiety was directly and significantly associated with relationship mindfulness ($\beta = -.16, p < .01$).

H4 was accepted. Attachment anxiety was directly and significantly associated with mindfulness ($\beta = -.33, p < .01$).

H5 was accepted. Attachment anxiety was directly and significantly associated with self-compassion ($\beta = -.44, p < .01$).

H6 was accepted. Attachment anxiety was directly and significantly associated with cognitive defusion ($\beta = -.54, p < .01$).

H7 was rejected. Attachment avoidance was not directly and significantly associated with relationship mindfulness ($p > .05$).

H8 was accepted. Attachment avoidance was directly and significantly associated with mindfulness ($\beta = -.17, p < .01$).

H9 was rejected. Attachment avoidance was not directly and significantly associated with self-compassion ($p > .05$).

H10 was rejected. Attachment avoidance was not directly and significantly associated with cognitive defusion ($p > .05$).

H11 was accepted. Mindfulness was directly and significantly associated with relationship mindfulness ($\beta = .45, p < .01$).

H12 was accepted. Mindfulness was directly and significantly associated with self-compassion ($\beta = .24, p < .01$).

H13 was accepted. Relationship mindfulness was directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .14, p < .01$).

H14 was rejected. Mindfulness was not directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

H15 was rejected. Self-compassion was not directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

H16 was rejected. Cognitive defusion was not directly and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

2. Hypotheses related to indirect relationships:

H17 was accepted. Relationship mindfulness mediated the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$).

H18 was rejected. Relationship mindfulness did not mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

H19 was rejected. Mindfulness did not mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

H20 was rejected. Mindfulness did not mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

H21 was rejected. Self-compassion did not mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

H20 was rejected. Self-compassion did not mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

H21 was rejected. Cognitive defusion did not mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

H22 was rejected. Cognitive defusion did not mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction ($p > .05$).

4.3. Summary of the Results

The current study intended to examine whether mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion are mediators of the relationship between attachment insecurity and romantic relationship satisfaction of emerging adults by testing a multiple mediation model. Before testing the model, bivariate correlations between the study variables were presented. All the main study variables were correlated significantly.

The measurement model was tested and yielded good results. Later, the structural equation modeling technique was used to test the multiple mediation model. The data did not fit the model well, so the model was trimmed by removing the insignificant regression paths and the cognitive defusion variable. A good model fit was observed for the trimmed model.

Attachment anxiety had a negative direct effect on relationship mindfulness, mindfulness, self-compassion, and relationship satisfaction. Attachment avoidance had a negative direct effect on mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. Mindfulness had a positive direct effect on the relationship mindfulness and self-compassion.

The only possible indirect path in the model was between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction through relationship mindfulness. This possible indirect path was examined, and the results were significant. It was revealed that relationship mindfulness mediates the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The chapter includes discussions on the current study results. Respectively, discussions on mindfulness and relationship mindfulness, self-compassion, and cognitive defusion were made. Later, implications of the study and recommendations for further research were presented.

5.1. Discussion on Mindfulness and Relationship Mindfulness

Maybe the most significant indicator of the current study is that trait mindfulness substantially differs from context-specific relationship mindfulness while examining romantic relationship outcomes. While trait mindfulness did not mediate the relationship between insecure attachment dimensions and relationship satisfaction, relationship mindfulness buffered the effect of attachment anxiety on relationship satisfaction. Although mindfulness was addressed in the context of romantic relationships earlier (Kozlowski, 2013, Karremans et al., 2017), the conceptualization of a context-specific phenomenon, relationship mindfulness, is relatively new.

As Kimmes et al. (2018; 2020) discussed, relationship mindfulness is related to but a separate concept from trait mindfulness. As can be seen from the model, it predicts relationship mindfulness significantly, but trait mindfulness may not be adequate to address the ability to pay attention to internal experiences such as thoughts or feelings related to romantic relationships; since mindfulness concerning others, especially romantic partners, might be in relevance to deeper relational problems such as attachment related pain (Kimmes et al., 2018). Therefore, the recent research outcomes support the current findings that divert these two constructs in terms of their mediator status for relationship satisfaction (Kimmes et al., 2018; 2020).

Current findings also showed that although the relationship between both insecure attachment dimensions and relationship mindfulness was significant at a correlational level similar to the study of Kimmes et al. (2018), attachment avoidance directly predicted relationship satisfaction without the mediating role of relationship mindfulness unlike the case for anxious attachment. This distinction between anxious and avoidant attachment can be explained by the unique internal working models they develop to cope with relational challenges.

Anxiously attached individuals are overly sensitive to the signs of acceptance or rejection in relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). They excessively ruminate on distressing events, tend to exaggerate negative emotions, and cannot tolerate ambiguity (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). This is precisely the opposite of highly mindful individuals' behaviors which are avoiding rumination, being open to new information with higher cognitive flexibility (Brown & Ryan, 2003), and observing internal experiences without any negative reaction (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Therefore, it is theoretically relevant and practically hope instilling that although an individual is anxiously attached to the romantic partner due to attachment relationships formed during childhood (Bowlby, 1969/1982; 1973; 1980), attaining the skill of relationship mindfulness can work as a buffer for satisfying romantic relationships.

On the other hand, avoidantly attached individuals tend to withdraw from interaction by keeping a distance from romantic partners, fearing that the partner will become a significant part of their lives (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In relationships, they do not experience emotions as dominant as those anxiously attached, which decreases their both negative and positive internal experiences compared to anxiously attached individuals (Li & Chan, 2012). They are more successful at suppressing their attachment system without showing latent distress (Fraley & Shaver, 1997). Therefore, it is understandable that relationship mindfulness, which requires an open and attentive attitude toward partners (Kimmes et al., 2018), can be a less efficient indirect path to predicting relationship satisfaction for avoidantly attached individuals.

In parallel to this, while a suppressed attachment system might help to direct focus from negative internal relational experiences for avoidant individuals, it also results in less positive feelings associated with romantic relationships (Li & Chan, 2012). The present study supported this argument by demonstrating that avoidant attachment was correlated with lower relationship satisfaction compared to anxious attachment.

On the other hand, the distinction between insecure attachments with trait mindfulness was not prevalent in the current study. Both anxious and avoidant attachment dimensions significantly predicted and correlated with trait mindfulness as in many other studies in the body of literature (Stevenson et al., 2017). However, trait mindfulness did not predict relationship satisfaction. This is a contradictory finding considering the body of literature (e.g., McGill et al., 2016; Quinn-Nilas, 2020). Nevertheless, earlier in this section, it was explained that these internal working models operate differently in relation to *romantic relationships*. The effect of hyperactivating and deactivating attachment strategies may not show distinctions in trait mindfulness due to fact that trait mindfulness is not adequate in predicting the mindfulness-related dynamics in relationships. Therefore, it is understandable that trait mindfulness does not predict relationship satisfaction, while relationship mindfulness, with differing mediator roles for insecure attachments due to the nature of their internal working models, predicts romantic relationship satisfaction.

5.2. Discussion on Self-Compassion

Predicted significantly by trait mindfulness, another variable of this study was self-compassion. To have a compassionate attitude toward whatever arises in mind, one has to be mindful of these mental representations first (Neff, 2003a; Neff & Germer, 2013). In several other studies, self-compassion worked as a mediator, predicted by mindfulness (e.g., Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011; Sedighimornani et al., 2019), and self-compassion was suggested to come after mindfulness (Bergen-Cico et al., 2013). Therefore, the direction of this significant relationship is supported by the body of literature.

Additionally, self-compassion was significantly correlated with all the main study variables. The body of literature supports this result with numerous research by showing that a higher self-compassion level is related to higher trait mindfulness

(Raque-Bogdan et al., 2011) and higher relationship satisfaction (Baker & McNulty, 2011; Barutçu-Yıldırım et al., 2021; Lathren et al., 2021). Also, as shown in the current study results, both insecure attachment dimensions were negatively correlated with self-compassion (Başer Baykal et al., 2019; Bolt et al., 2019; Joeng et al., 2017; Lathren et al., 2021; Neff & Beretvas, 2013).

Furthermore, secure attachment is another construct that is described as holding a positive view of the self (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), which is highly linked to the nature of self-compassion: the acceptance of one's failures in the face of challenges (Neff, 2003a). Securely attached individuals learn to develop compassion towards themselves in a warm family environment which contributes to the development of secure attachments in the first place (Neff & McGehee, 2010). The current study results support this proposition by producing significant correlations with insecure attachment dimensions and a regression path from attachment anxiety to self-compassion. As in line with the literature, if one develops insecure attachment dimensions, they will be less likely to hold a compassionate attitude toward themselves.

In addition, attachment anxiety predicted a decrease in self-compassion, but attachment avoidance did not. This might be explained by Bowlby's concepts of *models of self*. One's model of self can be labeled as either positive or negative according to seeing "the self as worthy of love and support or not" (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991, p. 227). Hazan and Shaver (1987) stated that just like securely attached, avoidantly attached individuals hold positive models of self (see also Berant et al., 2005). They stated that attachment avoidance is linked to fear of commitment and intimacy and a preference to be overly self-dependent by holding a grandiose self (see also Berant et al., 2005). They use repression as a coping mechanism and attribute relational challenges to others (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). For example, Bolt et al. (2019) showed that avoidantly attached individuals were more likely to have lower compassion toward their partner, but the compassion they hold for themselves was high.

In contrast, anxiously attached individuals do not try to repress or disguise feelings of insecurity, so they hold negative models of self (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Deep down,

seeing themselves as not worthy of love can be highly associated with low self-compassion. The study of Bolt et al. (2019) supported this conceptualization by showing that anxiously attached individuals had lower self-compassion levels than those avoidantly attached (see also Neff & McGehee, 2010; Wei et al., 2011). Therefore, the answer to the question of why attachment anxiety predicts low self-compassion but not attachment avoidance can be found in the initial theoretical foundations.

On another note, in the current study, although the positive relationship between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction was significant at the correlational level, higher self-compassion did not predict higher satisfaction in romantic relationships as hypothesized. In recent studies, self-compassion explained the relationship between attachment security and relationship quality (Bolt et al., 2019; Huynh et al., 2022), but the same relationship was not valid for relationship satisfaction (Bolt et al., 2019). Bolt et al. (2019) clarified this contradiction by stating that the measure of relationship satisfaction might be more direct and unvaried compared to the measure of relationship quality, which considers the interactional experiences between couples. Therefore, relationship quality might be more suitable for understanding the self-compassion effect in a relational context. A similar outlook can give meaning to the current study results as well.

5.3. Discussion on Cognitive Defusion

Compared to other variables in this study, cognitive defusion is the least explored construct in the body of literature, especially in the context of romantic relationships. The recent meta-analysis of Daks and Rogge (2020) investigates the effect of cognitive defusion in romantic relationships systematically and concludes that higher cognitive defusion is associated with higher relationship satisfaction and lower attachment anxiety. At the correlational level, these results align with the current study's findings. In the present study, cognitive defusion significantly correlates with relationship satisfaction and both insecure attachment dimensions. These correlations are stronger for attachment anxiety than attachment avoidance, as in the study of Daks and Rogge (2020).

However, when it comes to the mediator role of cognitive defusion in the proposed structural model, cognitive defusion fails to predict relationship satisfaction. Cognitive defusion only correlates with attachment anxiety significantly, but this correlation is also weak. For these reasons, the cognitive defusion variable and its related paths were trimmed from the model, meaning that the mediator role could not be further explored.

This inconsistency might be understood with some details in the previous research. When reporting the results on cognitive defusion, the subscales of multidimensional mindfulness measurements such as the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) have been used (e.g., Greer, 2017, as cited in Daks & Rogge, 2020). Studies using specific measurements for cognitive defusion in a romantic relationship context are very limited and still in progress (e.g., Baran et al., 2021). To the researcher's knowledge, there is no context specific measurement of cognitive defusion for relationships. Therefore, just like in mindfulness, a context specific scale might change the current results drastically by predicting relationship satisfaction of individuals successfully.

Although cognitive defusion was previously stated as a potential contributor to romantic relationships (Blackledge, 2015), it is mostly left unexplored in relationship research. Another probability is that cognitive defusion could have been the victim of the *file drawer problem* mentioned initially by Rosenthal (1979), meaning that the insignificant results achieved until now may have never been reported.

5.4. Implications of the Study

This study showed the importance of mindfulness for positive romantic relationship outcomes. The negative effects of insecure attachments on relationship satisfaction have long been known, but the current study showed that relationship mindfulness could intervene in this relationship, meaning that when individuals increase their mindfulness skills in the context of romantic relationships, they can have satisfying interactions with their partners despite their insecure attachments. Therefore, specialists in psychology, counseling or related areas can focus on mindfulness in couple education programs, and they can consider relationship mindfulness as one of the important therapeutic goals during practices. Moreover, increasing self-awareness through counseling was stated as one of the limited ways to alter internal working

models during adulthood (Bowlby, 1988), so especially when working with attachment related issues and internal working models, individual or couple counseling can combine the strengths of therapeutic relationships and increased mindfulness skills for better positive romantic relationship outcomes.

The question in the introduction section of this study -Is the course of individuals' romantic relationships, maybe the most important life aspect of emerging adults, expected to be as deterministic as attachment theory if they have insecure attachments as adults- can be gladly answered with a "No". This study can increase many insecurely attached university students' awareness about their behaviors in romantic relationships. Emerging adults can remember that relationship mindfulness is a skill that can be enhanced and ultimately can lead to more satisfying romantic relationships *despite* their attachment styles.

5.5. Recommendations for Future Research

A broad-scaled cross-national study shows that relationship satisfaction of non-marital couples is significantly higher if they are planning to marry or live together compared to those who have no intention to do so (Tai et al., 2014). Therefore, researchers can control this variable if they are planning to measure positive relationship outcomes of dating couples in the future.

The current study showed that relationship mindfulness differs from trait mindfulness in romantic relationship research by mediating between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction. Therefore, while examining romantic relationship outcomes, context specific relationship mindfulness measures can be used for more valid results.

In the current study, cognitive defusion was trimmed from the model due to its lack of significant relationships with other variables. This construct should be further explored in the context of romantic relationships, considering its worth mentioning results in therapeutic change and mental health workshops (Arch et al., 2012; Davidson, 2018; Luoma et al., 2007). Also, the development of a context specific cognitive defusion instrument could offer more beneficial results in the romantic relationship research, just like it was the case for context specific relationship mindfulness measure.

The current study results give hints about the diversity of factors that effect relationship satisfaction for individuals with attachment anxiety and avoidance. No indirect effect was observed in the relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction, so the mediators of this relationship are still unknown. Future research can investigate the factors that explain this relationship, so that the skills that avoidantly attached individuals should improve to increase their relationship satisfaction can be understood.

Moreover, future studies could implement different methodologies. Longitudinal, experimental, or dyadic studies can offer more comprehensive results. They could help understand the cause-and-effect relationship regarding adult attachments, psychological flexibility skills and relationship satisfaction.

Lastly, although this study showed that 39% of the variance in relationship satisfaction was explained by insecure attachments, mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, and self-compassion, the remaining 61% of the variance is still unknown. Some examples to important factors to focus on the future can be sexual activity and desire, couple interaction and communication, or emotional intelligence of individuals (Bühler et al., 2021).

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APPENDICES

A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
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20 MAYIS 2022

Konu : Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Funda Barutçu YILDIRIM

Danışmanlığınızı yürüttüğünüz Nureda TAŞKESEN'in "Güvensiz Bağlanma ve İlişki Doyumu: Bilinçli farkındalık, Öz- Şefkat ve Bilişsel Ayrışma'nın Azaltıcı Etkisi Üzerine Bir Yol Analizi" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **0301-ODTÜİAEK-2022** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.



Prof. Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY
İAEK Başkan

B. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

Demografik Bilgi Formu

1. Doğum yılınız: ...
2. Cinsiyetiniz: Kadın Erkek Non-binary
3. Şu anda devam ettiğiniz eğitim programı:
 Lisans Yüksek Lisans Doktora
4. Lisans öğrencisi iseniz fakülteniz:
 Eğitim Fen-Edebiyat İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler
 Mimarlık Mühendislik Diğer ...
5. Lisansüstü öğrencisi iseniz bağlı olduğunuz enstitünüz:
 Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü
 Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü Enformatik Enstitüsü
 Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü Diğer...
6. Şu anda devam eden duygusal/romantik bir ilişkiniz var mı?
 Evet Hayır
7. Evet ise ilişkinizin ne kadar süredir devam ettiğini ay olarak belirtiniz: ...
8. Şu anda devam eden ilişkiniz için hangisi uygundur?
 Sevgili Sözlü / Nişanlı Evli

C. SAMPLE ITEMS OF RELATIONSHIP ASSESSMENT SCALE

Lütfen her bir ifadenin size uygunluğunu 7 dereceli ölçek üzerinde değerlendirip ifadenin yanındaki boşluğa uygun sayıyı yazınız.

1) Sevgiliniz ihtiyaçlarınızı ne kadar iyi karşılıyor?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(Hiç karşılamıyor)

(Çok iyi karşılıyor)

2) Genel olarak ilişkinizden ne kadar memnunsunuz?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(Hiç memnun değilim)

(Çok memnunum)

3) Diğerleri ile karşılaştırıldığında ilişkiniz ne kadar iyi?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(Çok daha kötü)

(Çok daha iyi)

**D. SAMPLE ITEMS OF EXPERIENCES IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS–
REVISED**

(YIYE-II)

Aşağıdaki maddeler romantik ilişkilerinizde hissettiğiniz duygularla ilgilidir. Bu araştırmada sizin ilişkinizde yalnızca şu anda değil, genel olarak neler olduğuyla ya da neler yaşadığınızla ilgilenmekteyiz. Maddelerde sözü geçen "birlikte olduğum kişi" ifadesi ile romantik ilişkide bulunduğunuz kişi kastedilmektedir. Eğer halihazırda bir romantik ilişki içerisinde değilseniz, aşağıdaki maddeleri bir ilişki içinde olduğunuzu varsayarak cevaplandırınız. Her bir maddenin ilişkilerinizdeki duygu ve düşüncelerinizi ne oranda yansıttığını karşılardaki 7 aralıklı ölçek üzerinde, ilgili rakam üzerine çarpı (X) koyarak gösteriniz.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Hiç Kararsızım/ Tamamen
katılmıyorum fikrim yok katılıyorum

1. Birlikte olduğum kişinin sevgisini kaybetmekten korkarım.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Gerçekte ne hissettiğimi birlikte olduğum kişiye göstermemeyi tercih ederim.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Sıklıkla, birlikte olduğum kişinin artık benimle olmak istemeyeceği korkusuna kapılırım.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Özel duygu ve düşüncelerimi birlikte olduğum kişiyle paylaşmak konusunda kendimi rahat hissederim.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Sıklıkla, birlikte olduğum kişinin beni gerçekten sevmediği kaygısına kapılırım.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

E. SAMPLE ITEMS OF MINDFUL ATTENTION AWARENESS SCALE

BİFÖ

Açıklama: Aşağıda sizin günlük deneyimlerinize ilgili bir dizi durum verilmiştir. Lütfen her bir maddenin sağında yer alan 1 ile 6 arasındaki ölçeği kullanarak her bir deneyimi ne kadar sık veya nadiren yaşadığınızı belirtiniz. Lütfen deneyimizin **ne olması gerektiğini değil, sizin deneyiminizi gerçekten neyin etkilediğini** göz önünde bulundurarak cevaplayınız. Lütfen her bir maddeyi diğerlerinden ayrı tutunuz.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Hemen hemen her zaman	Çoğu zaman	Bazen	Nadiren	Oldukça Seyrek	Hemen hemen hiçbir zaman
1. Belli bir süre farkında olmadan bazı duyguları yaşayabilirim.						1 2 3 4 5 6
2. Eşyaları özensizlik, dikkat etmeme veya başka bir şeyleri düşündüğüm için kırarım veya dökerim.						1 2 3 4 5 6
3. Şu anda olana odaklanmakta zorlanırım.						1 2 3 4 5 6
4. Gideceğim yere, yolda olup bitenlere dikkat etmeksizin hızlıca yürüyerek gitmeyi tercih ederim.						1 2 3 4 5 6
5. Fiziksel gerginlik ya da rahatsızlık içeren duyguları, gerçekten dikkatimi çekene kadar fark etmeme eğilimim vardır.						1 2 3 4 5 6

F. SAMPLE ITEMS OF RELATIONSHIP MINDFULNESS MEASURE

Lütfen aşağıdaki ifadeleri okuduktan sonra kendinizi değerlendiriniz ve sizin için en uygun seçeneği işaretleyiniz.

1) Partnerimle birlikteyken, ne yaptığımın çok farkında olmadan otomatikçe bağlanmışım gibi geliyor.

1 2 3 4 5 6

Hemen hemen
hiçbir zaman

Hemen hemen
her zaman

...

3) Partnerimle olan ilişkimin istediğim gibi olmasına o kadar çok odaklanıyorum ki isteğime ulaşmak için şu an ne yaptığımın farkına varamıyorum.

1 2 3 4 5 6

Hemen hemen
hiçbir zaman

Hemen hemen
her zaman

G. SAMPLE ITEMS OF SELF-COMPASSION SCALE–SHORT FORM

Lütfen cevaplamadan önce her ifadeyi dikkatlice okuyunuz. Belirtilen davranışları ne sıklıkla yaptığınızı aşağıda verilen derecelendirme ölçeğine göre işaretleyiniz.

1) Benim için önemli olan bir şeyde başarısız olduğumda, yetersizlik hissiyle tükenirim.

1 2 3 4 5

Neredeyse
hiçbir zaman

Neredeyse
her zaman

2) Kişiliğimin sevmediğim yönlerine karşı anlayışlı ve sabırlı olmaya çalışırım.

1 2 3 4 5

Neredeyse
hiçbir zaman

Neredeyse
her zaman

3) Acı veren bir şey olduğunda, duruma dengeli bir açıdan bakmaya çalışırım.

1 2 3 4 5

Neredeyse
hiçbir zaman

Neredeyse
her zaman

H. SAMPLE ITEMS OF DREXEL DEFUSION SCALE

“Ayrışma” kelimesi, olaylara ya da durumlara, düşünceler ve duygulardan uzaklaşarak bakabilmeyi ifade eder. Bu “ayrışma” tanımını dikkate alarak, lütfen aşağıda verilen her bir senaryoda genellikle ne ölçüde “ayrışma” durumu yaşadığınızı ilgili kutucuğu işaretleyerek belirtiniz. Soruları cevaplamaya başlamadan önce bütün örnekleri okumak isteyebilirsiniz. (Önemli Bilgi: Sizden belli duygu ve düşünceleri ne ölçüde düşünüp hissettiğiniz değil, eğer yapabiliyorsanız ne ölçüde ayrışabildiğinizi belirtmeniz istenmektedir.)

1) **Öfke duygusu.** Uzun bir kuyruktayken birisi önünüze geçtiğinde sinirlenirsiniz. Genellikle bu öfke duygusundan ne ölçüde ayrışabilirsiniz (uzaklaşabilirsiniz)?

0 1 2 3 4 5

Hiç

Çok fazla

...

6) **Umutsuzluk düşünceleri.** Kendinizi üzgün hissediyorsunuz ve görünürde sonu belli olmayan zor bir durumda sıkışıp kalmışsınız. “Bir şeyler asla daha iyi olmayacak.” gibi düşünceleriniz var. Genellikle bu umutsuzluk düşüncelerinden ne ölçüde ayrışabilirsiniz (uzaklaşabilirsiniz)?

0 1 2 3 4 5

Hiç

Çok fazla

I. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKE ÖZET

GÜVENSİZ BAĞLANMA VE İLİŞKİ DOYUMU: BİLİNÇLİ FARKINDALIK, ÖZ-ŞEFKAT VE BİLİŞSEL AYRIŞMANIN AZALTICI ETKİSİ

1. GİRİŞ

Günümüz gençleri önceki nesillere kıyasla, evlilik, doğum veya sabit bir iş sahibi olma gibi yaşam olaylarını ertelemektedir. Bunun yerine, iş yaşamında, romantik ilişkilerinde ve dünya görüşlerinde çok sayıda olasılığı değerlendirirler. Kendilerini ergenlik ve yetişkinlik arasında hisseden bireyler, bu gelişim aşamasında kimliklerini keşfederler ve sıklıkla “Hayatımı nasıl bir insanla geçirmeliyim?” gibi romantik ilişkilerle yakından ilişkili sorulara kafa yorarlar (Fincham ve Cui, 2010).

Çok sayıda güncel araştırma, beliren yetişkinlik döneminde olan bireylerin yaşamlarında romantik ilişkilerin öne çıktığını göstermiştir. Arnett'in (2000) ilk önermelerinden sonra, Meier ve Allen (2008), yetişkinliğe geçişin romantik ilişkileri incelemek için yararlı bir çerçeve olabileceği fikrini desteklemişlerdir. Daha sonra, Fincham ve Cui (2010) beliren yetişkinlik döneminde romantik ilişkilerin araştırılmasının sadece psikolojik iyi oluş için değil (ör. Davila, 2010; Manning vd., 2010), aynı zamanda evlilik işleyişi veya istismarcı bir ilişkiyi sonlandırmayı öğrenme gibi uzun vadede fayda sağlayabilecek çıkarımlara sebep olabileceğini belirtmişlerdir (Lewandowski ve Bizzoco, 2007).

Romantik ilişkilerin önemi, bu konuyu farklı bakış açılarından incelemek için birçok çerçeve oluşturmuştur, ancak “insanlar arasındaki kalıcı psikolojik bağa” (Bowlby, 1969, s. 194) dayanan bağlanma kuramı muhtemelen bireysel farklılıkları ve romantik ilişkilerdeki işleyişi açıklayan en popüler ve uzun soluklu kuramdır. Bu kurama göre, çocuklar birincil bakım verenleri ile erken yaşlardan itibaren bağlanma ilişkileri kurarlar. Bilişsel ve duygusal zihinsel temsilleri içeren içsel çalışma modellerinin

(Bretherton, 1985), bebek ve bakıcı arasındaki etkileşimler nedeniyle çocuklukta oluştuğunu varsayar (Bowlby, 1969). Bakıcı ilgili, sıcak ve duyarlı olduğunda, çocuklar diğerlerine güvenebileceğini öğrenir ve güvenli içsel çalışma modelleri geliştirir. Bununla birlikte, soğuk veya tehdit edici bir etkileşim durumunda, diğer insanların bir koruma ve konfor kaynağı olmadığını öğrenirler ve psikolojik sıkıntı ile başa çıkmak için ikincil bağlanma stratejileri ve güvensiz bağlanma stilleri geliştirirler (Bowlby, 1969). Bu bağlanma stilleri yetişkinlik döneminde ilişkilerimizin gidişatını şekillendirirler (Bowlby, 1980; Hazan ve Shaver, 1987).

Yetişkinlerdeki bağlanma ilişkileri üzerine mevcut araştırmalar, romantik ilişkilerde hiperaktif (hyperactive) stratejilerle bağlantılı olan kaygılı bağlanmanın, yakınlık arzusu, romantik partnerlere bağımlılık, cinsel çekim, terk edilme korkusu, kıskançlık, duygusal dalgalanmalar, kabul görme veya reddedilme belirtilerine karşı aşırı duyarlılık ile ilişkili olduğunu ileri sürmektedir (Berant vd., 2005; Hazan ve Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer ve Shaver, 2003). Öte yandan, romantik ilişkilerde devre dışı bırakma (deactivating) stratejileriyle bağlantılı olan kaçınan bağlanma, yakınlık ve bağlılık korkusu, başkalarına bağımlılıktan kaçınma, partnerin hatalarını kabul etmede zorluk ve gösterişli bir benlik fikrine sahip olma ile ilişkilidir (Berant vd., 2005; Hazan ve Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer ve Shaver, 2003). Çok sayıda çalışma, güvensiz bağlanma boyutları ile düşük romantik ilişki doyumu arasında bağlantı kurar (Candel ve Turliuc, 2019; Hadden vd., 2014; Li ve Chan, 2012; Mikulincer ve Shaver, 2003).

Daha yakın zamanlarda yürütülen araştırmalar, üçüncü dalga davranışsal bir yaklaşım olan Kabul ve Kararlılık Terapisi ile ortaya çıkan psikolojik esneklik gibi daha modern kavramlarla bağlantılı olarak bağlanma teorisini araştırmaya başlamıştır (Salande ve Hawkins, 2017). Psikolojik esnekliğin temel kavramlarından biri olan bilinçli farkındalık, düşüncelerimizi, duygularımızı veya bedensel duyularımızı, olumlu, olumsuz veya nötr olarak değerlendirmeden, onlara tepki vermeden veya onlarla aşırı özdeşleşmeden olduğu gibi gözlemlememizi sağlayarak psikolojik iyi oluşa katkıda bulunur (Bishop vd., 2004). Yaş, cinsiyet veya medeni durumdan bağımsız olarak ilişkideki iki taraf için de daha yüksek seviyede ilişki doyumuna sebep olur (McGill vd., 2020; Quinn-Nilas, 2020).

Son zamanlarda, psikoloji literatüründe bilinçli farkındalıkla ilişkili ancak ondan ayrı bir kavram daha tartışılmaktadır: İlişkide bilinçli farkındalık. Bu kavram, güvensiz bağlanma gibi daha derin ilişki sorunlarını hedef almada daha başarılı olduğu için, romantik ilişki bağlamına özgü bir bilinçli farkındalık kavramının ilişki sonuçlarını genel bilinçli farkındalıktan daha iyi tahmin ettiği gözlemlenmiştir (Kimmes vd., 2018; ayrıca bkz. Stanton vd., 2021). Çalışmalar, güvensiz bağlanmaların ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığı anlamlı ve olumsuz bir şekilde yordadığını ortaya koymuştur (Kimmes vd., 2018).

Öz-şefkat de kuramsal olarak bilinçli farkındalıkla ilişkilidir ancak ondan farklıdır (Bluth ve Blanton, 2014). Bilinçli farkındalık, içsel deneyimlerle ilgili tepkisel olmayan, kabullenici bir farkındalıkla ilgiliyken (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), öz-şefkat, güçlükler karşısında kişinin kendisine verdiği tepkilerle ilgilidir (Bluth ve Blanton, 2014). Öz-şefkatin bilinçli farkındalıktan sonra geldiği öne sürülmüştür (Bergen-Cico vd., 2013), çünkü zihinde ortaya çıkan her şeye karşı şefkatli bir tutuma sahip olmak için, bireylerin önce bu zihinsel temsillerin farkında olması gerekir (Neff, 2003a; Neff ve Germer, 2013).

Bilinçli farkındalığın öz-şefkati arttırdığı bilinmektedir (Neff ve Beretvas, 2013; Neff ve Tirch, 2013) ve araştırmalar öz-şefkatin kişinin ilişki doyumunu olumlu yönde etkilediğini göstermektedir (Baker ve McNulty, 2011; Barutçu-Yıldırım vd., 2021; Lathren vd., 2021). Öz-şefkatin önemli göstergelerinden birinin güvenli bağlanma olduğu bulunmuştur (Neff ve Beretvas, 2013; Neff ve McGehee, 2010; Raque-Bogdan vd., 2011). Güvensiz bağlanan bireyler kendilerine karşı şefkatli olmayı ve bilinçli farkındalıkla hareket etmeyi daha zor bulmuşlardır (Raque-Bogdan ve ark., 2011).

Bilişsel ayrışma ise, düşüncelerle bütünleşmek yerine onlardan uzaklaşmayı ve davranışlara egemen olmalarına izin vermemeyi temsil eder (Hayes vd., 2011). İçsel deneyimlere yönelik, onları bastırmamayı veya onlarla aşırı özdeşleşmemeyi içeren bu esnek tutumlar, güvenliği bağlanmanın özellikleriyle ilişkilendirilebilir (bkz. Bishop vd., 2004; Ryan vd., 2007; Shaver vd., 2007; 2017) Daks ve Rogge (2020) bilişsel ayrışmanın bağlanma kaygısı ile istatistiksel olarak anlamlı ve olumsuz bir şekilde ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir.

Yüksek bilişsel ayrışma seviyesi aynı zamanda kişilerarası iletişim becerileri, algılanan partner desteği, ilişki memnuniyeti (Daks & Rogge, 2020) ve çift etkileşimlerinde yanlış anlaşılmanın daha nadir olarak tecrübe edilmesi ile ilişkilendirilmiştir (Baran vd., 2021). Öte yandan, daha düşük seviyedeki bilişsel ayrışma seviyeleri, bağırma, hakaret etme, alay etme gibi olumsuz çatışma davranışlarıyla bağlantılı çıkmıştır (Daks ve Rogge, 2020).

Sonuç olarak, bilinçli farkındalık, ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık, öz-şefkat ve bilişsel ayrışma kavramları, güvensiz bağlanmaların artırdığı ilişki zorluklarıyla başa çıkarken kişilere güvenli bir alan sunarak ilişki problemlerinde azaltıcı bir etkiye sebep olabilir (Saavedra vd., 2010). Bireylerin güvensiz bağlanma stillerine rağmen bu becerileri artırarak tatmin edici romantik ilişkilere sahip olabileceklerini gösterebilir ve bağlanma kuramının deterministik yapısını yumuşatabilir.

1.1. Çalışmanın Amacı

Bu çalışmanın amacı, güvensiz bağlanma boyutları (kaygılı bağlanma ve kaçınan bağlanma) ile romantik ilişki doyumu arasındaki ilişkide; bilinçli farkındalık, romantik ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık, öz-şefkat ve bilişsel ayrışmanın aracılık rollerini araştırmaktır. Bu amaca hizmet eden aşağıdaki sorulara yanıt aranmıştır:

1. Güvensiz bağlanma boyutları romantik ilişki doyumunu ne ölçüde doğrudan yordamaktadır?
2. Güvensiz bağlanma boyutları ile romantik ilişki doyumu arasındaki ilişkide; bilinçli farkındalık, romantik ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık, öz-şefkat ve bilişsel ayrışma, aracı değişken rolüne sahip olarak bu ilişkiyi ne ölçüde dolaylı olarak yordamaktadır?

1.2. Çalışmanın Önemi

Romantik ilişkilerin önemi sayısız araştırmacı tarafından vurgulanmıştır (Erikson, 1977; Fincham ve Cui, 2010). Yüksek doyuma sahip romantik ilişkilerin sırlarının araştırılmasının önemi, beliren yetişkinlik döneminde özellikle artar çünkü sağlıklı bir romantik ilişkiye sahip olmak bu yaş aralığındaki psikososyal gelişim için benzersiz bir öneme sahiptir (Erikson, 1977). Beliren yetişkinler davranışsal uyum ve öznel iyi oluş için sosyal beceriler öğrenirler (Davila, 2010; Manning vd., 2010) ve hali

hazırdaki romantik ilişkilerindeki zorluklarla başa çıkmayı öğrenerek bu becerileri gelecekteki evliliklerinde kullanırlar (Lewandowski ve Bizzoco, 2007).

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, romantik ilişki doyumu konusuna ışık tutmaktır. Çalışma özellikle güvensiz bağlanma stillerinin romantik ilişki doyumu ile olan ilişkisine odaklanmaktadır. Çocukluk döneminde oluşan bağlanma stillerimiz çoğunlukla yaşam boyu sabit kabul edildiğinden (Bowlby, 1980), yetişkin olarak kazanılabilecek bilinçli farkındalık, öz-şefkat veya bilişsel ayrışma gibi bazı psikolojik esneklik becerilerinin, güvensiz bağlanma ve ilişki doyumu arasındaki güçlü ilişkiye müdahale edebileceği düşünülmektedir. Bu anlamda bu çalışmanın, güvensiz bağlanma stillerine sahip olup romantik ilişkilerinde çeşitli zorluklarla mücadele eden olan bireyler için umut aşılacağı olabileceği düşünülmektedir.

Bir diğer önemli konu, romantik ilişkiler bağlamına özgü bir bilinçli farkındalık ölçeğinin çalışmada yer almasıdır. Bilinçli farkındalığın romantik ilişkilere olan olumlu yansımaları literatürde destek gören bir fikirdir (Barnes vd., 2007; McGill vd., 2020), ancak romantik ilişki bağlamına özgü bir bilinçli farkındalık kavramı çok nadir yer bulmaktadır (Kimmes vd., 2018). Yakın zamanda romantik ilişkilerdeki bilinçli farkındalığın, yerleşik kişilik özelliği olan genel bilinçli farkındalıktan ayrı bir kavram olduğu kanıtlanmıştır (Kimmes vd., 2018; 2020). Mevcut çalışma ise hem global bağlamda hem de Türkiye bağlamında bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmacının bilgisine göre, Türkiye'deki beliren yetişkinler örnekleminde romantik ilişki bilinçli farkındalığını ölçen ilk çalışmadır.

Ek olarak, psikolojik esneklik kavramları ile güvensiz bağlanma arasındaki ilişki daha önce incelenmiş olsa da (Cordon vd., 2009; Daks ve Rogge, 2020), bu çalışmada olduğu gibi romantik ilişki doyumu açısından bu ilişkilerin doğasını dikkate alarak belirli bir modeli test eden çalışmalar çok daha azdır. (ör. Jones vd., 2011). Son olarak, psikolojik esneklik kavramlarından biri olan bilişsel ayrışma, teorik tutarlılığına rağmen romantik ilişkiler bağlamında çok daha az incelenmiştir. Bilişsel ayrışmanın romantik ilişkilerdeki rolünü araştıran az sayıda çalışma (Daks ve Rogge, 2020) bu fikri oldukça yakın zamanda ilgi odağı haline getirmiştir (ör. Baran vd., 2021). Bu nedenle, mevcut romantik ilişki doyumu modelinde bilişsel ayrışmanın etkisini anlamak ayrıca önemlidir.

2. YÖNTEM

2.1. Çalışmanın Deseni

Bu çalışma bir korelasyon katsayısı kullanarak iki veya daha fazla nicel değişken arasındaki olası ilişkileri araştıran ilişkisel desenli bir araştırmadır. Yapısal eşitlik modeli yardımıyla bir çoklu aracılık modeli test edilmiştir. Güvensiz bağlanma stilleri ile ilişki doyumu arasındaki ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık, öz-şefkat ve bilişsel ayrışmanın olası aracı rolleri araştırılmıştır.

2.2. Örneklem

Çalışmanın örneklem grubu medeni durumu evli olmayıp en az 1 aydır devam eden romantik ilişki içerisinde olan 18-29 yaş aralığındaki beliren yetişkinlerdir. Örnekleme yöntemi olarak elverişlilik örnekleme kullanılmıştır. Kolay ulaşılabilir olduğu için örneklem Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi öğrencilerinden oluşmuştur. Toplamda 578 kişi anketleri tamamlamış, ancak 57 katılımcı çalışma dışı bırakılmıştır. 20 kişi yaş aralığı kriterini karşılamadığı için, 27 kişi medeni durumu evli olduğu için, 10 katılımcı ise aykırı değerlere (outlier) sahip oldukları belirlendiği için çalışma dışı bırakılmıştır.

Sonuç olarak, yaşları 19 ile 29 arasında ($M = 22.52$, $SD = 2.45$), ilişki süresi ise 1 ay ile 96 ay arasında değişen ($M = 20.66$, $SD = 19.32$) 521 katılımcıdan (367 kadın, 141 erkek, 13 non-binary) elde edilen veriler analizlere dahil edilmiştir. Katılımcıların çoğunu farklı fakültelerden lisans öğrencileri oluşturmaktadır.

2.3. Veri Toplama Araçları

Bu çalışmada veri toplama aracı olarak İlişki Doyumu Ölçeği (Curun, 2001), Yakın İlişkilerde Yaşantılar Envanteri-II (Selçuk vd., 2005), Bilinçli Farkındalık Ölçeği (Özyeşil vd., 2011), İlişkide Bilinçli Farkındalık Ölçeği (Taşkesen ve Barutçu-Yıldırım, 2021), Öz-Şefkat Ölçeği Kısa Formu (Barutçu-Yıldırım vd., 2021b) ve Drexel Ayrışma Ölçeği (Aydın ve Yerin Güneri, 2021) kullanılmıştır. Ölçeklerin psikometrik özellikleri mevcut çalışmanın verileriyle test edilmiştir.

2.4. Veri Toplama Süreci

Veriler toplanmadan önce yazarlardan ölçeklerin kullanılması için izin alınmıştır. Sonrasında ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu'ndan gerekli izinler alınmış ve veriler Mayıs 2021 ile Ocak 2022 tarihleri arasında METU Survey aracılığıyla çevrim içi şekilde toplanmıştır. Katılımcılar anketi doldurmaya başlamadan önce onam formunu onaylamışlardır. Toplamda 578 kişi ölçekleri tamamlamıştır.

2.3. Verilerin Analizi

Çalışmada çoklu aracılık modeli test etmek için Yapısal Eşitlik Modeli kullanılmıştır. İlk olarak SPSS versiyon 28 (IBM Corp., 2021) yazılım programı üzerinden veri tarama, kayıp veri analizi, uç değer analizi gibi bir takım ön analizler yapılmıştır. Yapısal eşitlik modelinin varsayımları test edilmiş ve çalışma değişkenleri arasında Pearson korelasyon analizlerinin yanı sıra tanımlayıcı analizler de yapılmıştır. Son olarak, oluşturulan yapısal modeli test etmek için AMOS versiyon 26 yazılım programı (Arbuckle, 2021) kullanılarak yapısal eşitlik modellemesi yapılmıştır.

2.4. Çalışmanın Sınırlılıkları

Bu çalışma yorumlanırken çeşitli sınırlılıklar dikkate alınmalıdır. İlk olarak, örnekleme yöntemi olarak kullanılan elverişlilik örnekleme çalışmanın genellenebilirliğini etkileyebilir. İkinci olarak, COVID-19 salgını nedeniyle veriler yalnızca çevrim içi bir anket platformu kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Bu nedenle araştırmacı anketin tamamlandığı ortamı kontrol edememiş ve katılımcılar araştırmacıya anket soruları ile ilgili soru sorma fırsatı bulamamıştır. Ayrıca, madde sayısının fazla olması nedeniyle anketin tamamlanması yaklaşık 20 dakika sürmüştür. Araştırmacı ankete dikkati ölçen bir soru eklese bile bu süre can sıkıntısı etkisine (boredom effect) sebep olabilir ve bu da iç geçerliği etkileyebilir. Ek olarak, pandemi koşulları katılımcıların romantik ilişki dinamiklerini etkileyerek ilişki doyumunun azalması gibi bir tarih tehdidi (history threat) oluşturmuş olabilir. Ayrıca çalışmada sadece öz bildirim formları kullanılmıştır. Katılımcılara anonimlik garanti edilse de sosyal olarak arzu edilen cevapları seçmeye meyilli olabilirler. Son olarak, araştırma deseni ilişkisel olduğu için sonuçlardan neden-sonuç ilişkisi çıkarılamaz.

3. BULGULAR

Yapısal eşitlik modelinin varsayım kontrolleri sırasında veri setinin tek değişkenli normallik, çok değişkenli normallik, doğrusallık ve eş varyanslılık varsayımına uyum gösterdiği gözlemlenmiştir. Ana değişkenlerin; yaş, cinsiyet ve romantik ilişki süresine göre değişiklik gösterip göstermediği incelendiğinde, ilişki süresi ile güvensiz bağlanma boyutları arasında negatif yönde [kaygılı bağlanma için, ($r = -.17, p < .01$); kaçınan bağlanma için, ($r = -.15, p < .01$)], bilinçli farkındalık ($r = .11, p < .01$) ve yaş ($r = .32, p < .01$) ile ise pozitif yönde anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. İkinci olarak, yaş ile kaygılı bağlanma arasında negatif yönde ($r = -.16, p < .01$), bilinçli farkındalık ($r = .11, p < .01$), ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık ($r = .09, p < .05$) ve öz-şefkat ($r = .09, p < .05$) arasında ise pozitif yönde anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu görülmüştür.

Ana çalışma değişkenleri arasındaki Pearson korelasyon analizi sonuçları incelendiğinde ise, güvensiz bağlanma boyutları ile diğer tüm ana değişkenler arasında anlamlı şekilde negatif bir ilişkinin olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Kaygılı ve kaçınan bağlanma kendi aralarında ($r = .38, p < .01$), diğer tüm ana değişkenler ise kendi aralarında pozitif ve anlamlı bir ilişki göstermiştir.

Doğrulayıcı faktör analizi kullanılarak ölçüm modeli test edilmiş ve modelin kabul edilebilir uyuma sahip olduğu görülmüştür [$(\chi^2 (35) = 126.62, p = .00, \chi^2 / df = 2.28, SRMR = .06, RMSEA = .05; CFI = .89; TLI = .88)$]. Standardize edilmiş faktör yükleri .13 ve .90 arasında gözlemlenmiştir. Sonrasında, ana araştırma sorusuna yanıt vermesi amacıyla oluşturulan yapısal eşitlik modeline ait uyum istatistikleri zayıf bulunmuştur [$(\chi^2 (839) = 2111.51, p < .05, \chi^2/df = 2.52, GFI = .84, CFI = .87, TLI = .86, RMSEA = .54, SRMR = .79)$]. Kuramsal çerçeveyi de dikkate alarak, bilişsel ayrışma değişkeni ve bu değişkene ait regresyon yolları, anlamlı olmayan diğer regresyon yollarıyla birlikte modelden çıkarılmıştır. Düzenlenen yeni modelin uyum istatistikleri iyi uyum göstermiştir [$(\chi^2 (481) = 1255.03, p = .00, \chi^2/df = 2.61, GFI = .86, CFI = .91, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .056, SRMR = .07)$].

Modelde kaygılı bağlanma; bilinçli farkındalık, ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık, öz-şefkat ve ilişki doyumunu negatif ve anlamlı şekilde yordamıştır. Bundan farklı olarak, kaçınan bağlanma ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığı ve öz-şefkati anlamlı olarak

yordamamıştır. Bilinçli farkındalık ise ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığı ve öz-şefkati anlamlı ve pozitif yönde yordamış, ancak ilişki doyumunu yordamamıştır. İlişkide bilinçli farkındalık ilişki doyumunu pozitif yönde anlamlı olarak yordamış, ancak aynı regresyon ilişkisi öz-şefkat ve ilişki doyumunu arasında gözlemlenmemiştir. Sonuçlara göre bireylerin romantik ilişki doyumundaki varyansın %39'unu güvensiz bağlanma, bilinçli farkındalık, ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık ve öz-şefkat açıklamıştır.

Modeldeki anlamlı regresyon yolları göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, yalnızca ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığın kaygılı bağlanma ve ilişki doyumunu arasındaki ilişkideki potansiyel aracı rolünün test edilebilecek olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. 5000 örneklem ve %95 güven aralığı kullanılarak bootstrap metodu uygulanmış ve basit kullanıcı tanımlı tahminleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık aracı değişkeninin, kaygılı bağlanma ve ilişki doyumunu arasındaki ilişkiyi azaltan bir aracı rolü olduğunu göstermiştir ($\beta = -.14, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.211, -.082]$).

4. TARTIŞMA

4.1. Bilinçli Farkındalık ve İlişkide Bilinçli Farkındalık

Mevcut çalışmanın en önemli bulgularından birisi, romantik ilişki sonuçlarını incelerken bağlama özgü bilinçli farkındalığın genel bilinçli farkındalıktan önemli ölçüde ayrışmasıdır. Bilinçli farkındalığın güvensiz bağlanma boyutları ile ilişki doyumunu arasında bir aracılık rolü bulunamamıştır. Ancak ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık, bağlanma kaygısının ilişki doyumunu üzerindeki etkisini azaltan bir etkiye sahiptir. Bilinçli farkındalık daha önce romantik ilişkiler bağlamında ele alınsa da (Kozlowski, 2013; Karremans vd., 2017), bağlama özgü bir olgu olan ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığın kavramsallaştırılması nispeten yenidir.

İlişkide bilinçli farkındalık, genel bilinçli farkındalık ile bağlantılı, ancak ondan farklı bir kavramdır (Kimmes vd., 2018; 2020; Stanton vd., 2021). Modelden de görülebileceği gibi, genel bilinçli farkındalık, ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığı anlamlı şekilde yordamaktadır, ancak tek başına romantik ilişkilerdeki duygular ve düşünceler gibi içsel deneyimlere farkındalık ile yaklaşma becerisini ölçmede ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık değişkeni kadar başarılı olmayabilir. Bunun sebeplerinden biri romantik ilişkilerin bağlanma problemleri gibi çok daha derin konularla ilişkili olması olabilir

(Kimmes vd., 2018). Bu nedenle, diğer güncel araştırma sonuçları bu çalışmadaki bilinçli farkındalık ve ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığın romantik ilişki doyumunu ele alırken farklılaşması sonucunu desteklemektedir (Kimmes vd., 2018; 2020).

Mevcut bulgular ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığın korelasyonel seviyede her iki güvensiz bağlanma çeşidiyle ilişkili olduğunu gösterse de yapısal eşitlik modeli sonucunda sadece kaygılı bağlanma tarafından yordandığını göstermiştir. Bu sonuç Kimmes ve diğerlerinin (2018) araştırma sonucuyla paraleldir ve farklı güvensiz bağlanma stillerinin zorluklarla başa çıkmak için geliştirdikleri benzersiz içsel çalışma modelleri (internal working models) ile açıklanabilir.

Kaygılı bağlanan bireyler, ilişkilerindeki kabul edilme ve reddedilme belirtilerine karşı aşırı duyarlıdır (Mikulincer ve Shaver, 2003). Yaşadıkları üzücü olaylar üzerine çok fazla kafa yorurlar, olumsuz duyguları abartmaya meyillidirler ve belirsizliğe tahammül edemezler (Hazan ve Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer ve Shaver, 2003). Bu, bilinçli farkındalığı yüksek bireylerin sergilediği bazı davranışların tam tersidir. Bilinçli farkındalığa sahip bireyler ruminasyondan kaçınırlar, yeni bilgilere açıktırlar ve bilişsel esneklikleri fazladır (Brown ve Ryan, 2003). Aynı zamanda, olumsuz herhangi bir tepki göstermeden içsel deneyimlerini gözlemleyebilirler (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Kuramsal yönden tutarlı olmasının dışında, bu sonuç aynı zamanda umut aşılacıdır. Bireylerin çocukluk dönemlerinde oluşturdukları kaygılı bağlanma stillerine rağmen (Bowlby, 1969/1982; 1973; 1980) romantik ilişkilerde bilinçli farkındalık becerisi kazanmaları bir tampon görevi görerek ilişki doyumlarının azalmasını engelleyen bir faktör olabilir.

Öte yandan, kaçınan bağlanma stiline sahip bireyler, partnerlerinin onlar için çok önemli, hayatlarının merkezinde bir konuma gelmesinden korkarak etkileşimden çekilme eğilimindedirler (Hazan ve Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer ve Shaver, 2003). İlişkilerde kaygılı bağlananlar kadar baskın duygular yaşamazlar ve bu da kaygılı bağlanan bireylere kıyasla ilişkilerde yaşadıkları hem olumsuz hem de olumlu içsel deneyimlerini azaltır (Li ve Chan, 2012). Ertelenmiş bir stres tepkisi göstermeden bağlanma sistemlerini bastırmada daha başarılıdırlar (Fraley ve Shaver, 1997). Bu nedenle, partnerlerine karşı açık ve ilgili bir tutum gerektiren ilişkide bilinçli farkındalık becerisinin (Kimmes vd., 2018), kaçınan bağlanmaya sahip bireyler için

ilişki doyumunu yordamada daha etkisiz olması anlaşılabilir bir sonuçtur. Aynı sebepten, yani kaçınan bağlanma stiline sahip bireylerin bastırılmış bağlanma sistemleri olumsuzlar kadar olumlu duyguları da bastırdığı için (Li ve Chan, 2012), kaçınan bağlanmanın kaygılı bağlanmaya kıyasla daha düşük seviyede bir ilişki doyumunu yordaması literatürü destekleyen bir sonuçtur.

Bir diğer sonuç hem kaygılı hem kaçınan bağlanma boyutlarının genel bilinçli farkındalık ile ilişkisinin olmasıdır. Her iki güvensiz bağlanma boyutu da düşük düzeyde bilinçli farkındalığı yordamış ve bu değişkenle korelasyonel düzeyde de anlamlı ve negatif yönde ilişkili çıkmıştır. Ancak, bilinçli farkındalık ilişki doyumunu yordamamıştır. Literatür göz önünde bulundurulduğunda bu çelişkili bir bulgudur (McGill vd., 2016; Quinn-Nilas, 2020). Bunun sebebi daha önce açıklandığı gibi genel bilinçli farkındalığın, ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığa kıyasla romantik ilişkilerdeki dinamikleri açıklamada yeterli olmaması olabilir.

4.2. Öz-Şefkat

Çalışmanın bir diğer değişkeni, bilinçli farkındalığın önemli bir ölçüde yordadığı öz-şefkattir. Zihinde canlanan tüm düşüncelere karşı şefkatli bir tutuma sahip olmak için öncelikle bu zihinsel temsillerin farkında olmak gerekir (Neff, 2003a; Neff ve Germer, 2013). Diğer birçok çalışmada da öz-şefkat bilinçli farkındalık tarafından yordanmıştır (ör., Hollis-Walker ve Colosimo, 2011; Sedighimornani vd., 2019) ve bilinçli farkındalıktan sonra geldiği önerilmiştir (Bergen-Cico vd., 2013). Dolayısıyla, bu ilişkinin yönü literatür tarafından desteklenmiştir.

Ek olarak, öz-şefkat tüm ana çalışma değişkenleri ile önemli ölçüde ilişkilidir. Çalışmalar öz-şefkat düzeyinin, bilinçli farkındalık (Raque-Bogdan vd., 2011) ve yüksek ilişki doyumunu ile (Baker ve McNulty, 2011; Barutçu-Yıldırım vd., 2021; Lathren vd., 2021) olumlu şekilde ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca, mevcut araştırma sonuçlarında gösterildiği gibi, her iki güvensiz bağlanma boyutu da öz-şefkatle negatif yönde ilişkilidir (Başer Baykal vd., 2019; Bolt vd., 2019; Joeng vd., 2017; Lathren vd., 2021; Neff ve Beretvas, 2013).

Ayrıca güvenli bağlanma, öz-şefkatin doğasıyla yüksek oranda bağlantılı olan benliğe ilişkin olumlu görüşlere sahip olma (Hazan ve Shaver, 1987) ve dolayısıyla, kişinin

zorluklar karşısında kendi hatalarını kabul edebilmesi ile yakından ilişkilidir (Neff, 2003a). Güvenli bağlanmanın gelişmesine katkıda bulunan sıcak bir aile ortamında, bireyler kendilerine karşı şefkat geliştirmeyi de öğrenirler (Neff ve McGehee, 2010). Mevcut çalışma sonuçları her iki güvensiz bağlanma boyutu ile öz-şefkat arasında anlamlı düzeyde olumsuz ilişki olduğunu göstermiş ve aynı zamanda kaygılı bağlanmanın öz-şefkati olumsuz şekilde yordadığını ortaya çıkararak geçmiş çalışmaları desteklemiştir.

Ancak, kaçınan bağlanma stili öz-şefkattaki azalmayı öngörmemiştir. Bu, Bowlby'nin benlik modelleri (models of self) kavramıyla açıklanabilir. Kişinin benlik modeli, “kendini sevgiye ve desteğe layık görüp görmediğine” göre olumlu ya da olumsuz olarak etiketlenebilir (Bartholomew ve Horowitz, 1991, s. 227). Hazan ve Shaver (1987), tıpkı güvenli bağlananlar gibi, kaçınan bağlanan bireylerin de olumlu benlik modellerine sahip olduklarını belirtmişlerdir (ayrıca bkz. Berant vd., 2005).

Kaçınan bağlanma, yakınlık korkusu, gösterişli bir benlik fikri ve bağımsız bir kişiliğe sahip olma ile ilişkilendirilmiştir (Hazan ve Shaver, 1987). İlişkisel zorlukları başkalarına atfederek başa çıkma yöntemi olarak bastırma (repression) kullanırlar (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Örneğin, Bolt ve diğerleri (2019) kaçınan bağlanma stiline sahip bireylerin eşlerine karşı düşük şefkate sahip olma olasılıklarının daha yüksek olduğunu, ancak kendilerine karşı besledikleri şefkatin yüksek olduğunu göstermiştir.

Öte yandan, kaygılı bağlanan bireyler güvensizlik duygularını bastırmaya ya da gizlemeye çalışmazlar, bu nedenle olumsuz benlik modelleri taşırlar (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Kendilerini sevgiye layık görmemek, düşük öz-şefkat ile ilişkilendirilebilir. Bolt ve diğerlerinin çalışması (2019), kaygılı bağlanan bireylerin kaçınan şekilde bağlanana göre daha düşük öz-şefkat düzeylerine sahip olduğunu onaylamıştır (ayrıca bkz. Neff ve McGehee, 2010; Wei vd., 2011). Dolayısıyla, kaygılı bağlanmanın neden düşük öz-şefkati yordadığı, ancak kaçınan bağlanmanın yordamadığı sorusunun yanıtı bu kuramsal temellerde bulunabilir.

Diğer yandan, mevcut çalışmada varsayımların aksine yüksek öz-şefkat, romantik ilişkilerden alınan doyumunu yordamamıştır. Güncel çalışmalarda güvenli bağlanma ile ilişki kalitesi arasında anlamlı ilişki bulunurken (Bolt vd., 2019; Huynh vd., 2022),

ilişki doyumu ile bulunamamıştır (Bolt vd., 2019). Bolt ve diğerleri (2019), çiftler arasındaki etkileşimleri dikkate alan ilişki kalitesi ölçeğine kıyasla, ilişki doyumu ölçeğinin daha doğrudan olduğunu ve çeşitli olmadığını belirterek bu çelişkiyi açıklığa kavuşturmuştur. Bu nedenle, romantik ilişki bağlamında öz-şefkatin etkisini anlamak için ilişki kalitesi değişkeni daha uygun olabilir. Benzer bir bakış açısı mevcut çalışma sonuçlarına da anlam kazandırabilir.

4.3. Bilişsel Ayrışma

Diğer değişkenlere kıyasla bilişsel ayrışma romantik ilişki bağlamında oldukça az çalışılmıştır. Daks ve Rogge (2020) tarafından yapılan güncel meta-analiz çalışması bilişsel ayrışmanın daha yüksek ilişki doyumu ve daha düşük bağlanma kaygısı ile ilişkili olduğu sonucuna varmıştır. Bu sonuç, korelasyonel düzeyde mevcut çalışmanın bulgularıyla uyumludur. Mevcut çalışma bilişsel ayrışmanın her iki güvensiz bağlanma boyutuyla da olumsuz yönde anlamlı olarak ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Daks ve Rogge'nin (2020) çalışmasında olduğu gibi, bu ilişki kaygılı bağlanma için daha kuvvetlidir.

Bununla birlikte, önerilen yapısal eşitlik modelinde bilişsel ayrışmanın aracı rolü kanıtlanamamıştır. Modelde bilişsel ayrışmanın sadece kaygılı bağlanma ile zayıf biçimde ilişkili olduğu ve diğer tüm regresyon yollarının anlamsız olduğu görülmüştür. Dolayısıyla, bilişsel ayrışma modelden çıkarılmış ve aracı rolü araştırılamamıştır.

Bu sonuç bilişsel ayrışmayı konu alan geçmiş çalışmaların yöntemleri incelendiğinde açıklık kazanabilir. Bilişsel ayrışma ile ilgili sonuçlar rapor edilirken, Beş Boyutlu Bilinçli Farkındalık Ölçeği (BBBFÖ) gibi çok boyutlu ölçeklerin alt boyutları kullanılmıştır (ör. Greer, 2017, akt. Daks ve Rogge, 2020). Romantik ilişki bağlamında bilişsel ayrışmayı ölçmek için bu değişkene özgü ölçekler kullanan çalışmalar çok sınırlıdır ve bazıları halen devam eden projelerdir (ör. Baran ve diğerleri, 2021). Daha önce bilişsel ayrışmanın romantik ilişkilere katkıda bulunabileceği belirtile de (Blackledge, 2015), romantik ilişki çalışmaları bu konuyu henüz gün ışığına çıkarmamıştır. Diğer bir olasılık da bilişsel ayrışmanın, ilk olarak Rosenthal (1979) tarafından belirtilen dosya çekmecesini probleminin (file drawer problem) kurbanı

olabileceğidir. Bu da şimdiye kadar elde edilen ancak istatistiksel olarak anlamsız çıkan sonuçların hiç rapor edilmemiş olabileceği anlamına gelir.

4.4 Uygulamaya Yönelik Çıkarımlar

Güvensiz bağlanma boyutlarının ilişki doyumu üzerindeki olumsuz etkileri uzun zamandır bilinmektedir. Ancak mevcut çalışma, ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığın bu ilişkiye müdahale edebileceğini göstermiştir. Bireyler romantik ilişki bağlamında bilinçli farkındalık becerilerini artırdıklarında, güvensiz bağlanmalarına rağmen partnerleriyle tatmin edici etkileşimler yaşayabilirler. Bu nedenle, psikoloji, psikolojik danışmanlık veya ilgili alanlardaki uzmanlar, çiftlere yönelik eğitim programlarında bilinçli farkındalık üzerine odaklanabilir ve bilinçli farkındalığın geliştirilmesini psikolojik yardım sürecinin önemli terapötik hedeflerinden biri olarak görebilirler.

Ayrıca bu çalışma, güvensiz bağlanan birçok üniversite öğrencisinin romantik ilişkilerdeki davranışlarına ilişkin farkındalıklarını artırabilir ve onlara umut olabilir. Beliren yetişkinlik döneminde olan bireyler, ilişkide bilinçli farkındalığın geliştirilebilecek bir beceri olduğunu ve nihayetinde güvensiz bağlanma stillerine rağmen daha tatmin edici romantik ilişkilere sahip olabileceklerini hatırlayabilirler.

4.5 Gelecek Çalışmalar için Öneriler

Mevcut çalışma, romantik ilişki sonuçlarını incelerken bağlama özgü bilinçli farkındalığın genel bilinçli farkındalıktan önemli ölçüde ayrıştığını göstermiştir. Bu nedenle araştırmacılar romantik ilişki sonuçlarını incelerken daha geçerli sonuçlar için bağlama özgü bilinçli farkındalık ölçümünü kullanılabılırler.

Güncel çalışmada diğer değişkenlerle anlamlı ilişkilerinin olmaması nedeniyle bilişsel ayrışma modelden çıkarılmıştır. Bilişsel ayrışmanın ruh sağlığına olan katkıları düşünüldüğünde (ör. Arch vd., 2012; Davidson, 2018; Luoma vd., 2007), bilinçli farkındalık değişkeninde olduğu gibi romantik ilişki bağlamına özgü bir bilişsel ayrıştırma aracının geliştirilmesi çalışmalarda daha faydalı sonuçlar sunabilir.

Mevcut çalışma sonuçları, farklı güvensiz bağlanma stiline sahip bireylerde ilişki doyumunu etkileyen faktörlerin çeşitliliği hakkında ipuçları vermektedir. Mevcut araştırmada kaçınan bağlanma ve ilişki doyumu arasında aracı değişken

gözlemlenmemiştir. Dolayısıyla bu ilişkiyi açıklayan faktörler belirlenememiştir. Gelecek araştırmalar bu faktörlere odaklanarak, kaçınan bağlanma stiline sahip bireylerin ilişki doyumlarını artırmak için geliştirebilecekleri becerileri belirleyebilir.

Ayrıca, çalışmalarda farklı araştırma yöntemleri uygulanabilir. Boylamsal, deneysel veya diyardik çalışmalar daha kapsamlı sonuçlar sunabilir. Potansiyel çalışmalar yetişkin bağlanma boyutları, psikolojik esneklik becerileri ve ilişki doyumu arasındaki neden-sonuç ilişkisini anlamaya yardımcı olabilirler.

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