

## HOW DOES POWER AND GENDER PREDICT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION? \*

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to find out the role of power and gender in romantic relationship satisfaction (used interchangeably in regard to dating relationship) among college students. The sample was composed of 202 college students. For data collection, Relationship Assessment Scale, Sense of Power Scale and Demographic Data Form were utilized. The results of Simultaneous Regression Analysis showed that power had positive relationship with relationship satisfaction while gender did not play a role in predicting relationship satisfaction among college students. Regarding the positive relationship between power and relationship satisfaction, power should be taken into consideration as an important variable in further relationship satisfaction studies.

**Keywords:** Power, Relationship Satisfaction, Gender

## GÜÇ VE CİNSİYET ROMANTİK İLİŞKİ DOYUMUNU NASIL YORDAMAKTADIR?

### Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı güç ve cinsiyetin romantik ilişki doyumunu ne ölçüde yordadığını belirlemektir. Çalışmaya bir devlet üniversitesinde öğrenim gören ve romantik ilişki (flört ilişkisi) yaşayan 202 lisans öğrencisi katılmıştır. Çalışmada veri toplama aracı olarak İlişki Doyumu Ölçeği, İlişkilerde Güç Algısı Ölçeği ve Demografik Bilgi Formu kullanılmıştır. Regresyon analizi sonuçlarına göre üniversite öğrencileri örnekleminde güç algısı ilişki doyumu ile pozitif yönde ilişkili iken, cinsiyet ilişki doyumunda yordayıcı bir değişken olarak bulunmamıştır. Güç algısının, ilişki doyumu üzerinde anlamlı bir etkiye sahip olmasından yola çıkılarak gelecekte yapılacak ilişki doyumu çalışmalarında göz önünde bulundurulması gereken önemli bir değişken olduğu görülmektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Güç, İlişki Doyumu, Cinsiyet

### Introduction

Relationship grows into close relationships based on the intimacy, mutually shared points and closeness. Researchers indicate that for healthy relationships, it is necessary to have satisfaction and the needs being met within the close relationships, especially in romantic relationships (or dating relationships interchangeably) (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). Relationship satisfaction is defined as an interpersonal evaluation of the

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\*Paper presented at European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) 2015, Budapest. Araştırma, Gönderim Tarihi: 28.03.2017 Kabul Tarihi: 13.10.2017

positivity of feelings for one's partner and attraction attached to the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). It can be understood from the definition that a partner perceives the relationship from his/her point of view. Various studies have explained the indicators of satisfaction in romantic relationships: To start with, the rewards and costs that couples accounted in the relationship affected the satisfaction. If one partner considered rewards outweighing cost, the possibility of being satisfied was high (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Previous research indicated positivity, openness, trust, self-disclosure, success on conflict resolution as prerequisite for relationship satisfaction (Guerrero, et al., 2011). However, studies also showed that power in close relationship was another indicator that could predict the overall relationship satisfaction (Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1986).

Guerrero et al. (2011) attached high importance to past relationship experiences and comparisons partners make by observing other relationships. Sacher and Fine (1996) mentioned that amount of time spent in a relationship affected satisfaction, which is closely related with the quality of communication. If partners could talk about the problem and solve the conflict, the feeling of satisfaction increased (Gottman, 1994). Likewise, self-disclosure was another indicator of satisfaction because there was the opportunity to express deeper feelings, and so being understood (Guerrero, et al., 2011). At last but not least, expectations were seen the most effective component of satisfaction since having realistic expectations or not might affect the process within the relationship. Kenny and Acitelli (2001) stated that realistic expectations helped partners see the other's needs objectively and create a sense of security within the relationship.

The satisfaction is a crucial term for healthy relationships because the association between dissatisfaction about the relationship and depression was evident in Rosand, Slinning, Eberhard-Gran, Roysamb and Tambs (2012)'s study. On the other side, low relationship satisfaction was associated with high need for power (Winter, 1973). This might lead to another possible indicator of relationship satisfaction: What is the role of power in relationships? Can power be a predictor of relationship satisfaction? These questions became the common concerns for studies as relationships were the core side of human life including family members, friends, supervisors, partners or couples (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Since 1930s, the power issue has been a real concern in close relationship studies (Goldhamer & Shils, 1939) since it was inevitable to think power outside in a relationship both individually or in groups (Emerson, 1962). Power is defined as a psychological state in which individuals have a scope to impact other people (French & Raven, 1959) beyond the previous perspective as a result of having a strong position (Anderson, John & Keltner, 2012). That is, there is a personal sense of power independent from people's position, authority or class (Bandura, 1999) and called as personal sense of power.

It was stated by Huston (1983) that a relationship could not be considered as close unless two people had an influence on each other for a relatively long period of time. As there was an influence over the other partner's behaviors, there were conducted many studies which examined the relationship between power and relationship satisfaction (Oyamot, et al., 2010). The results showed that if there was asymmetry, partners

became unsatisfied (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). On the contrary, when there was symmetry, where the balance of influence was equal, partners felt more satisfied (Oyamot, et al., 2010). Another component of power is the outcomes referring to the decisions and the final say of one partner. This concept was generally considered as the control over the other partner in relationships (Rehman, Holtzworth-Munroe, Herron & Clements, 2009). What's more, the literature showed that when individual perceived themselves as powerful, they were tend to behave in a way that increased their power (Anderson, et al., 2012). While the relationship satisfaction was based on satisfying the needs and desires of oneself, using or perceiving power was taken attention as the predictor. In the study, Oyamot, Fuglestad and Snyder (2010) stated that "Who influences whom and with what effect?" was a constant question through which the nature and concept of close relationships could be extended and discovered deeply.

There are different bases of power possessed by individuals (French & Raven, 1959): Legitimate power is based on the authority structure that people take from their position; Reward power is caused by the possibility of rewarding somebody; Coercive power happens when there is the ability to cause negative events; Expert power is based on the extensive knowledge; Referent power is due to the feeling of sense of oneness with other; and finally, Informational power is based on the information one partner possess (Huston, 1983). Any type of the power can exist within a close relationship of different partners.

Any type of the power can exist within a close relationship of different partners. As power was a crucial point in relationships, there were some studies conducted with married couples in terms of power (Schwarzwald, Koslowsky & Izhak-Nir, 2008; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). It might be because of the conditions that married couples have such as sharing the same house or being together all the time (Stafford, Backman & Dibona, 1977). However, the literature seemed to have fewer studies conducted with dating relationships, especially college students who could bring a different perspective to the power issue because according to Feiring (1996), romantic relationships in early adolescence was short lasting, causal and less influential; but still could be experienced and described as close relationship because partners shared intimacy and love. On the contrary, romantic relationships in college years were considered as more meaningful (Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007), more trustful, supportive and stable compared to early adolescent (Shulman & Kipnis, 2001). Further to that, in college years, individuals might experience romantic relationships and start shaping their perspectives towards romantic relationships and they were in need of asking help for their relationship problems. Consequently, investigating college years could be striking to provide new perspective for future marriage studies. All in all, relationship satisfaction is influenced by various properties including the possible effect of power. As power diversifies in bases, different samples of close relationship might give different results such as parent-child relationship, romantic relationships, marital relationships; consequently, it is worth conducting studies on the role of power in relationship satisfaction. In fact, relationship satisfaction is a crucial issue in social life since people who live in a healthy society can become more happy, fruitful and successful.

Oyamot, Fuglestad and Snyder (2010) worked with college students in predicting the role of self-monitoring on power and relationship satisfaction. In that study, it was discovered that female and male students perceived power differently. The results indicated that male partners who felt themselves as more powerful partner felt less satisfied in the relationship. Therefore, gender should be included as a predictor factor of the relationship satisfaction and power studies. Particularly within the scope of studies on relationship satisfaction, gender was highly emphasized because different concepts (commitment, love, conflict, decision making, influence), which were identified as the factors influencing satisfaction, differed from female to male (Schwarzwald, Koslowsky & Izhak-Nir, 2008). Anderson et al. (2012) proposed that though having a very important influence in relationships and various questions related to possible effects over thoughts and feelings, antecedents of power, its relation with the personality or even its definition were being demanded, there was a lack of literature about personal sense of power. Under the light of this perspective, the researchers felt a requirement to analyze personal sense of power within a deep and extensive perspective including specific relationships like friend relationships, different social context, interpersonal relationships or groups as well as individual differences and causes of personal power. With a detailed study, the researchers developed an instrument to measure personal sense of power within relationships: Sense of Power Scale.

Different cultures provide various perspectives in relation to gender, power or relationship satisfaction. Turkish culture, in which male power might seem to be higher than female in adults (Yaman Efe & Ayaz, 2010), needs to be investigated when college students are considered as a mirror of society but at the same time more educated. That is, traditional gender roles might shed a light to the studies about power and relationship satisfaction. The main purpose of this study was to find out the role of power and gender in predicting romantic relationship satisfaction among college students who are in a period of developing their relationship perception. For this aim, the following question was asked: "What is the role of power and gender in predicting romantic relationship satisfaction among college students?"

In this study, two of the factors which could be related to relationship satisfaction were studied. The literature attached high importance to power issue in marital satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. However, there were fewer studies conducted with college students, that is younger generation, in terms of the influence over the partner. Therefore, this study can provide valuable information to the literature with a different perspective over the topic of power. As the influence of power and gender in marital relationship was important, the effect should be studied in other close relationships as well. Conducting studies in romantic relationships rather than marriages might also provide different insight since it would not include the effect of marriage. Moreover, it was expected that the findings of this study could make a significant contribution to the Turkish literature in investigating the association between power and relationship satisfaction. According to previous research, any scales measuring perceived power in relationships was developed or adapted to Turkish. Therefore, this study might provide

a practical inventory about power to the Turkish literature. The findings of this study might provide ideas to counselors at university counseling centers regarding preventive activities for partners who had problems in their relationships. In addition, the findings can be beneficial for future research because the study can be replicated with other samples like long-term dating relationships. Moreover, how power was perceived in relationships in Turkish population might be a light in order to compare the results with previous findings in the literature. At last but not least, even though there could be many other factors, possible effect of power in romantic relationship satisfaction might open new ways to further research. The current study can be considered as a starting point with a small sample.

### **Method**

The present study was a cross-sectional survey design. In cross-sectional survey, data are gathered from a sample drawn from a pre-specified population and at one point in time (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). In this study, data was gathered at once from people who were in romantic relationship. The independent variables of the study were gender and power; the dependent variable was the romantic relationship satisfaction.

All college students who were in romantic relationship in Turkey were constituted the target population of the present study. The accessible population was romantic relationship partners at a state university in Turkey. For the sampling method, I used convenience sampling method because it was impossible to have a formal procedure to find students in romantic relationship. Totally, 202 college students participated in the study. Among participants, 105 of them were females (52%) and 97 of them were males (48%). The age ranged from 18 to 36 ( $M=21.7$ ). Students from five different disciplines attended to the study: 38.1% from Engineering Discipline, 19.3% from Arts and Sciences, 17.8% from Education Discipline, 16.3% from Economics and Administrative Sciences and finally 8.4% from Architecture Discipline. Among participants, in terms of year spent in the college, 7.9% were first grade, 33.2% were second grade, 32.7% were third grade and 26.2% were four grade students. In terms of duration of the relationship, it was seen that most of the participants had a relationship less than 1 year (40.6%), 23.3% of them were having a relationship from 1 to 2 year, 15.8% were from 2 to 3 and remained 20.2% were between 3 and 6. The descriptive statistics were provided in Table 1.

*Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Participants*

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		<i>f</i>	%
<b>Discipline</b>	Engineering	77	38.1
	Architecture	17	8.4
	Education	36	17.8
	Econ. and Adm. Sci.	33	16.3
	Arts and Sciences	39	19.3
<b>Grade Level</b>	1 (freshman)	16	7.9
	2 (sophomore)	67	33.2
	3 (junior)	66	32.7
	4 (senior)	53	26.2
<b>Duration</b>	0-1 year	82	40.6
	1-2 years	47	23.3
	2-3 years	32	15.6
	3-6 years	41	20.2

Three different instruments were used in the current study; Relationship Assessment Scale, Sense of Power Scale and Demographic Data Form.

**Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS):** The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) was developed by Hendrick (1988) and consisted of seven items to measure an individual's satisfaction with his/her romantic relationship. It was a 5-point Likert scale (1. Low satisfaction to 5. High satisfaction). The reliability analysis of the scale showed a Cronbach's alpha of .86, which meant items were highly related to each other. Higher scores on RAS equated 35. The RAS measured general satisfaction about the relationship rather than marriages and how well a partner met the other's needs. Two sample items were: "How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?" and "How well does your partner meet your needs?" There was no subscale of RAS and a total score was obtained via this questionnaire. The scale was translated into Turkish by Curun (2001).

**Sense of Power Scale:** The scale was developed by Anderson et al. (2012) to measure beliefs about power partners have in their romantic relationships. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with 8 items on a 7-point scale (1. Strongly disagree to 7. Strongly agree). Items were in the form of statement (i.e "In my relationship with my partner, I think I have a great deal of power.", "Even when I try, I am not able to get my way.") The scale had high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha level .88. A total score was obtained from the scale. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Aydın and Çağ (2015) on a married sample. While the original scale had a unidimensional factor structure, Exploratory Factor Analysis results showed that the scale had two-factor structure as "positive" and "negative" in Turkish version with a Cronbach alpha

calculated as .88. The two-factor structure of scale was confirmed by confirmatory factor analysis in a sample consisting of college students with the current study.

**Demographic Data Form:** The Demographic Data Form was designed by the researcher in order to collect information about gender (female/male), discipline, grade level and duration of the relationship. Participants were not asked about whether they were in a homosexual or heterosexual relationship. They provided information about their perceived power and satisfaction.

After I had taken necessary permission from Ethics Committee, I applied the scales in a state university. Before the administration of the instruments, researchers informed the participants about the research as only students currently in a romantic relationship could attend the study. Later, students were asked to sign the voluntary participation form and then they filled out the questionnaires in reference to the person whom they currently had a romantic relationship. The scales were administered online via the survey system of the university. The total administration time of the instruments was approximately 15 minutes. The data were collected in 4 week-period time at the end of the spring semester of 2014-2015 academic year.

The statistical analysis was carried out by making use of IBM SPSS Statistics 20 software program. Firstly, the data were scanned to check whether there were missing values or incorrect data entry. Then, descriptive statistics was conducted for this study. Finally, simultaneous regression analysis was used to analyze the data so as to find the role of power and gender in predicting relationship satisfaction.

### Results

In accordance with the purpose of the study, Simultaneous Regression Analysis was carried out for the study. Before the analysis, assumptions of regression which were normality, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals and outliers were checked (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) and satisfied in the analysis. For the descriptive statistics, the mean for relationship satisfaction was 34.09 ( $SD=4.29$ ) when the highest score which can be obtained from the scale is 35, the mean for power was 44.32 ( $SD=6.29$ ) when the highest score for power is 56 as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics for Variables*

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relationship Satisfaction	34.09	4.29
Power	44.32	6.29

After the variables were entered into the model, Simultaneous Regression Analysis was carried out to examine the variables predicting relationship satisfaction. The results of the simultaneous regression analysis indicated that the model significantly predicted relationship satisfaction,  $\Delta R^2 = .35$ ,  $\Delta F(2,199) = 13.86$ ,  $p < .05$  as shown in Table 3.

Overall, the regression model was significant and 35 % of the variance of the satisfaction can be accounted for by model.

Table 3 *Results of Simultaneous Regression Analysis*

Predictors	B	SE	b	T	p	$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F$
Model						.35	13.86
Gender	-.09	.57	-.01	-.15	.88		
Power	.24	.05	.35	5.24*	.00		

Among the predictors, it was found that while gender did not significantly predict satisfaction ( $\beta = -.01$ , n.s.), power did significantly predict relationship satisfaction ( $\beta = .35$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Contrary to expectations, gender was not a significant predictor. However, power was appeared as a significant predictor and was found to be positively associated with relationship satisfaction.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find the role of gender and power in predicting relationship satisfaction among college students. In relation with the literature (Howard et al., 1986; Oyamot et al., 2010; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983), power had an influence in close relationship satisfaction in the current study. The results indicated that power had a positive relationship with satisfaction. That is, the more people felt powerful in the relationship, the more they felt satisfied with their relationship.

Unlike the literature which stated the significant relationship between gender and relationship satisfaction (Felmlee, 1994; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997; Sprecher, Schmeekle, & Felmlee, 2006), in the current study, relationship satisfaction did not have a relationship with gender. That is, gender did not predict relationship satisfaction. Although the literature supported more meaningful state of relationships in college years compared to early adolescent (Shulman & Kipnis, 2001), the roles still might not be established appropriately in romantic relationships established in college years. So, gender might not have a relationship with the satisfaction. Moreover, regardless of gender, other points such as attraction, acceptance or body image can be more important in those ages of college years.

Oyamot et al. (2010) worked with college students in predicting the role of self-monitoring on power and relationship satisfaction. In that study, it was discovered that female and male students perceived power differently. The results indicated that male partners who felt themselves as more powerful felt less satisfied in the relationship. In contradiction with this study, the results of the current study provided that partners who felt high power felt more satisfaction in the relationship and unlike with Oyamot et al.'s study, gender did not play any significant role in the present study. Particularly within the scope of studies on relationship satisfaction, gender was highly emphasized because



different concepts (commitment, love, conflict, decision making, influence), which were identified as the factors influencing satisfaction, differed from female to male (Schwarzwald et al., 2008). However, these results were contradicted with the results of present study which indicated no significance of gender. The mean of power scale was high regardless of gender of participants which means participants who filled out the scale indicated high level of power playing a significant role in relationship satisfaction. Research showed that there was a difference in terms of distress, compassion and emotional regulation between people who experienced high and low power (van Kleef, Oveis, Löve, LuoKogan, Goetz & Keltner, 2008). While high-power people were in a state of having more positive emotions (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002), low-power people showed more reaction to their partners' emotions (Anderson et al., 2003). In line with the findings of the study, perceived high power predicted relationship satisfaction and further studies can be conducted to compare people who perceived high power and low power in various psychological issues.

In this study, two of the factors which could be related to relationship satisfaction were studied. The literature put high importance on power issue in marital satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. However, there were fewer studies conducted with college students, that is younger generation, in terms of the influence over the partner. Therefore, this study provided valuable information to the literature with a different perspective over the topic of power. Moreover, the findings of this study made a significant contribution to the Turkish literature in investigating the association between power and relationship satisfaction. The power issue has been a new topic for Turkish studies even though power is a crucial point in relationships in Turkish culture. Counselors and university counseling centers can use the results of the study to attach importance to power issue in their interventions and investigations.

The literature marked that in married couples, relationship satisfaction tended to be highest in egalitarian (i.e. symmetrical) relationships in terms of decision-making (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). This contradictory finding might lead the researchers to study power in marriage and dating relationships in Turkey with a larger sample. Also, the findings can be beneficial for future research because the study can be replicated with other samples like married couples. In addition, the findings of this study might provide ideas to counselors at university counseling centers regarding preventive activities for partners who have problems in their relationships as well as practitioners working in clinics. Moreover, how power is perceived in relationships in Turkish population might be a light in order to compare the results with previous findings outside the country, that is, the present research contributed studies in power literature, which is few in number in Turkey indeed. At last but not least, even though there are many other factors, possible effect of power in romantic relationship satisfaction can open new ways to further research. The current study can be considered as a starting point with a small sample which might lead a more detailed study.

There were some limitations of the current study to be considered. The first limitation was related to generalizability of the results. As sample was selected by convenient

sampling method, college students in one university were included. Therefore, generalization of the findings was limited with this sample. Another limitation was due to the self-report nature of the study. That means students might not have given the actual response to the items owing to different reasons since there were different kinds of ways to obtain information about relationships. As participants were college students, they may not have paid enough attention to the statements due to various reasons like exam anxiety or online questions. Lastly, there were other variables that could affect romantic relationship satisfaction as mentioned in the introduction part and the presence of unexplained variance because this study only focused on gender and power issues and tried to find their role as predictors of relationship satisfaction. It could be perfect to include the other related variables in order to examine the predictors of gender and power.

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