



RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA YAZISI

# The Mediating Role of Early Maladaptive Schemas in the Relationship Between Intimate Relationship Experiences and Sexual Satisfaction in Women

Kadınlarda Yakın İlişkilerdeki Deneyimler ve Cinsel Doyum Arasındaki  
İlişkide Erken Dönem Uyum Bozucu Şemaların  
Aracı Rolü

Kahraman Güler<sup>1</sup>, Ebru Özer<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract:

This study aimed to examine the mediating role of early maladaptive schemas in the association between experiences in intimate relationships and sexual satisfaction. The research sample comprised female participants over the age of 18, selected using nonprobability methods with convenient sampling. The study employed the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ-SF3), the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR-II), and the Golombok-Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction (GRISS). Statistical analyses revealed a significant positive correlation between the Female Form of the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale and the Disconnection, Impaired Autonomy, Other-Directedness, and Unrelenting Standards schema domains. The findings suggest that lower levels of sexual satisfaction are associated with a greater tendency to exhibit early maladaptive schemas. Furthermore, the Disconnection Schema Domain demonstrated a full mediating effect in the relationship between anxious attachment and sexual satisfaction. This indicates that the impact of anxious attachment on sexual satisfaction is entirely explained by the Disconnection Schema Domain. Moreover, the results suggest that the Disconnection Schema Domain is more strongly associated with anxious attachment than to sexual satisfaction as the outcome variable.

**Keywords:** Early Maladaptive Schemas, Sexual Satisfaction, Intimate Relationships.

<sup>1</sup>Assoc. Prof., Mudanya University, Faculty of Art and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Bursa, Türkiye, E-mail: pskdrkahramanguler@gmail.com Orcid Id: 0000-0002-0049-0658

<sup>2</sup>MSc. Istanbul Aydın University, Applied Psychology Department, Institute of Postgraduate Education, Istanbul, Türkiye, E-mail: ebruozel1@stu.aydin.edu.tr, Orcid Id: 0000-0002-8985-6651

**Address of Correspondence/Yazışma Adresi:** Kahraman Güler, Mudanya University, Faculty of Art and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Bursa/Turkey. E-mail: pskdrkahramanguler@gmail.com

**Date of Received/Geliş Tarihi:** 26.06.2024, **Date of Revision/Düzeltilme Tarihi:** 05.04.2025, **Date of Acceptance/Kabul Tarihi:** 11.04.2025, **Date of Online Publication/Çevrimiçi Yayın Tarihi:** 05.06.2025

**Citing/Referans Gösterimi:** Güler, K., & Özer, E. (2025). The Mediating Role of Early Maladaptive Schemas in the Relationship Between Intimate Relationship Experiences and Sexual Satisfaction in Women. *Cyprus Turkish Journal of Psychiatry & Psychology*, 7(2), 177-185.

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Cyprus Mental Health Institute / Cyprus Turkish Journal of Psychiatry and Psychology (www.ktppdergisi.com). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**Öz:**

Bu araştırma, erken dönem uyumsuz şemaların yakın ilişkilerde yaşantılar ve cinsel doyum arasındaki ilişkideki aracılık rolünü incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma örneklemini, kolayda örnekleme yöntemi ile seçilen 18 yaş üzeri kadın katılımcılardan oluşmaktadır. Çalışmada Young Şema Ölçeği (YSÖ-KF), Yakın İlişkilerde Yaşantılar Envanteri (YİYE-II) ve Golombok-Rust Cinsel Doyum Ölçeği (GRCDÖ) kullanılmıştır. İstatistiksel analizler, Golombok-Rust Cinsel Doyum Ölçeği-Kadın Formu ile Kopukluk Şema Alanı, Zedelenmiş Özerklik Şema Alanı, Diğerlerine Yönelme Şema Alanı ve Yüksek Standartlar Şema Alanı arasında anlamlı pozitif korelasyonlar olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular, düşük cinsel doyum seviyelerinin, erken dönem uyumsuz şemaların ortaya çıkma eğilimiyle ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, Kopukluk şema alanı, cinsel doyumun kaygılı bağlanma tarafından yordanmasında aracılık rolüne sahiptir. Bu durum, kaygılı bağlanmanın cinsel doyum üzerindeki etkisinin tamamen Kopukluk Şema Alanı tarafından açıklandığını göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, sonuçlar Kopukluk Şema Alanının bağımlı değişken olan cinsel doyumdan çok kaygılı bağlanma ile daha güçlü bir ilişki içinde olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Erken Dönem Uyum Bozucu Şemalar, Cinsel Doyum, Yakın İlişkiler.

**Introduction**

Individuals are complex beings whose intimate relationships and interactions within their social and cultural environments play a crucial role in shaping their overall well-being and life satisfaction (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). Early relational experiences with family members and caregivers during critical developmental stages significantly influence an individual's self-perception, attachment patterns, and the development of early maladaptive schemas. Early maladaptive schemas are formed through individuals' relationships with others and themselves, reflecting early experiences and encompassing memories, emotions, bodily sensations, and cognitions (Young et al., 2003). In other words, individuals develop various schemas as mechanisms to cope with and adapt to negative past experiences, patterns that may, in turn, impair their functioning in response to new experiences.

These schemas serve as fundamental cognitive structures that mediate the relationship between past intimate relationship experiences and current sexual satisfaction. Investigating the role of early maladaptive schemas in this context provides valuable insights into how early relational experiences shape adult sexual health and informs the development of targeted therapeutic interventions. Empirical research has consistently demonstrated a strong association between attachment patterns and early maladaptive schemas (Cecero et al., 2004; Mason et al., 2005; Simard et al., 2011; Stefanović & Nedjeljković, 2012). Individuals with insecure attachment styles frequently exhibit early maladaptive schemas. Specifically, those with a preoccupied attachment style tend to score higher on schemas related to insufficient self-control, self-discipline, and unrelenting standards. Furthermore, studies examining the relationship between schemas and close relationships highlight a significant connection between relational dynamics and attachment-driven responses (Kaya & Aydin, 2020).

Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, posits that the caregiver–infant relationship has a profound impact on an individual's development across the lifespan. Ainsworth (1978) classified attachment styles into three categories: secure, anxious, and avoidant. Secure attachment ensures that an infant's needs are consistently met, whereas anxious attachment is associated with uncertainty and insecurity. In contrast, avoidant attachment develops when a caregiver rejects the infant's need for bonding (Simpson & Rholes, 2019);

Selçuk, Zayas, & Hazan, 2010; Mickelson, Kessler, & Shaver, 1997). Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended attachment theory to adult romantic relationships, demonstrating that attachment patterns persist into adulthood. Securely attached individuals tend to form and maintain satisfying relationships with relative ease. In contrast, individuals with avoidant attachment often withdraw from intimacy and maintain emotional distance. Those with anxious or ambivalent attachment styles typically exhibit a heightened fear of abandonment (Güngör, 2015).

Attachment plays a crucial role in schema formation, as interpersonal schemas are believed to predict attachment styles (Lukáč & Popelková, 2020). Schemas are cognitive frameworks through which individuals interpret their surroundings, relationships, and experiences. According to schema theory, early maladaptive schemas are dysfunctional emotional and cognitive patterns that develop in response to unmet basic needs during childhood and persist into adulthood (Young et al., 2019). These schemas, arise from deficiencies or disruptions in early relational experiences, are believed to contribute to difficulties in adult relationships, including lower relationship satisfaction (Rafaeli et al., 2012). Young et al. (2019) categorized early maladaptive schemas into five domains and eighteen subdomains, including themes related to connection and security, autonomy, competence, self-expression, spontaneity, and the consequences of unmet childhood needs and adverse early experiences. Closeness, both physical and emotional, is a fundamental component of relationships (Eğinli, 2019). While friendship can fulfil some intimacy needs, romantic relationships, particularly those involving sexual commitment, are often regarded as the most significant (Popovic, 2005).

Sexuality has long been a central focus of research due to its role in reproduction, its contribution to relationship satisfaction, and its impact on overall well-being. Healthy sexual functioning is characterized by mutual sexual desire and arousal, free from shame, fear, or anxiety (Mohammadi et al., 2021). Research suggests that schemas influence both sexual behaviour and sexual satisfaction. Schema theory posits that the fulfillment of core emotional needs during childhood is crucial for the development of satisfying adult relationships. Conversely, unmet early needs can lead to relationship dissatisfaction and impaired sexual functioning (Young & Gluhoski, 1997). Oliver and

Nobre (2013) identified a strong association between cognitive schemas and sexual functioning (Mohammadi, 2021). Similarly, Heshamian et al. (2015) found that, in women, schemas related to emotional deprivation, mistrust/abuse, abandonment/instability, and defectiveness/shame were significantly associated with aspects of sexual satisfaction. Gender differences in schema patterns also warrant attention. The present study, which included female participants, aimed to explore these dynamics while considering societal attitudes toward sexuality and cultural norms. Findings indicate that male participants exhibited higher scores in disconnection, impaired autonomy, and high standards schemas compared to female participants.

The Golombok–Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction (GRISS) was employed to assess the quality of sexual relationships and identify potential sexual dysfunctions in heterosexual individuals. This instrument comprises two gender-specific forms, each containing 28 items. In the current study, the version designed for women was used; therefore, only female participants were selected and assessed.

### The Aim and Importance of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the mediating role of early maladaptive schemas in the relationship between experiences in intimate relationships and sexual satisfaction. Furthermore, it sought to contribute to both existing and future research in this area, by highlighting the significant role of sexuality across diverse societal and cultural contexts. The study focused on female participants to provide a more specific analysis of how early maladaptive schemas influence intimate relationships and sexual satisfaction among women. By narrowing the scope to women, this research aimed to offer a more detailed understanding of the unique effects these schemas have on their sexual well-being. The findings from this study contribute to the existing literature by underscoring the importance of these schemas in shaping sexual satisfaction, particularly in women, and offer valuable insights into their potential role in therapeutic interventions.

To the best of our knowledge, no prior research in our country has examined the interaction among these three concepts. Therefore, in addition to contributing to the existing literature, this study offers mental health professionals a novel perspective. By illuminating the relationships between relationship experiences, sexual satisfaction, and early maladaptive schemas in women, it also addresses a critical gap in the field.

## Method

### Research Model

This study utilized a cross-sectional design within a correlational survey model, aiming to examine multiple variables simultaneously and determine the presence and degree of covariation among them. The correlational survey model, a subtype of the general survey approach, is used to identify relationships between variables and to explore the nature and strength of these associations (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016).

### Research Sample

The research sample consisted of 248 female participants. The required sample size was calculated using the G\*Power 3.1.9.4 program prior to data collection, based on a 95% confidence interval. To achieve a statistical

power of 0.80 for Pearson correlation analysis, with a medium effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.3$ ) and an alpha level of 0.05, a minimum of 84 participants was recommended. However, 248 participants were included in the study to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method that involves selecting individuals based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. This method was chosen for its practicality and efficiency in reaching the target population within a limited timeframe. The inclusion criteria for participation required individuals to (a) identify as female, (b) be between the ages of 20 and 58, and (c) voluntarily complete the survey instruments. Recruitment took place across various settings, including [insert specific locations or platforms, e.g., university campuses, social media platforms, or community health centers]. Participants were fully informed about the voluntary and anonymous nature of the study, and all provided informed consent prior to participation.

All participants in the study were female ( $N = 248$ ), with a mean age of 32.48 years ( $SD = 9.13$ ), ranging from 20 to 58 years. None of the participants reported a current psychiatric diagnosis. The majority were unmarried (58.1%) and had completed a university-level education (61.3%). In terms of socioeconomic status, 61.3% reported a family income above the minimum wage. Regarding sources of sexual information, 32.3% indicated that they had received information from multiple sources, including friends, books or magazines, spouses, and the internet. Additionally, 37.1% of participants described their sexual life as “good.” At the time of the study, 69.4% were in a romantic relationship. Furthermore, 88.7% reported having no known physical or mental health conditions.

### Procedure

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines, and ethical approval was obtained from the Doğuş University Ethics Committee (Decision No. 57634, dated 26.01.2024). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method. Prior to participation, all individuals were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data collection was carried out either online via a secure survey platform or through printed questionnaires administered in controlled settings. Participants completed a set of self-report instruments, including the Golombok–Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction (GRISS–Female Version), the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR-II), and the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ–S3). The survey required approximately 30 minutes to complete. To ensure data quality, responses were screened for missing values and inconsistencies prior to analysis.

All procedures were designed to minimize potential biases and enhance the reliability of responses. Upon completing the survey, participants received debriefing information along with contact details for further inquiries or psychological support, if needed.

### Ethical Statement

The use of the questionnaires in this study was approved by the Istanbul Doğuş University Ethics Committee (Decision No. 57634, dated 26.01.2024).

## Data Collection Tools

### Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ-SF3)

The assessment tool was originally developed by Jeffrey E. Young in 1991 to evaluate early maladaptive schemas and was revised by Young et al. in 2003. Higher scores on the questionnaire indicate the presence of multiple and more severe maladaptive schemas. The reliability and validity of the Turkish version were established by Soygüt, Karaosmanoğlu, and Çakır (2009). The questionnaire consists of 90 items grouped into five schema domains: Impaired Autonomy, Disconnection, Unrelenting Standards, Other-Directedness, and Impaired Limits. The internal consistency coefficients for the subscales ranged from .63 to .80. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the schema domains, as determined through higher-order factor analysis, ranged from .53 to .81.

In the present study, Cronbach's alpha values for the domains were as follows: .93 for the Disconnection domain, .95 for the Impaired Autonomy domain, .73 for the Impaired Limits domain (referred to here as Weak Boundaries), .86 for the Other-Directedness domain, and .83 for the Unrelenting Standards domain (referred to here as High Standards and Suppression).

### The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR-II)

The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Revised (ECR-II) was developed by Fraley and Shaver (2000) to assess attachment styles in intimate relationships. The scale consists of 36 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with scores for each sub-dimension (avoidance and anxiety) ranging from 18 to 126. The Turkish adaptation and validation of the scale were conducted by Selçuk et al. (2005). In the original study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.90 for the avoidance subscale and 0.86 for the anxiety subscale. The test-retest reliability coefficients were 0.81 and 0.82, respectively. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.88 for avoidant attachment and 0.91 for anxious attachment.

### The Golombok-Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction (GRISS)

The Golombok-Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction (GRISS) was developed to assess the quality of sexual intercourse and identify sexual dysfunctions in heterosexual individuals. The inventory includes two gender-specific forms, each consisting of 28 items, designed separately for males and females. In this study, only the female version was administered, as the sample

comprised exclusively female participants. Both forms include five common subscales: avoidance, satisfaction, communication, touching, and frequency. Higher scores indicate greater deterioration in the quality of sexual intercourse and sexual functioning. The GRISS was originally developed by Rust and Golombok (1986) and was adapted into Turkish by Tuğrul et al. (1993). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the female form was found to be .82, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

### Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the strength and direction of the relationships among the study variables. Mediating effects were assessed using the PROCESS Macro version 4.2 (Hayes, 2022), specifically Model 4, which is designed to test simple mediation models. This model evaluates the indirect effect of an independent variable (X) on a dependent variable (Y) through a mediating variable (M). Confidence intervals for the indirect effects were estimated using the bootstrapping method, which is advantageous as it does not rely on the assumption of normality and provides greater flexibility for various data types (Bradley-Garcia & Clement, 2022).

In the mediation analysis, anxious and avoidant attachment styles were specified as independent variables, the *Disconnection* and *Impaired Autonomy* schema domains were entered as mediators, and sexual satisfaction was designated as the dependent variable. These variables were selected based on their high intercorrelations. All analyses were conducted with a 95% confidence interval, and statistical significance was determined at the  $p < .05$  level.

### Findings

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the independent variables (attachment styles), the mediating variables (early maladaptive schema domains), and the dependent variable (sexual satisfaction). Significant positive correlations were found between scores on the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female and the following variables: Disconnection Schema Domain ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ), Impaired Autonomy Schema Domain ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ), Other-Directedness Schema Domain ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ), Unrelenting Standards Schema Domain ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ), Avoidant Attachment ( $r = .57, p < .01$ ), and Anxious Attachment ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ).

**Table 1.** *The Relationship Between Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female, Young Schema Scale, Inventory of Experiences in Close Relationships-II*

	Disconnection	Impaired Autonomy	Impaired Limits	Other-Directedness	Unrelenting Standards	Avoidant Attachment	Anxious Attachment
Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female	.382**	.352**	-.063	.255**	.186**	.572**	.301**
Infrequency-Female	.028	.100	-.279**	-.062	-.099	.403**	.189**
Non-communication-Female	.169**	.104	-.129*	.004	.055	.459**	.069
Female dissatisfaction	.380**	.302**	-.049	.390**	.255**	.513**	.285**
Female avoidance	.437**	.285**	-.034	.148*	.133*	.316**	.214**
Female non-sensuality	.284**	.195**	.065	.112	.046	.355**	.058
Vaginismus	.219**	.416**	.013	.243**	.275**	.426**	.475**
Anorgasmia	.276**	.257**	-.036	.285**	.153*	.405**	.169**

\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$  Test used: Pearson Correlation

Mediation analyses were conducted using Model 4 of the PROCESS macro (version 4.2) for SPSS, developed by Hayes (2018). This model is specifically designed to test simple mediation, in which the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable is transmitted through a single mediating variable. The analyses were based on ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, and indirect effects were evaluated using the bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant if the confidence interval did not include zero.

In the first mediation model, anxious attachment was specified as the independent variable, the Disconnection Schema Domain as the mediator, and the Golombok–Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction – Female Form (GRISS-

F) as the dependent variable. Results indicated that anxious attachment alone explained 9% of the variance in GRISS-F scores ( $R^2 = .09$ ). When the Disconnection Schema Domain was included as a mediator, it independently accounted for 6% of the variance ( $R^2 = .06$ ). Together, the two variables explained 15% of the variance in sexual satisfaction ( $R^2 = .15$ ). Following the inclusion of the mediator, the standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ) for anxious attachment decreased from .30 to .12, suggesting a mediating effect. The bootstrapped 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero, indicating statistical significance. These results provide evidence of partial mediation by the Disconnection Schema Domain in the relationship between anxious attachment and sexual satisfaction.

**Table 2.** Results on the Role of Anxious Attachment as a Mediator of the Disconnection Schema Domain in the Golombok Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female Prediction

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	SH	$\beta$	t	p	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	.29	.09	19.19	2.78		6.90	0.000	13.71	24.68
<b>1 Anxious Attachment</b>			4.29	0.87	0.30	4.94	0.000	2.58	6.01
(Constant)	.36	.15	14.61	2.89		5.05	0.000	8.91	20.30
Anxious Attachment			1.67	1.04	0.12	1.61	0.108	-0.37	3.71
			0.26	0.06	0.31	4.32	0.000	0.14	0.38
<b>2 Disconnection</b>									
Undirect total effect (Mediator)			2.62	0.68				1.38	4.09

\* $p < 0.05$  Test used: PROCESS 3.5

In the second mediation model, anxious attachment was designated as the independent variable, the Impaired Autonomy Schema Domain as the mediator, and the Golombok–Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction – Female Form (GRISS-F) as the dependent variable. Consistent with the first model, anxious attachment alone accounted for 9% of the variance in GRISS-F scores ( $R^2 = .09$ ). When the Impaired Autonomy Schema Domain was introduced as a mediator, the combined explanatory power of the model increased to 12% ( $R^2 = .12$ ).

The inclusion of the mediator resulted in a reduction of the standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ) for anxious attachment from .30 to .05, indicating a potential mediating effect. To assess the statistical significance of the indirect effect, bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval were employed. The confidence interval did not include zero, confirming that the indirect effect was statistically significant. These findings provide evidence of partial mediation by the Impaired Autonomy Schema Domain in the relationship between anxious attachment and sexual satisfaction.

**Table 3.** Results on the Intermediary Role of Anxious Attachment in the Golombok Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female Prediction of Impaired Autonomy Schema Domain

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	SH	$\beta$	t	p	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	.29	.09	19.19	2.78		6.90	0.000	13.71	24.68
<b>1 Anxious Attachment</b>			4.29	0.87	0.30	4.94	0.000	2.58	6.01
(Constant)	.36	.12	17.60	2.78		6.32	0.000	12.12	23.08
Anxious Attachment			0.76	1.42	0.05	0.54	0.592	-2.03	3.55
			0.19	0.06	0.31	3.12	0.002	0.07	0.31
<b>2 Impaired Autonomy Schema Domain</b>									
Undirect total score (Mediator)			3.53	1.26				1.18	6.14

\* $p < 0.05$  Test used: PROCESS 3.5

In the third mediation model, avoidant attachment was specified as the independent variable, the Impaired Autonomy Schema Domain as the mediator, and the Golombok–Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction – Female Form (GRISS-F) as the dependent variable. Results indicated that avoidant attachment alone accounted for 33% of the variance in GRISS-F scores ( $R^2 = .33$ ). When the Impaired Autonomy Schema Domain was added as a mediator, the total explained variance increased to 34% ( $R^2 = .34$ ), with the schema domain contributing an additional 1% of explanatory power.

The inclusion of the mediator resulted in a reduction of the standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ) for avoidant attachment from .57 to .51, indicating a potential mediating effect. A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval was used to assess the significance of the indirect effect. The confidence interval did not include zero, confirming that the mediating effect was statistically significant. These findings provide evidence of partial mediation by the Impaired Autonomy Schema Domain in the relationship between avoidant attachment and sexual satisfaction.

**Table 4.** Results Regarding the Mediating Role of Avoidant Attachment in the Prediction of Golombok Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female by the Impaired Autonomy Schema Area

Model		R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	SH	$\beta$	t	p	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	(Constant)	.57	.33	5.89	2.55		2.31	0.022*	0.87	10.91
1	Avoidant Attachment			8.84	0.81	0.57	10.93	0.000*	7.24	10.43
	(Constant)	.58	.34	3.26	2.77		1.18	0.240	-2.19	8.71
	Avoidant Attachment			7.96	0.89	0.51	8.99	0.000*	6.22	9.70
2	Impaired Autonomy			0.08	0.04	0.13	2.34	0.020*	0.01	0.15
	Undirect total score (Mediator)			0.88	0.43				0.09	1.75

\* $p < 0.05$  Kullamulan test: PROCESS 3.5

In the fourth mediation model, avoidant attachment was designated as the independent variable, the Disconnection Schema Domain as the mediator, and the Golombok–Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction – Female Form (GRISS-F) as the dependent variable. In the initial model, avoidant attachment alone explained 33% of the variance in GRISS-F scores ( $R^2 = .33$ ). When the Disconnection Schema Domain was introduced as a mediator, it accounted for an additional 1% of the variance, increasing the total explained variance to 34% ( $R^2 = .34$ ). The inclusion of the

mediator resulted in a reduction of the standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ) for avoidant attachment from .57 to .50, indicating a potential mediating effect. A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval was employed to assess the statistical significance of the indirect effect. The confidence interval did not include zero, confirming that the mediating effect was statistically significant. These findings provide evidence of partial mediation by the Disconnection Schema Domain in the relationship between avoidant attachment and sexual satisfaction (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** Results on the Mediating Role of Avoidant Attachment in the Golombok Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female Prediction of the Disconnection Schema Domain

Model		R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	SH	$\beta$	t	p	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	(Constant)	.57	.33	5.89	2.55		2.31	0.022	0.87	10.91
1	Avoidant Attachment			8.84	0.81	0.57	10.93	0.000*	7.24	10.43
	(Constant)	.59	.34	3.32	2.73		1.21	0.226	-2.07	8.70
	Avoidant Attachment			7.79	0.91	0.50	8.57	0.000*	6.00	9.58
2	Disconnection			0.12	0.05	0.14	2.44	0.015*	0.02	0.22
	Undirect total score (Mediator)			1.04	0.35				0.40	1.78

\* $p < 0.05$  Kullamulan test: PROCESS 3.5

## Discussion

This research was designed to examine the mediating role of early maladaptive schemas in the relationship between experiences in intimate relationships and sexual satisfaction. Additionally, the study aimed to contribute to both current and future research in this area. Given the pivotal role of sexuality within cultural and social contexts, the study focused on female participants to enable a more in-depth understanding of how these schemas influence sexual satisfaction and relational experiences among women. While the primary focus was on women, comparative analyses indicated that male participants (from a broader dataset or previous literature, if applicable) reported higher scores in the Disconnection, Impaired Autonomy, and High Standards schema domains. By centering on female participants, this study

offers valuable insights into how early maladaptive schemas specifically affect women's intimate relationships and sexual well-being.

Positive correlations were found between scores on the Golombok–Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale–Female and the Disconnection, Impaired Autonomy, Other-Directedness, and Unrelenting Standards schema domains. These findings suggest that women with lower sexual satisfaction are more likely to exhibit early maladaptive schemas—a pattern supported by prior research (Hashemian et al., 2015; Nobre & Pinto-Gouveia, 2009; Oliveira, Pedro, & Nobre, 2012). Such schemas are understood to exert dysfunctional effects on sexual satisfaction by shaping maladaptive beliefs and expectations within intimate relationships.

Additionally, sexual satisfaction was found to be positively correlated with both avoidant and anxious attachment styles. This finding aligns with Hazan and Shaver's (1987) assertion that sexuality functions as a key motivator in the formation and maintenance of relational bonds. The influence of avoidant attachment on sexual satisfaction appears to be partially mediated by the Disconnection Schema Domain, which encompasses feelings of emotional detachment, loneliness, and unmet relational needs. As a mediator, this schema may intensify the negative impact of avoidant attachment by reinforcing patterns of emotional withdrawal and disconnection, thereby diminishing sexual satisfaction. Emotional detachment and perceived isolation, as reflected in disconnection-related schemas, can interfere with intimacy and satisfaction within sexual relationships. Prior research indicates that individuals with secure attachment styles tend to experience greater sexual satisfaction and feel more emotionally safe during sexual encounters (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Feeney & Noller, 2004). In contrast, avoidant tendencies—particularly those rooted in anxious attachment—may inhibit individuals from fully engaging emotionally or physically with their partners. Moreover, traditional gender roles ascribed to women often encourage self-sacrificing behaviors in pursuit of social approval (Güler & Özgörü, 2022). In this context, defectiveness/shame schemas may cause individuals to suppress their needs, whereas impaired boundaries may lead some women to challenge sexual taboos or societal expectations in ways that complicate their relational experiences.

Positive correlations were also observed between female dissatisfaction and the Disconnection, Impaired Autonomy, Other-Directedness, and Unrelenting Standards Schema Domains. The issue of sexual satisfaction is believed to be intertwined with individuals' early maladaptive experiences. A direct relationship was identified between female dissatisfaction and both avoidant and anxious attachment. Previous studies have established a link between sexual satisfaction and insecure attachment patterns (Lafortune et al., 2022). Individuals with insecure attachment may struggle to achieve sexual fulfillment. Gender roles that encourage women to behave altruistically can manifest as avoidance in expressing their feelings or a drive for approval (Güler & Yüksel, 2021).

A significant correlation was found between avoidant behaviors in women and both avoidant and anxious attachment styles. The association between avoidant attachment—characterized by emotional distancing and discomfort with closeness—and avoidant behaviors during sexual intercourse is particularly evident. Moreover, some individuals may exhibit heightened avoidance in sexual encounters due to fears related to their partner's long-term commitment or emotional availability. Schemas developed through early relational experiences, particularly those involving disruptions in forming secure attachments with caregivers, may hinder women's ability to recognize, accept, and express their sexual identity, desires, and needs. From this perspective, early maladaptive schemas and insecure attachment styles may contribute to the development of vaginismus, a conclusion supported by the findings of this study.

The Disconnection Schema Domain was found to fully mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and sexual satisfaction, indicating that this mediator is more

strongly associated with anxious attachment than with sexual satisfaction itself. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating a robust link between disconnection schemas and anxious attachment, further supporting the notion that maladaptive schemas negatively impact sexual satisfaction (Karantzas et al., 2022; Mohammadi et al., 2021). In addition, the Impaired Autonomy Schema Domain also plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between anxious attachment and sexual satisfaction. This suggests that the relationship between anxious attachment and reduced sexual satisfaction can be more comprehensively explained through impaired autonomy—reflecting a stronger correlation between this schema and anxious attachment than with the dependent variable. Prior studies have identified a negative association between anxious attachment and personal autonomy (Corduneanu, 2019). Taken together, these findings suggest that anxious attachment and sexual satisfaction are predictive of both the Disconnection and Impaired Autonomy schema domains. The Disconnection schema is characterized by fears of abandonment and difficulties forming close emotional bonds, while the Impaired Autonomy schema reflects a diminished sense of independence and a tendency toward dependent behavior patterns. Overall, the detrimental impact of early maladaptive schemas on individual well-being and relational functioning appears to be both significant and predictable.

This study highlights the relationship between avoidant attachment style, the Disconnection Schema Domain, and sexual satisfaction among women, emphasizing the importance of addressing disconnection-related schemas in efforts to enhance sexual well-being. The findings suggest that understanding and targeting early maladaptive schemas—particularly within therapeutic and counseling settings—may be crucial for improving sexual satisfaction alongside addressing attachment-related dynamics. Sexual satisfaction is shaped not only by individual and relational factors but also by deeper psychological structures such as cognitive-emotional schemas. These insights into the impact of early maladaptive schemas on women's experiences in intimate relationships underscore the need for further research and clinical attention in this area.

## Conclusion

A positive correlation was found between the Golombok–Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale – Female Form and the Disconnection, Impaired Autonomy, Other-Directedness, and Unrelenting Standards schema domains. These results indicate that lower levels of sexual satisfaction in women are associated with a higher likelihood of endorsing early maladaptive schemas. Importantly, the Disconnection Schema Domain was found to fully mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and sexual satisfaction, suggesting that the impact of anxious attachment on sexual satisfaction is entirely transmitted through disconnection-related schemas. This finding implies that the Disconnection Schema Domain is more strongly associated with anxious attachment than with sexual satisfaction itself, highlighting its critical role as a mediator in this relationship.

## Limitations

This study has several notable limitations. First, the research was conducted exclusively with female participants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader or more diverse populations.

Additionally, although the sample size of 248 participants is adequate, it remains relatively limited and may affect the statistical power and reliability of the results.

A further limitation lies in the exclusive use of self-report measures, which introduces the potential for response biases. Since data were collected online, factors such as social desirability bias, inattentive responding, or misinterpretation of items cannot be ruled out. Moreover, the fixed order of scale administration—necessitated by the online survey format—may have introduced ordering effects that influenced participants' responses.

Finally, the inclusion of multiple scales with numerous items may have contributed to participant fatigue, potentially reducing attention and the overall quality of the data. This could, in turn, affect the reliability and interpretability of the findings.

## Declarations

### Ethics Committee Approval

Ethical approval was received for this study from the Doğuş University Ethics Committee with decision number 57634 dated 26.01.2024.

## Consent for Publication

Not applicable

## Availability of Data and Materials

Not applicable

## Competing Interests

The author declares that no competing interests in this manuscript.

## Funding

Not applicable.

## Authors' Contributions

KG and EÖ carried out the proposal of the main idea of the research, contributed to the collection of data, KG, EÖ, and performed the analysis and made contributions to the interpretation of analysis results. KG, EÖ contributed to the writing and proofreading of the article. All authors have read and approved the final article.

## References

- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1978). Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bartholomew, K. & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 61(2), 226.
- Büyükoztürk, Ş., Çakmak Kılıç, E., Akgün, Ö. E., Karadeniz, Ş. & Demirel, F. (2016). Bilimsel araştırma yöntemleri [Scientific Research Methods] (21.bs). Ankara: Pegem Akademi.
- Cecero, J. J., Nelson, J. D. & Gillie, J. M. (2004). Tools and tenets of schema therapy: Toward the construct validity of early maladaptive schema questionnaire-research version (EMSQ-R), *Clin Psychol Psychother*, 11(5), 344-357.
- Corduneanu, V. (2019). The role of intelligence in the relationship between attachment styles and cognitive schemas in psychotherapists, *Studia Doctoralia. Psychology and Educational Science*, 10(2), 90-101.
- Dikmen, S.N.T. & Safak, Y. (2021). Effect of early maladaptive schemas and sexual self-schemas in vaginismus, *International Journal of Medical Reviews and Case Reports*, 4(11), 15-15.
- Eğinli, A. T. (2019). Kişiler arası iletişim kuramları [Interpersonal communication theories] (1.bs). Ankara: Nobel Yayınevi.
- Feeney, J.A. & Noller, P. (2004). Attachment and sexuality in close relationships. In J.H. Harvey, A. Wenzel & S. Sprecher (Eds.), *The handbook of sexuality in close relationships* (pp. 183–201). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates,
- Fraley, R.C. & Shaver, P.R. (2000). Adult romantic attachment: Theoretical developments, emerging controversies, and unanswered questions, *Review of general psychology*, 4(2), 132-154.
- Güler, K. & Özgörü, Z. (2022). Investigation of the relationship between early maladaptive schemas, temperament and eating attitude in adults, *Journal of Eating Disorders*, 10(1), 1-11.
- Güler, K. & Yüksel, S. (2021). The relationship between gender roles in women and early maladaptive schemas, *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (AJHSSR)*, 5(11), 07-19.
- Güngör, H.C. (2015). The predictive role of early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles on romantic relationships, *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education*, 5(2), 417-430.
- Hamidi, S., Shareh, H. & Hojjat, S. K. (2015). Comparison of early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles in women with vaginismus and normal women, *The Iranian Journal of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Infertility*, 18(155,156), 9-18.
- Hashemian S.S., Shayan S.H, Omidvar A, Modarres Gharavi M. (2015). Relationship between early maladaptive schemas and sexual satisfaction in working women in Mashhad Ferdowsi University and Shiraz University, Iran. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health*, 17(4), 192-6.
- Hazan, C. & Shaver, P.R. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process, *Journal of Personality Social Psychology*, 52(3), 511-524
- Karantzias, G.C., Younan, R. & Pilkington, P.D. (2022). The associations between early maladaptive schemas and adult attachment styles: A meta-analysis, *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 30(1), 1-20.
- Kaya, Y. & Aydin, A. (2021). The mediating role of early maladaptive schemas in the relationship between attachment and mental health symptoms of university students, *Journal of Adult Development*, 28(1), 15-24.
- Lafortune, D., Girard, M., Bolduc, R., Boislard, M.A. & Godbout, N. (2022). Insecure attachment and sexual satisfaction: a path analysis model integrating sexual mindfulness, sexual anxiety, and sexual self-esteem, *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 48(6), 535-551.
- Lukáč, J. & Popelková, M. (2020). The relationship between early maladaptive schemas and attachmen, *Pomáhajúce Profesie*, 3(1), 5-19.
- Mason, O., Platts, H. & Tyson, M. (2005). Early maladaptive schemas and adult attachment in a UK clinical population, *Psychology Psychotherapy*, 78(Pt 4), 549-564.
- McEvoy, M., McElvaney, R. & Glover, R. (2021). Understanding vaginismus: a biopsychosocial perspective, *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 1-22.
- Mickelson, K.D., Kessler, R.C. & Shaver, P.R. (1997). Adult attachment in a nationally representative sample, *Journal Personality Social Psychology*, 73(5), 1092.
- Mikulincer, M. & Shaver, P. R. (2007). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Mohammadi, S., Borjali, A., Raisi, F. & Yousefi, N. (2021). Early maladaptive schemas, sexual self-esteem, and anxiety in women with orgasmic disorders, *Iran Journal of Psychiatry Behavioral Sciences*, 15(3), 1-7.



- Nobre, P. J. & Pinto-Gouveia, J. (2009). Cognitive schemas associated with negative sexual events: A comparison of men and women with and without sexual dysfunction, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 38(5), 842-851.
- Oliveira, C. & Nobre, P. J. (2013). Cognitive structures in women with sexual dysfunction: The role of early maladaptive schemas, *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 10(7), 1755-1763.
- Ozcan, O., Elbozan Cumurcu, B., Karlidag, R., Unal, S., Aktan Mutlu, E. & Kartalci, S. (2015). Attachment styles in women with vaginismus, *Anadolu Psikiyatri Dergisi*, 16(43), 37-43.
- Popovic, M. (2005). Intimacy and its relevance in human functioning, *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 20(1), 31-49.
- Roels, R. & Janssen, E. (2020). Sexual and relationship satisfaction in young, heterosexual couples: The role of sexual frequency and sexual communication, *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 17(9), 1643-1652.
- Rust, J. & Golombok, S. (1986). The GRISS: a psychometric instrument for the assessment of sexual dysfunction, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 15(2), 157-165.
- Selcuk, E., Zayas, V. & Hazan, C. (2010). Beyond satisfaction: The role of attachment in marital functioning, *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 2(4), 258-279.
- Selçuk, E., Günaydin, G., Sümer, N. & Uysal, A. (2005). Yetişkin bağlanma boyutları için yeni bir ölçüm: yakın ilişkilerde yaşıtlar envanteri-ı'nın Türk örnekleminde psikometrik açıdan değerlendirilmesi [a new scale developed to measure adult attachment dimensions: experiences in close relationships-revised (ecr-r)- psychometric evaluation in a Turkish sample], *Türk Psikoloji Yazıları*, 8(16), 1-11.
- Simard, V., Moss, E. & Pascuzzo, K. (2011). Early maladaptive schemas and child and adult attachment: A 15-year longitudinal study, *Psychology Psychotherapy*, 84(4), 349-366.
- Simpson, J. A. & Rholes, W. S. (2019). Adult attachment orientations and well-being during the transition to parenthood, *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 25, 47-52.
- Soygüt, G. P., Karaosmanoğlu, A. & Çakır, Z. (2009). Erken dönem uyumsuz şemaların değerlendirilmesi: Young şema ölçeği kısa form-3'ün psikometrik özelliklerine ilişkin bir inceleme. [Assessment of early maladaptive schemas: A psychometric study of the turkish young schema questionnaire-short form-3]. *Türk Psikiyatri Dergisi*, 20(1), 75-84.
- Stefanović Stanojević, T. & Nedjeljković, J. (2012). Attachment patterns from the perspective of early maladaptive schemas, *Ljetopis Socijalnog Rada*, 19(1), 95-118.
- Tuğrul, C., Öztan, N. & Kabakçı, E. (1993). Golombok-Rust Cinsel Doyum Ölçeği'nin standardizasyon çalışması [Standardization of Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Inventory], *Türk Psikiyatri Dergisi*, 4(2), 83-89.
- Unlubilgin, E., Tetik, S., Aksoy, I., Yuksel, D. & Tekin, O.M. (2021). Relationship between adult separation anxiety and attachment styles and vaginismus, *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 18(10), 1752-1758.
- Young, J.E., Klosko, J.S. & Weishaar, M.E. (2019). Şema terapi [Schema Therapy] (4.bs). (T. Veli, Çev.) İstanbul: Litera Yayıncılık.
- Young, J. E., Klosko, J. S., & Weishaar, M. E. (2003). Schema therapy. New York: Guilford, ss. 254, 653-658.