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The Importance and the Potential Predictors of the Construct of Commitment for the Romantic Relationships of Young Adults

Genç Yetişkinlerin Romantik İlişkilerinde Bağlılık Kavramının Önemi ve Bağlılığın Olası Yordayıcıları

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ÖZ. Genç yetişkinlik dönemi, bireylerin yakın ilişki inanç, tutum ve alışkanlıklarını oluşturdukları, ve bu tutum ve alışkanlıklarının evlilik ilişkisi gibi gelecekteki daha ciddi ilişkilerinin temelini oluşturduğu son derece önemli bir gelişimsel evredir. Dünya genelinde artan boşanma oranları ve bunun aile yapısı, çocukların ve yetişkinlerin ruh sağlığı üzerindeki olumsuz etkileri göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, gelecek nesillerin ruh sağlığı adına tedbirler alınması gerekmektedir. Ulusal çapta yapılan bazı boylamsal çalışmalar, ilişkilerde bağlılık eksikliğinin boşanmanın bir numaralı sebebi olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu yazı, genç yetişkinlerin romantik ilişkilerinde bağlılık kavramının önemi ve bu kavramın olası yordayıcıları konusunda literatür özeti sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Mevcut kuram ve araştırmalar ışığında, bağlılığın önemli bir bilişsel yordayıcısı olarak bağlanma stilleri üzerinde özellikle durulmuştur.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Romantik İlişkiler, Genç Yetişkinlik, Bağlılık, Bağlanma Stilleri

ABSTRACT. Young adulthood is an important developmental period during which the individuals tend to create their relationship beliefs, attitudes and habits which constitute the basis of their future serious relationships such as marriage. Considering the increasing divorce rates all around the world and its harmful impact on family life, children's and adults' mental health, cautions should be taken for the psychological health of future generations. Some longitudinal nationwide studies indicate that lack of commitment is the number one reason for divorce. This paper aims to review the importance of the commitment for the romantic relationships of young adults and the possible predictors of commitment. In the light of theories and research, this paper specifically emphasizes attachment styles as a significant cognitive factor to explain the construct of commitment.
Keywords: Romantic Relationships, Young Adulthood, Commitment, Attachment Styles

INTRODUCTION

According to Erikson (1968), one of the crucial developmental tasks of young adulthood is to establish and sustain a committed romantic relationship, which in turn help the individuals establish more mature and serious adult relationships, and promote their mental health throughout the life span. Several factors have been proposed to explain the predictors of commitment in romantic relationships and attachment styles, which has been comprehensively conceptualized in attachment theory, has been considered as one of the most promising individual and interpersonal factor in relation to commitment in romantic relationships since it is one of the earliest schemas about self and others. This paper aims to present a review on the literature on attachment styles and commitment in romantic relationships of young adults.

Conceptualization of Commitment

Commitment is a complex phenomenon defined and measured differently by several researchers at different studies. According to the interdependence theory of Kelly (1979, as cited in Agnew et. al., 1998), dependence is greater to the degree that a relationship provides good outcomes and to the degree that the outcomes available in alternative relationships are poor. Hence, commitment was mainly defined as dependence. Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow (1986) made an extensive definition of commitment as having high satisfaction, low alternative quality, and high investment size in the relationship. Hence, they proposed three bases of dependence rather than two. In fact, in a meta-analysis of 52 studies, Le and Agnew (2003) reported that satisfaction, investments, and quality of alternatives accounted for 61% of the variance in commitment.

Although this approach, which is basically known as investment model, was used extensively in the literature, several following researchers challenged the model and argued that these three components may constitute dependence in the relationship, however, being dependent does not necessarily mean commitment (Agnew et. al., 1998). They claimed that dependence is a structural property whereas commitment is a subjective experience that dependent individuals experience on a daily basis. Therefore, although

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commitment develops as a result of high satisfaction, poor alternatives, and high investments, commitment is more than a simple numerical summary of dependence. In sum, Rusbult's definition of commitment - investment model- was criticized as being very structural and mechanical. It was proposed that couples' feeling that they have to stay in the relationship may not mean that they are psychologically committed to their relationship.

With the claim that dependence produces some sort of commitment but commitment cannot be reduced to dependence, Agnew and colleagues (1998) defined commitment as a psychological state which is beyond structural dependence. According to their definition, commitment has three components: *a) Conative component* (defined as intent to persist and being intrinsically motivated to continue the relationship in the future) *b) Cognitive component* (long term orientation - strong assumption that in the distant future the relationship will remain intact) *c) Affective component* (psychological attachment to each other - one's wellbeing is affected by the other's wellbeing).

Another definition of commitment was proposed by Johnson (1991; cited in Adams & Jones, 1997; Arriaga & Agnew, 2001). He defined commitment as causes of relationship persistence and listed his categories as follows: *a) Personal commitment* (the person stays in the relationship because he wants to do so), *b) Moral commitment* (ought to do so), *c) Structural commitment* (have no choice but to do so).

Having a similar standing to Johnson (1991, cited in Adams & Jones, 1997; Arriaga & Agnew, 2001), Adams and Jones (1997) also recommended the same three primary dimensions for defining commitment, with slightly different subtitles: *(a) Attraction component* based on devotion, satisfaction, and love; *(b) Moral-normative component* based on a sense of personal responsibility for maintaining the marriage and on the belief that marriage is an important social and religious institution; and *(c) Constraining component* based on the fear of social, financial, and emotional costs of relationship termination.

A simplified and an equally comprehensive definition of commitment was proposed by Stanley and Markman (1992). In their definition, commitment has two components: *a) Dedication* (personal commitment) *b) Constraints* (structural commitment). Dedication refers to the individual's desire for the relationship to be long-term, to have an identity as a couple, and to make the relationship a priority (Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004). While dedication defines why the person wants to stay in the relationship, constraints define the reasons why the person does not want to leave his relationship because of certain obligations and pressures (Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004). In the original theory (Stanley & Markman, 1992), constraints were divided into three in itself: i) perceived constraints (e.g. social pressure), ii) material constraints (e.g. owning a pet, gym membership, owning a house together), iii) felt constraints (feeling trapped). Their later studies showed that high dedication, high perceived constraint, high material constraints and less felt constraint predicted higher commitment, each of these four factors having a unique effect in predicting relationship break-up (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010).

As suggested by these researchers, it can be inferred that commitment is a multifaceted concept. Despite the variety of definitions, romantic commitment is principally and largely conceptualized as a cognitive construct, as the intention to maintain a couple relationship in the future, despite its costs or benefits and possible fluctuations in positive feelings (Dandurand, Bouaziz, & LaFontaine, 2013). Actually Surra and Hughes (1997) found that in relationships with high interpersonal commitment, the partners' commitment reaches a high level and stay there consistently over time. Whereas in a relatively uncommitted relationship (or in event-driven commitments rather than interpersonal commitment), the level of commitment can reach high levels but may fluctuate dramatically over time with sharp downturns.

Predictors of Commitment in the Literature

Because of the importance of the concept for close relationships, there is a vast literature on predictors of commitment. Many studies have investigated a range of variables including individual difference dimensions and interdependence processes as predictors of commitment (Etcheverry et. al., 2013).

First variable that should be mentioned while displaying studies on commitment is relationship satisfaction. Although they are highly correlated, and although some of the theories like investment model takes satisfaction as part of the commitment construct, the literature distinguishes between these two concepts as satisfaction being positivity of affect or attraction to one's relationship and commitment being the tendency to maintain a relationship and to feel psychologically attached to it (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986). The literature is quite consistent in the finding that commitment is positively associated with

satisfaction though some studies revealed that satisfaction is sometimes largely irrelevant to commitment for certain kinds of relationships (e.g., in abusive relationships) (Rusbult & Martz,1995). However, in general it is mostly argued that satisfaction (quality) and commitment (strength and stability), although conceptually distinct, are highly positively correlated both within persons and between couples (Le & Agnew, 2003) suggesting that they may be part of the same latent variable (Givertz et. al., 2013).

A second group of studies focused on obligations rather than satisfaction to predict commitment in close relationships. Cox and colleagues (1997) studied the effects of different forms of "obligation to persist" on commitment. In their study they defined *personal prescription* as beliefs that support persisting in a relationship and *social prescription* as the belief that significant network members support persisting, for either moral or pragmatic reasons. Their results revealed that social prescription accounted for unique variance in commitment. The authors argue that one explanation of personal prescription for not having a significant effect may be due to measurement limitations since they measured this concept with a single item rather than a comprehensive scale.

A third group of studies focused on the relationship style to predict commitment in close relationships. Actually, there are several studies showing that commitment is associated with relationship types. An example study of a national sample in USA conducted with couples who lived together before marriage revealed that they had a lower commitment than couples who are married without cohabitating before marriage and that their commitment level was still lower after getting married when compared with their counterparts who never cohabited before getting married (Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004). In the literature, this fact is known as *cohabitation effect*. The researchers further underline that both current cohabitation and having cohabited before marriage were associated with more alternative monitoring and less dedication, it other words less commitment. There may be several mechanisms to explain this cohabitation effect. First of all, as the authors stated, it is already an old finding that people who have less commitment to marriage institution tend to choose cohabitation. Also, constraints are much less in a cohabitation relationship, so it may be easier to break up. This study also revealed that both premarital cohabitation and nonmarital cohabitation were associated with lower levels of interpersonal commitment to partners. Married partners were more dedicated even after controlling for relationship satisfaction. Most significant finding of the study is that the level of the male partner's dedication was significantly lower in married couples who lived together prior to marriage than those who did not. These men who fear commitment may choose to cohabit before marrying, perhaps as a way to delay the greater obligation of marriage. In sum, cohabitation effect can simply be defined as the fact that living together prior to marriage is associated with lower marital satisfaction, poorer quality communication, lower levels of interpersonal commitment especially for men, and greater marital instability than those who did not cohabit premaritally (Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004; Rhoades et. al., 2006; Stanley et. al., 2010).

As it can be inferred from the given literature, predictors of commitment were mostly sought amongst relational variables such as satisfaction, obligations in the given relationship and relationship style. But the literature on individual factors is much less comprehensive and the relationships seem to be weaker. To start with a comprehensive summary, in a meta-analysis of 52 studies, Le and Agnew (2003) reported that the components of the investment model showed little variation as a function of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or relationship length.

There used to be a little controversy about gender in the literature. To explain, there are some study findings yielding that women were more committed than men in dating relationships (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999). It was reported that women were higher in investments. Nevertheless, a more recent study conducted with engaged, married or cohabitating couples showed that females did not rate themselves more highly in commitment than males (Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). Actually, there was a trend for males to score higher. These data suggest that men, on average, feel as committed in their marriages as do women. However, this does not mean that males and females act out their felt commitment in similar ways. For instance, there is clear evidence that male commitment dynamics are far more associated with their attitudes about sacrificing for their partners than are females' commitment levels (Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002).

Another individual factor that is studied to explain commitment is parental divorce and there is a strong research supporting the intergenerational transmission of divorce (Adams & Jones, 1997; Amato & Deboer, 2001; Segrin, Taylor, & Altman, 2005). Whitton and colleagues (2008) found that women's, but not men's parental divorce was associated with lower relationship commitment, even when controlling for the influence

of recalled inter-parental conflict and premarital relationship adjustment. Their finding indicated that parental divorce, but not parental conflict, is linked with lower commitment. This was consistent with earlier research stating stronger impact of parental divorce on daughters' than sons' risk for divorce (Amato, 1996). A more recent research about parents' marital status compared three different parental marital status; namely, married, divorced and parents who have never married and found that children of the parents who have never married had the lowest commitment in their own adult unmarried dating relationships (Rhoades et. al., 2012).

The problem with these individual factors is they have very little explanatory power over commitment. As an individual factor, this review proposes adult attachment styles as a predictor with high potential to explain commitment in romantic relationships and the related literature will be summarized below.

Conceptualization of Attachment Style

Adult attachment theory specifies three attachment styles: anxious, avoidant, and secure attachment. Although attachment styles used to be described and measured with these categories, most recent research tend to define two continuous attachment dimensions; namely, anxiety and avoidance (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Secure attachment has been operationally defined as low scores on both dimensions. People who are securely attached to their romantic partner tend to feel emotionally close and intimate with their partner, and believe that their closeness and intimacy is and will be adequately reciprocated by their partner (Hadden, Smith, & Webster, 2014). They find it easy to trust and rely on others, and they engage in more adaptive, constructive relationship strategies (Joel, MacDonald, & Shimotomai, 2011).

Insecure attachment (high anxiety and/or high avoidance) in general is believed to result from experiences with emotionally unavailable attachment figures in early life which is transferred to adult relationships via cognitive schemas about self and others (Etcheverry et. al., 2013). However, the dynamics of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance are quite different from each other which will be explained below.

Anxious attachment develops from inconsistent responsiveness, and thus an uncertainty that others can be trusted or relied on. Anxious individuals tend to be extra alert to signs of distress or separation from partners (Hadden, Smith, & Webster, 2014). In adult life, the anxiety dimension is characterized by a preoccupation with the partner's accessibility and excessive worry about rejection and abandonment; a lack of confidence in one's own value as a relationship partner and in one' capacity to regulate a partnership effectively (Morgan & Shaver, 1999; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). And anxious attachment is associated with chronic rumination, worry, and doubt about the availability of one's romantic partner and anxious individuals are prone to more emotional highs and lows, conflicts of greater frequency and severity, and lower levels of trust (Joel, MacDonald, & Shimotomai, 2011).

Avoidant attachment develops from neglect or consistent unresponsive attachment figures. Avoidant people believe that their partners cannot be relied on, and show a disinterest in relationships, along with a heightened desire for self-reliance (Hadden, Smith, & Webster, 2014). In adult life, the avoidance dimension is characterized by being uncomfortable with closeness and interdependence; and a preference to remain highly independent, self-contained and self-reliant. (Morgan & Shaver, 1999; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Their romantic relationships are vested with less interdependency, less intimacy, less self-disclosure and less trust (Joel, MacDonald, & Shimotomai, 2011).

Regarding gender differences in attachment, earlier research report that with the exception of a dismissive attachment style where men tend to score higher than women, attachment style is not associated with sex, age, or relationship status (Ross, McKim, & DiTommaso, 2006). However, in a more comprehensive recent study Guidice (2011) conducting a meta-analysis of sex differences in the avoidance and anxiety dimensions of adult romantic attachment based on 113 samples from 100 studies found that overall, males showed higher avoidance and lower anxiety than females. Sex differences were much larger in community samples than in college samples. Sex differences in anxiety peaked in young adulthood, whereas those in avoidance increased through the life course.

Apart from the possible gender differences in attachment styles, another area of debate in the literature is the stability of the attachment style as a trait. Mikulincer and Shaver (2007; as stated in Ehrenberg, Robertson, & Pringle, 2012) suggested that attachment style is relatively stable because people tend to look for behavior that confirms their beliefs and expectations, which then serves to perpetuate those beliefs,

including beliefs or views on marital commitment. However, there are also some researchers (Wittenborn, Keiley, & Sprenkle, 2012; Wittenborn, Faber, & Keiley, 2012) in this area claiming that attachment can be changed.

To summarize some of the main studies about the stability of the concept, in a review, Hadden, Smith and Webster, (2014) reported that there is little evidence for genetic correlates of adult attachment aside from some modest support for a gene (HTR2A rs6313) x environment (maternal sensitivity over time) interaction for avoidant attachment. Also, they report small associations between parent-child attachment security and later adult attachment. It was concluded that the link between childhood and adulthood attachment is modest at best, and thus fairly mutable over time.

When changes do occur in adult attachment, they are likely to be the result of important relationship experiences (Wittenborn, Keiley, & Sprenkle, 2012), updating from prior adult romantic relationships. Attachment can change within the same relationship as well either through changes in relationship conditions, such as the transition to parenthood, or through learning. There are also studies showing that attachment can change within the same relationship via some sort of relationship education programs that are given at times of transition to marriage or commitment (Wittenborn, Faber, & Keiley, 2012; Wittenborn, Keiley, & Sprenkle, 2012).

Some of the debate about the stability of the attachment results from the fact that adult attachment has been conceptualized in two different ways in the literature; attachment style as a trait (attachment orientation), or attachment that develops in the current adult relationship (normative attachment development).

To begin with the first one, most of the studies consider attachment as a permanent trait factor that people bring into the relationship. Actually, this is the origin of the attachment theory assuming that the schemas we develop about self and others during early childhood years become our general cognitive schemas and determine our behavioral tendencies as it was explained before.

However, there are also studies, although relatively much fewer in number, which define attachment as something that is created within the given adult relationship. To explain this normative process of attachment, some longitudinal studies showed that in adulthood, romantic partners typically take over the role of primary attachment figures for all attachment components in the following sequence; first they utilize their partner for proximity, then as a safe haven and finally as a secure base (Fagundes & Schindler, 2012).

Studies on Attachment and Commitment

Research on relationship between attachment and commitment is limited and complicated. It is relatively clear that secure attachment is associated with higher commitment in romantic relationships (Simpson, 1990), marriages and remarriages (Ehrenberg, Robertson, & Pringle, 2012). Studying specifically with young adults, Keelan, Dion and Dion (1994) examined the fluctuations in commitment over a four month period and even in this comparatively short period of time, insecure participants recorded decreases in commitment while secure participants showed almost no such decreases.

Several studies report that insecure attachment in general is associated with lower commitment (Givertz et. al., 2013) and these associations are stronger (more negative) for avoidance than for anxiety (Hadden, Smith, &Webster, 2014). But the unique dynamics of attachment anxiety and avoidance requires more investigation.

In earlier studies, it was roughly reported that attachment anxiety is associated with strong willingness for commitment while attachment avoidance is associated with less willingness for commitment (Morgan & Shaver, 1999). In a later work, Schindler, Fagundes, and Murdock (2010) stated that attachment avoidance, but not anxiety was predictive of not entering into committed dating relationships. However it is also known that avoidant individuals are perceived as less desirable partners than both anxious and secure individuals (Klohnen & Luo, 2003). Hence the findings should be interpreted cautiously. Avoidance was associated with less likelihood to commit, but it was not associated to the likelihood to date. Actually it was already found out that avoidant individuals are more likely to have promiscuous sexual relations with multiple partners (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

Li and Chan (2012) had a meta-analytic review on adult attachment and relationship quality based on 73 previous studies. Their findings revealed that both anxiety and avoidance were detrimental to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of relationship quality. Compared with anxiety, avoidance was

more negatively associated with general commitment. In contrast, anxiety was more positively associated with general conflict in relationships. Anxiety was not significantly related to commitment which was theoretically expected by the researchers considering their mixed feelings about connectedness in romantic relationships.

Since the studies on global commitment reveals mixed findings, there are several studies specifically focusing on different components of commitment. In a recent study on adult attachment and commitment (Ho et. al., 2012), it was found that attachment anxiety was positively linked to structural commitment (staying in the relationship considering the costs of break-up), whereas attachment avoidance was negatively related to personal commitment (choice to be in the relationship because of relational rewards).

In another recent study attempting to show the mediating role of commitment between attachment and satisfaction, the results revealed that anxious attachment was related with higher dedication and constraint commitment while avoidant attachment was negatively linked with dedication and no relation with constraint commitment; and dedication but not constraint commitment predicted satisfaction (Dandurand, Bouaziz, & Lafontaine, 2013).

In one study examining the relation between attachment and the investment model, Etcheverry and colleagues (2013) reported that satisfaction, alternatives, and investments mediated the associations between attachment insecurity and relationship commitment. Specifically, the prediction of commitment by avoidance was mediated by satisfaction, alternatives, and investments, and the prediction of commitment by anxiety was mediated by satisfaction and investments. This mediated model was supported for men and women, proximal and long-distance relationships, and college student and community samples. For directs effects, avoidance significantly and negatively predicted relationship commitment while anxiety directly predicted relationship termination. Researchers also reported that attachment avoidance predicts investments (structural commitments) better for the community sample than the college sample (Etcheverry et. al., 2013).

In examining the relationships of attachment, social rewards, threats and the investment model of commitment, Gere and colleagues (2013) found that attachment avoidance was uniquely associated with lower perceptions of social rewards (i.e., connection and intimacy) whereas attachment anxiety was uniquely associated with stronger perceptions of social threat (i.e., rejection and negative evaluation). Stronger reward perceptions were associated with higher commitment, investment, and satisfaction, as well as lower quality of alternatives. Stronger threat perceptions were related to lower satisfaction and higher investment but not necessarily with overall commitment. The researchers speculate that the unique association between attachment anxiety and higher threat perceptions imply that attachment anxiety may be particularly important in the establishment of trust between relationship partners. In contrast, the unique association between attachment avoidance and lower reward perceptions imply that attachment avoidance may play an important role in inhibiting the development of relationship commitment.

Independent of how studies define the global commitment in romantic relationships, it seems pretty clear that there are different mechanisms for anxiety and avoidance to effect commitment. Therefore, several studies focus specifically on only one of these dimensions of attachment insecurity; namely, they focus on either anxiety or avoidance. These specific studies will be summarized below.

Attachment Avoidance and Commitment

To begin with the findings regarding attachment avoidance, there is a strong literature indicating that avoidance is associated with commitment aversion (Ho et. al., 2012). It is postulated by several researchers that avoidant people tend to reject intimacy or closeness, and protect themselves from disappointments and rejection by others, maintaining a sense of independence and invulnerability (Saucedo-Coy, & McInnes-Miller, 2014). They may struggle to trust partners, often expecting future hurt and abandonment. And they are likely to make destructive choices in intimate partnerships and struggle with relationship commitment in general.

In a specific study on attachment avoidance and commitment, Birnie and colleagues (2009) theorized that avoidant individuals have developed an interpersonal script to avert the pain of others' inevitably proving to be unreliable and undependable. As they defined, scripts are hypothesized cognitive structures for the sequence of events that are typically performed in a specific situation. In this study, commitment aversion was operationally defined as an absence of positive commitment-related acts, such as moving in together, as well as the presence of negative acts that undermine commitment, such as becoming interested in someone else. Results of the study revealed that; attachment avoidance was associated with expectation of relationship

failure and commitment aversion; commitment aversion was associated with expected relationship failure, and it was a significant unique predictor of relationship failure even after accounting for avoidance; and it mediated the association between avoidance and expected relationship failure.

Another recent study on attachment avoidance, infidelity and commitment found that people with high levels of avoidance had more permissive attitudes towards infidelity, expressed greater daily interest in meeting alternatives to their current relationship partner, perceived the alternatives more positively, and engaged in more fidelity over time (DeWall et. al., 2011). This effect was mediated by lower levels of commitment (neither satisfaction nor closeness mediated this relationship). Hence the researchers argued that personal commitment is so important that the avoidant people's infidelity was independent of relationship satisfaction. However, the authors add that these findings do not suggest that avoidant individuals are at risk for engaging infidelity out of a desire to hurt their partners. Instead, people high in attachment avoidance appear to be deficient in an inhibitory force since they lack strong interpersonal commitment.

Attachment Anxiety and Commitment

As there are studies mainly focusing on attachment avoidance as summarized above, there are also several studies specifically focusing on attachment anxiety which tends to give more mixed results than attachment avoidance in terms of its effect on commitment. Adding more confusion to the findings, some of these studies define commitment as simply staying in the relationship while some others define break-up (relationship termination) as a lack of commitment both of which contribute to the lack of clarity in the attachment anxiety and commitment literature. Therefore the findings in the literature should be interpreted carefully.

Studies focusing on attachment anxiety and satisfaction claim that anxiously attached individuals invest more to secure their relationship. They perceive a higher cost for quitting their relationship and more likely to feel "trapped" in their relationship and thus have lower satisfaction (Ho et. al., 2012). However, findings about their reactions to this reduced satisfaction are unclear.

Some researchers claim that anxious individuals stay in relationships even when their needs are not met since being in any relationship, regardless of its quality, may be preferable to being alone for them (Slotter & Finkel, 2009). On the contrary, some others argue that although anxious individuals are more emotionally dependent on their partners, they typically have the shortest relationship (Feeney & Noller, 1990).

As an attempt to explain their having the shortest relationships, it was speculated that anxiously attached individuals tend to perceive harmless relationship events as negative, and actual negative events as downright catastrophic (Joel, MacDonald, & Shimotomai, 2011). From a risk-regulation perspective, this should make committing to one's romantic relationships difficult, despite a desire for such commitment.

Joel, MacDonald and Shimotomai (2011) summarizing the literature in their review postulated that anxiously attached individuals remain characteristically ambivalent throughout adulthood and they define ambivalence as holding strong positive and negative views on an issue simultaneously. They further added that anxiously attached individuals are particularly likely to break up and get back together with the same romantic partner implying that they are ambivalent about commitment. To speculate more on this ambivalence, it is argued that anxious attachment was associated with greater insecurity in partners' affections and lower satisfaction with relationships each of which appeared to place downward pressure on levels of commitment. On the other hand, anxiously attached individuals were more likely to feel they need their partners which appeared to create an upward force on commitment.

There are also studies focusing on strategies that people with high attachment anxiety use in their relationships and how their partners react to these. Overall and colleagues (2014) had an observational study and they found that anxious individuals were rated by objective coders as exhibiting more guilt-induction strategies during conflict, which led to increased partner guilt. In this way, anxious individuals experienced more stable perceptions of their partner's commitment. Unfortunately, these benefits were accompanied by significant declines in the partner's relationship satisfaction. To explain their findings, researchers state that individuals high in attachment anxiety yearn for closeness and acceptance but they have deep-seated fears that they will be rejected or abandoned. Such fears create hypersensitivity to rejection and undermine coping when faced with relationship challenges. Anxious individuals experience more intense and prolonged distress and behave in less constructive ways during conflict. In the end, such destructive reactions tend to elicit

aggressive and rejecting responses in the partner, which prevents desired closeness and is likely to foster dissatisfaction in both partners.

CONCLUSIONS

As can be seen in the literature, attachment style seems to be an important construct to explain commitment in romantic relationships. Although it is clear that secure attachment is directly linked to higher commitment in relationships, the mechanisms of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance is less clear and more complicated. These constructs can be studied further with different surveys to explain the relationship between the two. Understanding the nature of this relationship seems crucial to promote the mental health of young adults. As it was clearly stated in the literature, university students apply to university counseling centers mostly for the difficulties that they experience in their romantic relationships (Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999). Romantic relationships form the core of the life of young adults (Demir, 2008) and it is the most important psycho-social task of university students aged between 18-26 (Erikson, 1968; Kuttler & Greca, 2004 as stated by Küçükarslan & Gizir, 2014). Because the perceptions and expectations that are produced by first romantic relationships provide perspectives for future relationships, these relations determine both the quality of intimate relationships that will be established during adulthood and an individual's partner choice throughout the marriage process (Furman, 2002; Le et. al., 2010).

In the light of the findings of these studies, preventive work can be done with the university students through psycho-education programs so that they can have more committed and healthier relationships which constitute an important part of being a psychologically healthy adult (Coie et. al., 1993; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1993; Beach, Smith, & Fincham, 1994; Forthofer et. al., 1996; Sinclair, & Nelson, 1998; Dandurand, Bouaziz, & Lafontaine, 2013).

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