Mediating role of rejection sensitivity between borderline personality features and self-silencing, body image coping strategies

Haydeh Faraji[1] (ID), Buse Duran[2] (ID), Songül Oğur[3] (ID)

Abstract

In individuals with borderline personality traits, there is a profound sense of worthlessness and negative perceptions of body image. Additionally, there is an intense need for others and a constant fear of rejection. These conditions can lead to uncertainties and conflicts in relationships. Individuals who exhibit borderline traits in intimate relationships may overreact, expecting their spouse to reject them and misinterpreting their partner's actions. They may exhibit clingy behavior or change themselves to avoid ending the relationship due to fear of abandonment. Body image encompasses thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors related to physical appearance. When individuals develop a negative body image, they may hide their bodies or exert excessive control. Self-silencing is often a coping mechanism to avoid conflicts, maintain relationships, or feel secure, and it can significantly impact romantic relationships. This study aims to understand the relationship between borderline personality traits, self-silencing, and body image coping strategies and to examine the mediating role of rejection sensitivity in this relationship. This research was applied based on the relational screening model. Convenience sampling was preferred in the sample selection. The study sample consists of 400 individuals over 18 living in Istanbul. Borderline Personality Questionnaire (BPQ), Silencing the Self Scale (STSS), Body Image Coping Strategies Inventory (BICSI), and Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (A-RSS) were applied to the participants with a Socio-Demographic Information Form prepared by the researcher. The data obtained were analyzed using the SPSS 25 program, and Pearson correlation analysis, independent sample t-test, and ANOVA were used. As a result of the findings, rejection sensitivity has a partial mediator role in the relationship between borderline personality traits and self-silencing, rejection sensitivity has a full mediator role between borderline personality traits and appearance fixing, and rejection sensitivity has a partial mediator role between borderline personality traits and avoidance of body image coping strategies has been determined. The study results reveal that the increase in rejection sensitivity may cause the individuals to avoid expressing themselves and showing their perceived physical flaws and to try to correct the perceived physical flaws, thus showing various forms of avoidance. Considering the reinforcing effect of avoidance on behavior, the importance of psychotherapy studies targeting rejection sensitivity to prevent the deepening of existing problems is understood.

Öz

Borderline kişilik özellikleri ile kendini susturma, beden imgesi baş etme stratejileri arasında reddedilme duyarlılığının aracı rolü

Sınır kişilik özelliklerine sahip bireylerde, derin bir değersizlik duygusu ve beden imgesinde negatif algılar görülür. Aynı zamanda, yoğun bir şekilde ötekine duyulan ihtiyaç ve sürekli reddedilme korkusu yaşanır. Bu durumlar, ilişkilerde belirsizliklere ve çatışmalara yol açabilir. Yakın ilişkilerde, borderline özelliklere sahip bireyler reddedilme korkusuyla ilişkiyi bitirmemek için kendilerini değiştirme veya yapışma davranışları sergileyebilirler. Beden imgesi, kişinin fiziksel görünümüyle ilgili düşüncelerini, algılamalarını, tutumlarını ve davranışlarını kapsar. Olumsuz bir beden imgesi geliştiren kişiler, bedenlerini gizleme veya aşırı kontrol gibi davranışlar sergileyebilirler. Kendini susturma, genellikle çatışmalardan kaçmak, ilişkiyi sürdürmek ya da güvende hissetmek amacıyla gerçekleştirilen bir davranıştır ve romantik ilişkilerde etkili olabilir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, borderline kişilik özellikleri ile kendini susturma, beden imgesi baş etme stratejileri arasındaki ilişkiyi anlamak ve bu ilişkide reddedilme duyarlılığının aracı rolünün incelenmesidir. Bu araştırmada ilişkisel tarama modeli kullanılmış ve örneklem seçiminde kolay ulaşılabilir örnekleme yöntemi tercih edilmiştir. Araştırmanın örneklemi İstanbul ilinde yaşayan 18 yaş üzeri 400 bireyden oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılara araştırmacı tarafından hazırlanan Sosyodemografik Bilgi Formu ile Borderline Kişilik Ölçeği (BKÖ), Kendini Susturma Ölçeği (KSÖ), Beden İmgesi Baş Etme Stratejileri Ölçeği (BİBSÖ) ve Yetişkin Reddedilme Duyarlılığı Ölçeği (Y-RDÖ) uygulanmış, elde edilen veriler SPSS 25 programı ile analiz edilmiştir ve Pearson korelasyon analizi, bağımsız gruplar t-testi ve ANOVA kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular sonucu, borderline kişilik özellikleri ile görünüşü düzeltme arasında reddedilme duyarlılığının tam aracı rolü olduğu, borderline kişilik özellikleri ile kendini susturma arasındaki ilişkide reddedilme duyarlılığının kısmi aracı rolü olduğu, borderline kişilik özellikleri ile beden imgesi baş etme stratejilerinden kaçınma arasında reddedilme duyarlılığının kısmi aracı rolü olduğu belirlenmiştir. Çalışma sonuçları, reddedilme duyarlılığındaki artışın bireyin kendini ifadeden ve algılanan bedensel kusurlarını göstermekten kaçınma ve algılanan bedensel kusurları düzeltme çabası içine girerek çeşitli biçimlerde kaçınmalar gösterebileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Kaçınmanın davranış üzerindeki pekiştirici etkisi göz önüne alındığında mevcut sorunların derinleşmesini engellemek adına reddedilme duyarlılığının hedeflendiği psikoterapi çalışmalarının önemi anlaşılmaktadır.

Borderline personality disorder is a disorder characterized by instability and loss of functionality in the self, emotions, and relationships (APA, 2013). Individuals with borderline personality traits (BPT) may meet the feature clusters of borderline personality disorder at lower levels, but these features may not be high enough and common enough to be diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (Faraji & Güler, 2021). People with BPT may experience intense feelings of worthlessness, inadequacy, and chronic uncertainty in their relationships, affects, and sense of identity (Kring et al., 2017; Leichsenring et al., 2024).

Rejection sensitivity (RS) causes people to have an anxious expectation of rejection and negatively affects their close relationships (Worley & Samp, 2018). Individuals with BPT may believe that they will be rejected in all their relationships, especially in their close relationships, and may react intensely by perceiving the uncertain behavior of their partner as rejection (Priebe et al., 2022). They may often ruminate about their partner's thoughts and feelings, which may be far from realistic (Faraji & Bilğiş, 2023; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). People with RS may associate their partners' cold and distant behavior with their inadequacies (Breines & Ayduk, 2015). As a result, they may exhibit clinging behavior by fixing their appearance or behavior to prevent their relationship from ending (Faraji & Tezcan, 2023; Wolchik et al., 2002).

The German author Schilder initially developed the idea of "body image" as a significant and essential psychological phenomenon in his 1935 English-language monograph The Image and Appearance of the Human Body. Schilder defined body image as "the mental image of our own body, that is, how the body appears to ourselves," in his monograph. The concept has recently been broadened to include "the mental image we have of the size, shape, and form of our bodies; as well as our emotions regarding these attributes and our individual body parts" (Slade, 1988). When people develop a negative body image, they exhibit behaviors such as hiding their bodies or excessive control on it (Karazsia et al., 2017; Öngören, 2015; Swami & Voracek, 2013). The person's social life is also affected by this understanding, and this causes avoidant behaviors that can lead to negative consequences such as social isolation (Sklar, 2017). Cash et al. (2005) states that people develop three strategies to cope with negative body image: avoidance, positive logical acceptance, and appearance fixing. Appearance fixing and avoidance strategies are people's main strategies to cope with body image (Walker & Murray, 2012). Appearance fixing and avoidance serve as security behaviors used by individuals with body anxiety to prevent or impose these concerns (Summers & Cougle, 2018). People either regulate the aspects in which they are flawed or avoid them altogether (Cash et al., 2005).

Individuals with a negative self-perception are more prone to self-silencing (Kiraz & Onnar, 2024). People with BPT who struggle with rejection sensiti-vity and negative body image have difficulty coping with the problems they experience in interpersonal relationships and self-silencing seems like one of them (Faraji & Tezcan, 2023; Lazarus & Cheavens, 2017). Self-silencing is an attitude generally undertaken to escape a conflict, maintain a relationship, or provide a sense of physical or psychological safety. This behavior occurs mainly in relational processes (Birchler & Webb, 2020). The factor that most affects self-silencing is thought to be romantic relationships (Calvillo & Roberts, 2021). In romantic relationships, since the emotional commitment and closeness between couples is higher than in other types of relationships, greater importance is attached to maintaining the relationship, and self-silencing behavior can be seen more frequently and is used as a strategy to maintain a relationship for many couples (Kato et al., 2016). However, rejection sensitivity predicts self-silencing, even in friendships (Thomas & Bowker, 2015). One of the biggest threats to the individuals who silences themselves, whose primary goal is to continue their relationship, is the loneliness they will experience after the relationship ends (Morrison et al., 2019). People state that they want to avoid rejection and the end of relationships (Bhatia et al., 2019; Faraji & Tezcan, 2023). They exhibit self-silencing behavior by renouncing their feelings and thoughts (Demir Güneş, 2016). Besides, self-silencing is frequently linked to abuse or neglect in early infancy; it can also be seen in patients with character dysfunction who strive to exert control when they feel overwhelmed (Goldblatt & Ronningstam, 2023). All of these refer to people who have BPT, which indicates abuse and neglect experiences in their childhood, who have negative self-perception and exhibit rejection sensitivity, and who have experienced abuse and neglect might also tend to exhibit self-behaviors. Feeling worthless and unlovable is one of the main themes of self-silencing (Maji & Dixit, 2019). People with borderline personality disorders show a lack of self-perception (Bourvis et al., 2021). Their self-esteem is low, and they are prone to have negative feelings towards themselves, including their body, such as self-disgust and shame (Winter et al., 2017). Chronic body shame of people with borderline personality traits adversely affects their relationships (Unoka & Vizin, 2017). They also tend to sacrifice, and it is known that self-silencing individuals view making sacrifices as a compassionate act, leading them to make substantial compromises to preserve closeness (Grzegorzewski et al., 2019; Maji & Dixit, 2019). Therefore, self-silencing might work as another coping mechanism that occurs due to low self-esteem and shame-like emotions towards the self and rejection sensitivity, like avoiding and fixing body image.

Based on these explanations, it is thought that people with BPT may exhibit self-silencing behavior to avoid rejection and maintain their relationships. This study aims to understand the relationship between BPT and self-silencing and body image coping strate-

gies and to investigate the mediating role of RS in this relationship. The study's main hypothesis is that rejection sensitivity plays a mediating role between borderline personality traits and self-silencing. The secondary hypothesis is that rejection sensitivity plays a mediating role in borderline personality traits and body image coping strategies. People with borderline personality disorder experience intense fear of abandonment in relationships and have anxious thoughts of being rejected by their partners (Faraji & Tezcan, 2023). It is thought that having a sensitivity to rejection will cause the person to develop appearance-fixing and avoidance strategies for coping with body image and to exhibit self-silencing behaviors to avoid abandonment. Besides, it is known that people with borderline personality traits are more prone to partner victimization, and it is also known that rejection sensitivity and self-silencing predict partner victimization (Faraji & Demir, 2023; Inman & London, 2022). Therefore, it is thought that the results of the current study will show the importance of evaluating the RS of individuals exhibiting BPT and including them in the psychotherapy process in order to increase both the individuals' relationship quality and their ability and willingness to express themselves.

METHODS

Model of Research

This study's model is the cross-sectional relational scanning method. The relational survey method is a quantitative research method used to determine the relationship between two or more variables. Researchers use a predefined conceptual model to determine possible relationships between variables (Hair et al., 2018).

Participants

The research population consisted of adults in Turkey, and the sample included 400 individuals over the age of 18 residing in Istanbul, selected through convenience sampling. Prior to data collection, a priori power analysis was conducted using the G*Power 3.1.9.4 program. With a medium effect size ($\rho = .30$; Cohen's f), a significance level of $\alpha = .05$, and a desired power of $(1-\beta) = .80$, the required minimum sample size was estimated as $N = 84$. The critical correlation values were calculated as $r = -.215$ and $r = .215$, yielding an achieved power of $(1-\beta) = .800$.

Data were collected between March and May 2022. Exclusion criteria were having any psychiatric diagnosis. Therefore, 26 participants were excluded from the study. The scales and Informed Consent Form were delivered to the participants via Google Forms. 249 (62.3%) of the participants were women, 151 (37.8%) were men; 352 (88%) were single, 48 (12%) were married. 40 (10%) participants were high school graduates, 304 (76%) have bachelor's degrees, 56 (14%) have postgraduate degrees; 216 (54%) are working, 184 (46%) are not working; 136 perceive their income as low (34%), 235 (58.8%) perceive it as moderate, and 29 (7.3%) perceive it as high. The average age of participants is 25.08 +- 3.62; the youngest is 18, and the oldest is 48. The average age of women is 24.82 +- 3.34; the youngest age is 18, and the oldest is 38. The average age of men is 25.49 +- 4.00; the youngest age is 18, and the oldest is 48.

Data Collection Tools

Sociodemographic Information Form The researchers developed a Sociodemographic Information Form that included questions about gender, marital status, employment status, and perceived income level to determine the participants' socio-demographic characteristics.

Borderline Personality Questionnaire (BPQ) The Turkish adaptation of the Borderline Personality Questionnaire developed by Poreh et al. (2006) was made by Ceylan (2017). The scale consists of a total of 80 questions answered based on self-report. It is a true-false type scale. Scoring is done by adding items for each subscale. The total score is the sum of the subscales and is 80. The minimum score that can be obtained from the scale is 0. The scale includes nine subscales. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the subscales were 0.50 for impulsivity, 0.77 for affective instability, 0.40 for abandonment, 0.68 for relationships, 0.72 for self-image, 0.48 for suicidal/self-mutilating behavior, 0.73 for feelings of emptiness, 0.74 for intense anger, and 0.62 for psychosis-like states. The Cronbach's alpha value of the total scale was measured as 0.89, which means there is high internal consistency (Ceylan, 2017). In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.94 for the total score, 0.67 for impulsivity, 0.72 for affective instability, 0.79 for abandonment, 0.70 for relationships, 0.80 for self-image, and 0.80 for suicidal self-mutilating behavior. It was found to be 0.75 for feelings of emptiness, 0.83 for intense anger, and 0.66 for psychosis-like states.

Silencing the Self Scale (STSS) The Silencing the Self Scale was developed by Jack & Dill (1992). The scale is used to measure whether people prefer to remain silent or suppress these thoughts rather than express their thoughts, needs, or feelings. Doyum (2017) conducted the scale's Turkish validity and reliability study. Silencing the Self Scale consists of 4 dimensions and 31 items: 6 items measure the externalized self-perception dimension, 9 items measure the self-perception dimension, 9 items measure the self-silencing dimension, and 7 items measure the split self-dimension. Like its original form, the Turkish form of

the scale was used with university students, pregnant women, people in hospitals, and individuals in women's shelters. The scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "definitely wrong" (1 point) to "definitely true" (5 points). Five items in the scale are reverse-coded. The scores that can be obtained from the scale vary between 31 and 155. High scores on the scale mean that people silence themselves more. In the Turkish validity and reliability study, Cronbach's alpha values of the scale were 0.75, 0.79, and 0.83 for the externalized self-perception dimension for the study group; 0.65, 0.60, and 0.81 for the dimension of seeing oneself as a victim; 0.78, 0.81, and 0.90 for the self-silencing dimension; 0.74, 0.83, and 0.78 for the divided self-dimension. For the total scale, it was calculated as 0.86, 0.89, and 0.94 (Doyum, 2017). Within the scope of this research, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined as 0.90 for the total scale, 0.76 for externalized self, 0.76 for seeing oneself as a victim, 0.77 for silencing the self, and 0.73 for divided self.

Body Image Coping Strategies Inventory (BICSI)

Body Image Coping Strategies Inventory, developed by Cash et al. (2005), was adapted into Turkish by Doğan et al. (2011). This scale is a four-point Likert-type and aims to measure individuals' coping strategies with body image threats and negativities. The scale consists of 29 items and three sub-dimensions, and the sub-dimensions are "appearance fixing," "positive logical acceptance," and "avoidance." Minimum and maximum values varying between 10-40 for appearance fixing subdimension, and 11-44 for positive logical acceptance, and 8-32 for avoidance. The Cronbach's alpha value for " appearance fixing" was 0.90 for women and 0.93 for men; for "positive logical acceptance," it was 0.80 for women and 0.85 for men; for "avoidance," it was found to be 0.74 in women and men. The reliability study of the Turkish version of the scale was conducted by gender and on the whole sample. As a result of the analyses, for " appearance fixing," it was 0.84 for women, 0.87 for men, and 0.86 for the whole sample; for "positive logical acceptance" it was 0.83 in women, 0.81 in men, 0.81 in the whole sample; for "avoidance", an internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.84 was calculated for women and men, and 0.84 for the entire sample (Doğan et al., 2011). Within the scope of this research, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined as 0.60 for appearance fixing, 0.76 for positive logical acceptance, and 0.64 for avoidance.

Adult Rejection Sensitivity Scale (A-RSS)

The Adult Rejection Sensitivity Scale is a scale developed by Downey and Feldman (1996) to determine the level of people's sensitivity to rejection. The items in the scale, whose Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Bozkuş and Araz (2015), are expected to be answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale regarding people's beliefs that they will be rejected or accepted by others who are important to them. The scale has a one-dimensional structure containing nine hypothetical situations. Each item includes the person's expectations of possible rejection and expectations of acceptance by 'significant others', and two different scores are given for each situation. The RS score is obtained by reversing the acceptance expectation score. High scores indicate high RS, and the highest RS score is 324. The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.74 in the original form, it was found to be 0.62 in the Turkish form (Bozkuş & Araz, 2015). Within the scope of this research, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined to be 0.92 for the Adult Rejection Sensitivity Scale.

Procedure

Permission to use the scales was obtained via e-mail from the researchers who conducted the Turkish validity and reliability study of the scales used. Later, ethics committee approval numbered 2022/03 dated 24.02.2022 was received from Istanbul Aydın University. The scales were delivered to the participants who stated they were volunteers via Google Forms, and no identification information was obtained from the participants. The participants approved the Informed Consent Form, the scales were filled out in an average of 20 minutes, and the data were analyzed with the SPSS 25 program. All authors participated jointly in the writing process and data transformation into findings.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were formatted appropriately and imported into the SPSS 25 program for data analysis. The normal distribution assumption was considered as the next stage. Kurtosis and skewness values were measured in order to assess this assumption; the fact that these two values fall within the -2 + 2 value range suggests that the assumption of a normal distribution is satisfied (Hahs-Vaughn & Lomax, 2020). Kurtosis and skewness values of the scores obtained from the scales of 400 participants participating in the study were examined and it was observed that the kurtosis and skewness values of all the scales were ±2, which is the reference range, and since there were no outliers, participants were continued in the sample. Following this assessment, parametric tests were used to continue the analysis.

Pearson correlation analysis tests the relationship between variables in the parametric test group. Independent sample t-test and ANOVA were used to detect significant differences between groups. The mediating role analysis was conducted with Hayes Process Macro 3.5 by selecting model 4 (Hayes, 2022). Range of values for correlation coefficient was as follows: a relationship between 0.00-0.30 is defined as weak, be-

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

		n	*%*
Gender	Female	249	62.3
	Male	151	37.8
Marital Status	Single	352	88.0
	Married	48	12.0
Education Level	Secondary Education	40	10.0
	Bachelor	304	76.0
	Postgraduate	56	14.0
Employment Status	Working	216	54.0
	Not working	184	46.0
Perceived Income Level	Low	136	34.0
	Moderate	235	58.8
	High	29	7.3
	Total	400	100.0

Table 2. Mediating Role of Rejection Sensitivity in the Relationship Between Borderline Personality Traits and Self-Silencing

Variable / Path	*b*	*β*	SE	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Mediator Model (Outcome: Rejection Sensitivity)						
Constant	38.52		1.80	21.46	< .001	[34.99, 42.05]
Borderline Personality (Path a)	0.40	0.30	0.06	6.37	< .001	[.27, .52]
Outcome Model (Outcome: Self-Silencing)						
Constant	58.71		1.83	32.03	< .001	[55.11, 62.32]
Borderline Personality (Path c)	0.41	0.31	0.06	6.53	< .001	[.29, .54]
Outcome Model (Outcome: Self-Silencing)						
Constant	46.02		2.55	18.04	< .001	[41.00, 51.04]
Borderline Personality (Path c')	0.28	0.21	0.06	4.50	< .001	[.16, .41]
Rejection Sensitivity (Path b)	0.33	0.32	0.05	6.79	< .001	[.23, .42]
Indirect Effects	Effect	*β*	Boot SE			Boot 95% CI
Standardized Indirect Effect		0.10	0.02			[.06, .14]

Note. N = 400. b = unstandardized regression coefficient; β = standardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.

tween 0.301-0.70 as a moderate relationship, and between 0.701-1.00 as a high degree of relationship. With a p-value of 0.05, the study's confidence interval is 95% (Bertoldo et al., 2022).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for the scales and subscales are as follows: for Borderline Personality Questionnaire, the mean score is 24.97 (*SD* = 14.51), for Impulsivity the mean score is 1.95 (*SD* = 1.84), for Affective Lability the mean score is 4.27 (*SD* = 2.48), for Abandonment the mean score is 2.72 (*SD* = 2.48). For Relationships the mean score is 3.03 (*SD* = 2.18), for Self-Image the mean score is 2.22 (*SD* = 2.35), for Suicide Self-Injury Behavior the mean score is 1.08 (*SD* = 1.64), for Feeling of Emptiness the mean score is 3.55 (*SD* = 2.58), for Intense Anger the mean score is 3.85 (*SD* = 2.97), for Psychosis-like States the mean score is 2.30 (*SD* = 1.87). For Silencing the Self Scale the mean score is 69.07 (*SD* = 19.35), for Externalized Self the mean score is 14.58 (*SD* = 5.14), for Seeing Yourself as a Victim the mean score is 16.81 (*SD* = 5.73), for Silencing the self it is 21.12 (*SD* = 6.64), for

Divided Self the mean score is 16.57 (*SD* = 5.41), for Appearance Fixing the mean score is 22.31 (*SD* = 7.05), for Positive Logical Acceptance the mean score is 29.22 (*SD* = 7.51), for Avoidance the mean score is 14.89 (*SD* = 5.00), for Adult Rejection Sensitivity Scale the mean score is 48.41 (*SD* = 18.90).

When it is shown in Table 1, 62.3% of the participants were female, 37.8% were male, 88% were single, 12% were married, 10% had secondary education, 76% had bachelor's degrees, 14% had a postgraduate degree, 54% were working, 46% were not working, 34% perceive their income level as low, 58.8% perceive their income level as moderate, 7.3% perceive their income level as high.

The mediating role of rejection sensitivity in the relationship between borderline personality traits and self-silencing was tested (See Table 2 and Figure 1). Borderline personality traits significantly predicted rejection sensitivity (*b* = 0.40, *β* = 0.30, *SE* = 0.06, *t* = 6.37, *p* < .001, 95% CI [.27, .52]). In the outcome model, borderline personality traits were also found to significantly predict self-silencing (*b* = 0.41, *β* = 0.31, *SE* = 0.06, *t* = 6.53, *p* < .001, 95% CI [.29, .54]). When rejection sensitivity was added to the model, the direct

Table 3. The Mediating Role of Rejection Sensitivity in Predicting Appearance Fixing due to Borderline Personality Traits

Variable / Path	b	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
Mediator Model (Outcome: Rejection Sensitivity)						
Constant	38.52		1.80	21.46	< .001	[34.99, 42.05]
Borderline Personality (Path a)	0.40	0.30	0.06	6.37	< .001	[.27, .52]
Outcome Model (Outcome: Fixing)						
Constant	20.28		0.69	29.25	< .001	[18.91, 21.64]
Borderline Personality (Path c)	0.08	0.17	0.02	3.40	.001	[.03, .13]
Outcome Model (Outcome: Appearance Fixing)						
Constant	16.76		0.99	16.92	< .001	[14.81, 18.71]
Borderline Personality (Path c')	0.05	0.09	0.02	1.85	0.065	[-.00, .09]
Rejection Sensitivity (Path b)	0.09	0.24	0.02	4.85	< .001	[.05, .13]
Indirect Effects	Effect	β	Boot SE			Boot 95% CI
Standardized Indirect Effect		0.08	0.02			[.04, .12]

Note. N = 400. b = unstandardized regression coefficient; β = standardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval; Boot = bootstrap.

effect of borderline personality traits on self-silencing decreased but remained statistically significant ($b = 0.28$, $β = 0.21$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 4.50$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.16, .41]). At the same time, rejection sensitivity significantly predicted self-silencing ($b = 0.33$, $β = 0.32$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 6.79$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.23, .42]). The indirect effect of borderline personality traits on self-silencing through rejection sensitivity was significant ($β = 0.10$, *Boot SE* = 0.02, 95% CI [.06, .14]), as indicated by the bias-corrected bootstrap analysis with 5,000 samples.
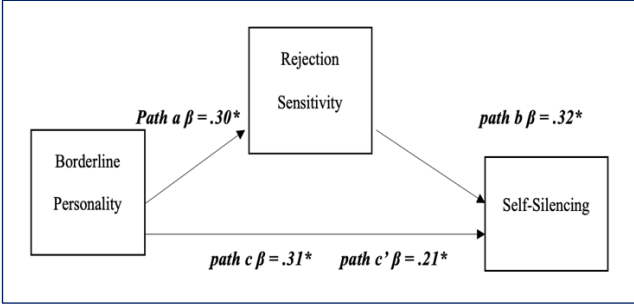

Figure 1. The Mediating Role of Rejection Sensitivity in the Relationship Between Borderline Personality Traits and Self-Silencing: Beta Coefficients. *Note.* *p < 0.05.

The mediating role of rejection sensitivity in the relationship between borderline personality traits and appearance fixing was examined (See Table 3 and Figure 2). First, borderline personality traits significantly predicted rejection sensitivity ($b = 0.40$, $β = 0.30$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 6.37$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.27, .52]). Next, borderline personality traits directly and significantly predicted appearance fixing ($b = 0.08$, $β = 0.17$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 3.40$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [.03, .13]). In the final model, the direct effect of borderline personality traits on appearance fixing was not statistically significant ($b = 0.05$, $β = 0.09$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 1.85$, $p = .065$, 95% CI [−.00, .09]). In contrast, rejection sensitivity significantly predicted appearance fixing ($b = 0.09$, $β = 0.24$,

$SE = 0.02$, $t = 4.85$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.05, .13]). The indirect effect tested by bootstrapping was significant ($β = 0.08$, *Boot SE* = 0.02, 95% CI [.04, .12]). These findings indicate that borderline personality traits influence appearance fixing through rejection sensitivity.
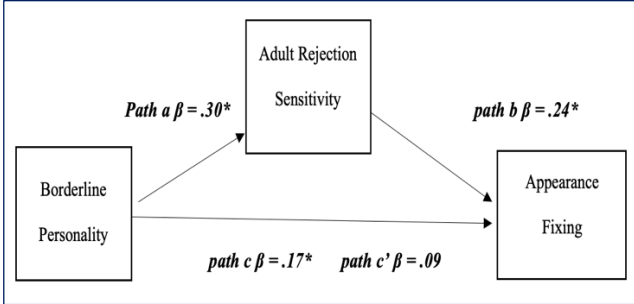

Figure 2. The Beta Coefficients of the Mediating Role of Rejection Sensitivity in Predicting Appearance Fixing due to Borderline Personality Traits. *Note.* *p < 0.05.

The mediation analysis findings which investigated the mediating role of rejection sensitivity in predicting avoidance due to borderline personality traits was shown in Table 4 and Figure 3. Borderline personality traits significantly predicted rejection sensitivity ($b = 0.40$, $β = 0.30$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 6.37$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.52]). In the outcome model, borderline personality traits significantly predicted avoidance ($b = 0.08$, $β = 0.23$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 4.77$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.11]). When rejection sensitivity was added to the model, the direct effect of borderline personality traits on avoidance was significant ($b = 0.04$, $β = 0.13$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 2.64$, $p = .009$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.08]). In addition, rejection sensitivity significantly predicted avoidance ($b = 0.09$, $β = 0.35$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 7.17$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.12]). The indirect effect tested by bootstrapping was significant ($β = 0.10$, *Boot SE* = 0.02, 95% CI [0.06, 0.15]).

The independent sample t-test was conducted to com-

Table 4. The Mediating Role of Rejection Sensitivity in Predicting Avoidance due to Borderline Personality Traits

Variable / Path	b	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
Mediator Model (Outcome: Rejection Sensitivity)						
Constant	38.52		1.80	21.46	< .001	[34.99, 42.05]
Borderline Personality (Path a)	0.40	0.30	0.06	6.37	< .001	[0.27, 0.52]
Outcome Model (Outcome: Avoidance)						
Constant	12.89		0.49	26.55	< .001	[11.93, 13.84]
Borderline Personality (Path c)	0.08	0.23	0.02	4.77	< .001	[0.05, 0.11]
Outcome Model (Outcome: Avoidance)						
Constant	9.36		0.67	13.94	< .001	[8.04, 10.68]
Borderline Personality (Path c′)	0.04	0.13	0.02	2.64	.009	[0.01, 0.08]
Rejection Sensitivity (Path b)	0.09	0.35	0.01	7.17	< .001	[0.07, 0.12]
Indirect Effects	Effect	β	Boot SE			Boot 95% CI
Standardized Indirect Effect		0.10	0.02			[0.06, 0.15]

Note. $N = 400$. b = unstandardized regression coefficient; β = standardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. Boot = bootstrap.

Table 5. Comparison of Scores Obtained from Borderline Personality Traits, Silencing the Self, Body Image Coping Strategies, and Rejection Sensitivity According to Gender Variable

|	Female ($n = 249$)		Male ($n = 151$)				
Dependent Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t	df	p
Borderline Personality Questionnaire	23.67	14.32	27.10	14.63	-2.30	398	0.022*
Silencing the Self Scale	67.35	19.35	71.91	19.08	-2.30	398	0.022*
BICSS Appearance Fixing	22.28	7.15	22.37	6.92	-0.13	398	0.898
BICSS Positive Logical Acceptance	29.71	7.27	28.42	7.84	1.66	398	0.098
BICSS Avoidance	14.52	4.82	15.49	5.26	-1.88	398	0.061
Adult Rejection Sensitivity Scale	49.55	17.58	46.52	20.83	1.55	398	0.121

Note. *$p < 0.05$.
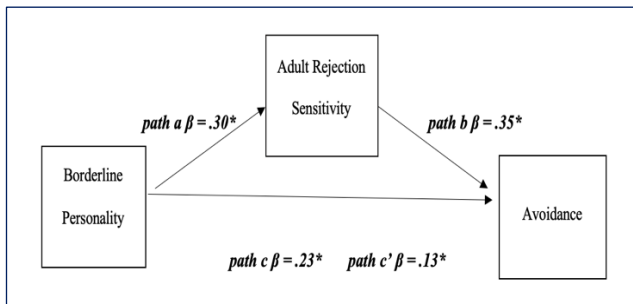
Figure 3. The Beta Coefficients of the Mediating Role of Rejection Sensitivity in Predicting Avoidance due to Borderline Personality Traits. *Note.* *$p < 0.05$.

pare scores obtained from borderline personality traits, silencing the self, body image coping strategies, and rejection sensitivity according to the gender variable (See Table 5). When the Appearance Fixing, Positive Logical Acceptance, Avoidance, and Rejection Sensitivity Scales were compared over the gender variable, there was no significant difference between the mean scores obtained from the scales ($p > 0.05$). For Borderline Personality Questionnaire ($t_{(398)} = -2.30, p < 0.05$) and Silencing the Self Scale ($t_{(398)} = -2.30, p < 0.05$), it was found that there was a significant difference between the mean scores obtained from the scales. When the averages are compared, it is seen that males have higher averages than females.

The independent sample t-test was conducted to compare scores obtained from borderline personality traits, silencing the self, body image coping strategies, and adult rejection sensitivity according to marital status (See Table 6). When the results of the given

findings are examined, Silencing the Self Scale, Appearance Fixing, Positive Logical Acceptance, Avoidance, and Rejection Sensitivity were analyzed according to marital status, and no significant difference was found between the compared groups ($p > 0.05$). When the results of the Borderline Personality Questionnaire ($t_{(72, 189)} = 3.33, p < .05$) were examined according to marital status, a significant difference was found between the groups compared. When the average scores obtained from the scales were evaluated, it was observed that the scores of singles were higher than those of married people.

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare borderline personality traits, silencing the self, body image coping strategies, and adult rejection sensitivity by education level (See Table 7). When the scores obtained from the Silencing the Self Scale, Appearance Fixing, Positive Logical Acceptance, Avoidance, and Rejection Sensitivity Scale were examined according to the level of education, no significant difference was found between the compared groups ($p > 0.05$). When the scores obtained from the Borderline Personality Questionnaire ($F_{(2, 397)} = 4.60, p < 0.05$) were analyzed according to the level of education, a significant difference was found between the compared groups. Considering the results of Games-Howell's findings, it was observed that the scores of those with secondary education and undergraduate degrees were significantly higher than those with graduate degrees.

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare borderline personality traits, silencing the self, body image coping strategies, and re-

Table 6. Comparison of Borderline Personality Traits, Silencing the Self, Body Image Coping Strategies, and Adult Rejection Sensitivity According to Marital Status

Dependent Variables	Single (n = 352)		Married (n = 48)		t	df	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Borderline Personality Questionnaire	25.68	14.79	19.75	11.05	3.33	72.189	0.001*
Silencing the Self Scale	69.32	19.48	67.27	18.46	0.69	398	0.493
BICSS Appearance Fixing	22.35	6.93	22.04	7.98	0.28	398	0.777
BICSS Positive Logical Acceptance	29.05	7.63	30.46	6.54	-1.22	398	0.225
BICSS Avoidance	14.71	4.93	16.17	5.40	-1.89	398	0.059
Adult Rejection Sensitivity Scale	48.50	18.27	47.69	23.22	0.23	55.223	0.816

Note. *$p < 0.05$.

Table 7. Comparison of Borderline Personality Traits, Silencing the Self, Body Image Coping Strategies, and Adult Rejection Sensitivity by Education Level

Dependent Variables	Education Level						F (2, 397)	p	Post-Hoc
	Secondary Education[1] (n = 40)		Bachelor's Degree[2] (n = 304)		Postgraduate[3] (n = 56)				
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Borderline Personality Questionnaire	27.45	13.78	25.60	15.11	19.73	10.05	4.60	0.011*	1, 2 > 3
Silencing the Self Scale	73.05	21.27	69.43	18.68	64.29	20.89	2.63	0.073	-
BICSS Appearance Fixing	23.23	7.94	22.21	7.07	22.21	6.32	0.37	0.690	-
BICSS Positive Logical Acceptance	29.23	7.47	29.02	7.67	30.32	6.60	0.71	0.493	-
BICSS Avoidance	16.05	6.59	14.83	4.86	14.39	4.44	1.38	0.253	-
Adult Rejection Sensitivity Scale	50.83	19.37	48.39	18.77	46.75	19.42	0.54	0.582	-

Note. * $p < 0.05$

jection sensitivity by perceived income level (See Table 8). When the scores obtained from Self-Silencing, Appearance Fixing, Positive Logical Acceptance, Avoidance, and Rejection Sensitivity Scale are examined according to income level, no significant difference was found between the compared groups ($p > 0.05$). When the scores obtained from the Borderline Personality Questionnaire ($F_{(2, 397)} = 3.35$, $p < 0.05$) were analyzed according to income level, a significant difference was found between the compared groups. When the results of Tukey's findings are considered, it is observed that the scores of those with moderate income are significantly higher than those with high income. When the scores obtained from the Silencing the Self Scale ($F_{(2,397)} = 4.22$, $p < 0.05$) were analyzed according to income level, a significant difference was found between the compared groups. When Tukey's findings are considered, it is observed that the scores of those with low and medium-level income are significantly higher than those with a high-level income.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to understand the relationship between borderline personality traits and self-silencing and also body image coping strategies with the mediator role of rejection sensitivity. Afterwards it was aimed to understand the differentiating role of gender, marital status and education level on variables. The first result of the study is that RS had a significant mediator role in the relationship between BPT and self-silencing. Due to internalizing the invalidating envi-

ronment that they raised in people with BPT tend to self-invalidate. Self-invalidating is the process of questioning or doubting the veracity of one's thoughts, feelings, or experiences (Livesley, 2017). BPT is closely related to factors such as possessiveness and unstable relationships and rejection sensitivity (Faraji & Başçelik Yavuz, 2023; Paris, 2019). RS can cause the person to turn to self-silencing behaviors to avoid threats such as rejection or criticism. People with RS may avoid expressing the problems they experience in their romantic relationships, and it is stated that the reason for this behavior is their fear of their relationship ending (Lazarus & Cheavens, 2017; Worley & Samp, 2018). Individuals with BPT anxiously believe that they will be rejected and develop various strategies to cope with the fear of rejection (Foxhall et al., 2019). Therefore, they apply self-silencing strategies rather than expressing emotions as a kind of coping strategies (a maladaptive one) (Goldblatt & Ronningstam, 2023; Johnson et al., 2017). As the perception of rejection increases, they tend to withdraw and silence themselves (Faraji, 2021; Faraji & Tezcan, 2023). They may even feel ashamed of their existence in the world and may exhibit attitudes and behaviors that apologize for their existence (Jørgensen & Bøye, 2024). Similarly, Mishra and Allen (2023) with their meta-analysis, which includes 60 studies, indicate that RS leads to self-silencing attitudes.

Another result of the research is that RS has a fully mediating role between BPT and appearance fixing, a body image coping strategy. Physical attractiveness is important in interpersonal relationships, and people with

Table 8. Comparison of Borderline Personality Traits, Silencing the Self, Body Image Coping Strategies, and Rejection Sensitivity by Perceived Income Level

	Perceived Income Level								
	Low[1] (n = 136)		Moderate[2] (n = 235)		High[3] (n = 29)				Post-Hoc
Dependent Variables	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F (2, 397)	p	
Borderline Personality Questionnaire	25.15	13.74	25.67	14.94	18.34	13.32	3.35	0.036*	2 > 3
Silencing the Self Scale	69.78	18.89	69.89	19.14	59.10	21.05	4.22	0.015*	1, 2 > 3
BICSS Appearance Fixing	21.71	7.01	22.83	7.02	20.97	7.40	1.65	0.194	-
BICSS Positive Logical Acceptance	28.54	7.67	29.52	7.32	29.97	8.27	0.89	0.413	-
BICSS Avoidance	14.83	5.43	15.06	4.73	13.79	5.14	0.83	0.435	-
Adult Rejection Sensitivity Scale	48.96	17.02	48.83	19.30	42.38	23.27	1.60	0.204	-

Note. *$p < 0.05$.

these characteristics are seen as more popular and in-demand individuals (Elgán, 2021). A negative body image can cause fear of rejection (Roberts & Waters, 2019). Also, rejection sensitivity can cause negative perceptions about body image (Saylan & Soyyiğit, 2024). It is thought that people with BPT may resort to a strategy of fixing their appearance in order not to lose their loved ones or to avoid rejection. Studies show that individuals with BPT may have high levels of negative perceptions about their apperarance and seek appearance fixing (Szily et al., 2023; Vizgaitis & Lenzenweger, 2019). Appearance fixing is a term that includes various interventions aimed at changing a person's physical appearance to address body image problems, and these interventions may include plastic surgery operations, teeth whitening, skin care, hair transplantation, weight loss, and fitness programs (Vizgaitis & Lenzenweger, 2019). It has been determined that individuals with BPT can frequently resort to body appearance-fixing behaviors, especially physical arrangements such as applying make-up or hair arrangement, as emotional regulation strategies (Glenn et al., 2016). It has been found that women with BPT may tend to resort to appearance-fixing methods such as cosmetic surgery to correct their negative body perception (Szily et al., 2023). If individuals associate their RS with appearance, they anticipate, recognize, and overreact to rejection indications based on appearance. Also, people who have insecurities about their acceptance (like individuals with borderline traits) in social environments have appearance-based RS. They become more susceptible to cosmetic surgeries (Amirian et al., 2024). In this regard, it is thought that individuals with BPT may use appearance-fixing strategies to be accepted by others in situations where they have threatening thoughts of being rejected. There is a special form of rejection sensitivity called appearance-based rejection sensitivity (ABRS). Individuals high in ABRS associate physical flaws with rejection, and they over-evaluate their weight/shape, restrain, develop binge eating, exercise compulsively, and vomit in attempts to fix their negative perceptions of the body (Linardon et al., 2017). Disordered eating, like bulimia nervosa, anorexia nervosa, and binge eating,

are also attempts at appearance fixing (Bianchi et al., 2023; Kostecka et al., 2019; Sandoz et al., 2020). Physical activity is another element linked to fixing one's perception of a poor body image (Sen et al., 2020). Even popular American singer Taylor Swift, who has many fans to be sure about her acceptance, declared in a documentary that Swift recounts that at times, it was difficult to see photos of herself because she would feel like I looked like my tummy was too big and she was struggling with her disordered eating. She indicated that she was overexercising but did not eat enough food to find the energy to not faint (Pope & Rose, 2024).

Considering the findings of the research, it is seen that RS has a partial mediator role between borderline personality traits and avoidance of body image coping strategies. It is observed that individuals with BPT exhibit more avoidant behaviors regarding their appearance when they are sensitive to rejection. Avoidant behaviors can also negatively affect romantic relationships by causing people to avoid close contact to hide their flaws (Sutin et al., 2015). It has been observed that individuals with BPT are likely to exhibit avoidance behavior through body image coping strategies (İlk & Bilge, 2020; Oldershaw et al., 2018). Individuals with BPT are more likely to exhibit avoidant coping strategies related to body image when they experience RS (Ma et al., 2021). It has been shown that the RS factor partially mediates the relationship between BPT and avoidance in general and avoidance of body image coping strategies in particular (Ducasse et al., 2020; Wayda-Zalewska et al., 2021). As a result, it is thought that the relationship between BPT and body image avoidance coping strategies can be explained through RS. Individuals with BPT are more likely to exhibit avoidant coping strategies related to body image when they experience RS.

The findings of this study showed that levels of borderline personality traits in singles were higher than those of married people. Borderline personality traits tend to cause romantic relationships to be stormy (Unoka & Vizin, 2017). It is also known that people with borderline personality traits have rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy (Faraji & Tezcan, 2023).

People with borderline personality traits have emotion regulation difficulties, and this causes them to be more prone to act aggressively in case of perceived rejection (Priebe et al., 2022). Also, it is indicated that most people with BPT are easily involved in a relationship but have difficulty maintaining it (Faraji & Tezcan, 2023). Therefore, it might be challenging to engage in marriage for people with BPT, which requires sustainability with lots of requirements.

This study indicates that individuals with medium income had significantly higher borderline personality traits than those with high income. Results of the current study showed that secondary education and undergraduate degrees had significantly higher levels of borderline personality traits than those with graduate degrees. BPD, which represents higher and malfunctioning degrees of BPT, is marked by a low level of functioning in a broad range of areas, unemployment, ongoing dependency on welfare systems, and general underachievement in education (Jørgensen et al., 2009). Ten Have et al. (2016) found that an increase in BPD was joined by a decrease in educational level. They explained it by highlighting that impulsive behavior and an unstable social interaction pattern are hallmarks of BPD, which may make academic success difficult.

Individuals who perceived their income as low and individuals who perceived their income as moderate had significantly higher self-silencing levels than those who perceived their income as high. Not earning enough money to live enables an individual to be independent (Sharma & Kirmani, 2024), and being dependent is related to self-silencing (Tariq & Yousaf, 2020). Self-esteem is closely and negatively related to self-silencing (Kaya & Kaya, 2023). The Social Indicator Theory posits that an individual's self-esteem is contingent upon their social position, and income is one the main markers of social position, so an increase in income results in an increase in self-esteem (Pelham, 1995). The Social Indicator Theory is thought to also explain the relationship between self-silencing and income level.

Jack (1991) proposed the hypothesis of self-silencing based on her long-term research with women who were chronically depressed. So, self-silencing has a strong association with women. Similarly, Puzio and Best (2020) conducted a study with adolescents, and they found that self-silencing occurs similarly in both genders but is slightly salient in girls. This study revealed that males had higher levels of self-silencing than females. Also, there are other studies with findings similar to this one (Duarte & Thompson, 1999; Gratch et al., 1995). There is a conflict between the results of studies, and there is a lack of studies comparing women's and men's self-silencing levels. It is clear from the Self-Silencing Theory that people retain interactions with others as a driving force behind their self-silencing (Maji & Dixit, 2019). Therefore, conflict in the literature might be because the need to retain the relationship doesn't occur because of gender. Also, there might be an effect on income level when there is self-silencing of men. Traditional Turkish culture holds men responsible for supporting the household, and in this respect, financial power comes to the fore as one of the criteria for a man's masculinity (Yavuz, 2017). Therefore, it is thought that the decline in economic level is associated with an increase in the tendency for men to silence themselves.

Conclusions

As a result of this study, it is seen that rejection sensitivity has a partial mediator role between BPT and self-silencing, and rejection sensitivity has a full mediator role between BPT and appearance fixing. RS may cause people to resort to strategies such as silencing themselves and fixing or avoiding their appearance. Avoidance behaviors have different appearances, such as avoiding to show and trying to fix perceived physical flaws. Considering the reinforcing effect of avoidance on behavior, the importance of psychotherapy studies targeting rejection sensitivity to prevent the deepening of existing problems is understood. Intervention before adulthood is also recommended because body image beliefs are developed in early childhood but become less malleable after late adolescence, especially after adulthood (Sen et al., 2020). Engaging children in team sports involvement and the positive experiences of coaching and peer support is recommended to decrease body image dissatisfaction (Boone & Leadbeater, 2006). Girls may find this especially crucial because they tend to have more unfavorable thoughts about their bodies.

The common factor to both the concept of RS and self-silencing is increased sensitivity to negative social feedback and a tendency to preoccupy with rejection cues. Alternatively, it is thought that individuals with a tendency to self-silencing may be more likely to be rejected by others, as they are more likely to use methods aimed at preventing conflicts or ameliorating post-conflict situations rather than expressing themselves in social relationships, which may increase their sensitivity to rejection. It is recommended that future research consider the similar or different pathways of these constructs and whether there are any causal links between them, with a study explicitly examining both parameters.

There are secondary results of the study, such as people with higher borderline personality traits have lower income levels and educational levels, and also most of them are singles. Therefore, these results show the difficulty BPT caused to have a more functional life. Considering that all three (income level, educational level, and being married) are supportive external factors for any individual, the study results show the importance of finding maladaptive parts of personality traits and alleviating them. Study findings also showed that there is a significant relationship between income

level and self-silencing. This finding also shows the importance of being able to earn enough money to have economic independence.

Across all anxiety provoking situations, avoidance strategies—regardless of the specific type of anxiety—are maintained through negative reinforcement: when an individual avoids or escapes an anxiety-provoking stimulus or situation, the immediate reduction in anxiety strengthens the avoidance response. Although this reduction is temporary, it reinforces avoidance and prevents corrective learning, thereby maintaining or even exacerbating anxiety over time (Mowrer, 1947; Krypotos, Effting, Kindt, & Beckers, 2015).

Therefore, self silencing mechanism and body image coping mechanisms may enable individuals to better cope with possible rejection or abandonment and establish healthier relationships and also can cause to elevated levels of rejection sensitivity. Knowing these issues is thought to benefit mental health professionals in creating an appropriate road map during the treatment process. Especially focusing on rejection sensitivity might be key solution point. Clinicians can use emotion regulation techniques by developing appropriate strategies to increase self-confidence in consultants, which plays a preservative role in rejection sensitivity. In addition, it would be beneficial to study with an experimental design and to distribute the education levels of the people in the sample evenly.

A key strength of this study is that it identifies the decisive role of rejection sensitivity in the relationship between borderline personality features and self-silencing and body-related coping behaviors. The results indicate that individuals with borderline personality features, when experiencing heightened levels of rejection sensitivity, tend to avoid expressing themselves as they are—both verbally and physically—in an effort to prevent rejection. These individuals sometimes present responses they perceive as desirable, while at other times they conceal aspects of themselves they consider potentially undesirable, either through avoidance or by masking them at the verbal and bodily levels.

One of the limitations of the study is that patients diagnosed with borderline personality disorder were not included in the study. Another limitation of the study is that the results of the change in mediator variables cannot be determined due to the cross-sectional and correlational nature of the study. Another limitation of the present study concerns the composition of the sample. Participants were not evenly distributed across age, gender, income, marital status, and educational level, which may reduce the representativeness of the findings and limit their generalizability to broader populations. Another limitation lies in the exclusive reliance on self-report instruments for data collection. Although self-report measures are widely used in psychological research, they are inherently vulnerable to response biases, such as social desirability

effects, memory inaccuracies, and participants' subjective interpretations of the items. Consequently, the results should be interpreted with caution, and future research would benefit from employing more diverse samples and incorporating additional data collection methods, such as behavioral observations or objective assessments, to strengthen the validity of the findings.

DECLARATIONS

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