

## ETHNIC IDENTITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF AMBIVALENCE IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS\*

### ETNİK KİMLİK VE PSİKOLOJİK İYİ OLUŞ: YAKIN İLİŞKİLERDE İKİRCİKLİLİĞİN ARACI ROLÜ

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#### Abstract

This study examined the role of ethnic identity and relationship ambivalence in predicting psychological well-being among 422 adults from Turkey. Specifically, the mediating role of relationship ambivalence (direct and indirect) on the link between the importance of ethnic identity and well-being (hedonic and eudaimonic) was examined using an online survey. Mediation analyses, using SPSS PROCESS macro, indicated that the importance attached to ethnic identity positively predicted eudaimonic well-being through a reduction in direct ambivalence, but not through indirect ambivalence. For hedonic well-being, both direct and indirect ambivalence mediated the relationship between the importance of ethnic identity and well-being, with reductions in ambivalence linking to increased well-being. Gender, age, education, and relationship status were included as covariates, with age and relationship status positively predicting well-being outcomes. These findings suggest that the significance individuals place on their ethnic identity may enhance their psychological well-being by alleviating relationship ambivalence, drawing attention to the impact of social relationships on well-being.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Identity, Relationship Ambivalence, Eudaimonic Well-Being, Hedonic Well-Being

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## Öz

Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'den 422 yetişkinin katılımıyla etnik kimlik ve ilişkilerde hissedilen ikircikli duyguların psikolojik iyi oluş üzerindeki rolü incelenmiştir. İlişkilerde doğrudan ve dolaylı olarak hissedilen ikircikli duyguların etnik kimliğe verilen önem ile psikolojik iyi oluş (hedonik ve ödamonik) arasındaki ilişkide aracılık rolü üstlenip üstlenmediği çevrimiçi anket yoluyla test edilmiştir. SPSS PROCESS makro kullanılarak yürütülen aracılık analizleri, etnik kimliğe verilen önemin ödamonik iyi oluşu doğrudan ölçülen ikirciklilik aracılığıyla pozitif yönde yordadığını; ancak dolaylı olarak ölçülen ikircikliliğin benzer bir aracılık rolü üstlenmediğini göstermiştir. Hedonik iyi oluş için ise hem doğrudan hem de dolaylı olarak ölçülen ikircikliliğin aracılık rolü olduğu ve ikircikliliğin azalmasının iyi oluşta artışla bağlantılı olduğu bulunmuştur. Çalışmada cinsiyet, yaş, eğitim ve ilişki durumu kontrol edilmiş; yaş ve ilişki durumunun bireylerin psikolojik iyi oluşlarına olumlu yönde katkı sağladığı saptanmıştır. Bulgular, etnik kimliğe atfedilen önemin, ilişkilerde hissedilen ikircikli duyguları azaltarak psikolojik iyi oluşlarını güçlendirebileceğini ortaya koymakta ve sosyal ilişkilerin iyi oluşla yakından ilişkili olduğunu vurgulamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Etnik Kimlik, İlişkilerde İkirciklilik, Ödamonik İyi Oluş, Hedonik İyi Oluş

## 1. Introduction

Social group identification has long been recognized for positively affecting individuals' psychological well-being, primarily through mechanisms such as interpersonal support and the fulfillment of fundamental psychological needs (Greenaway et al., 2015; Haslam et al., 2016; Häusser et al., 2020; Jetten et al., 2009; 2017). In contexts like immigration, where people need to receive social support and to feel belonging, ethnic identity becomes a crucial determinant of people's psychological functioning. Earlier studies have found that minority individuals who feel strong identification with their ethnic background often exhibit greater psychological well-being (Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Phinney et al., 2001; Smith & Silva, 2011). While much of the existing literature has investigated how ethnic identity affects the psychological well-being of individuals from minority groups, less attention has been paid to how ethnic identity influences interpersonal relationships and, consequently, psychological well-being.

In the context of interpersonal relationships, one important function of social group identification, as suggested by social identity theory, is its potential to foster preferential relationships with in-group members, thereby enhancing individuals' self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986). Identifying with a social group has also been shown to reduce interpersonal problems, such as in-group dissonance (Glasford et al., 2009; Wei et al., 2024). Similarly, ethnic identity affirmation tends to increase positive attitudes toward in-group members (Corenblum, 2014; Phinney et al., 1997). Although prior research has largely focused on positive attitudes toward in-group members, a secure and clear identification with one's ethnic group may reduce feelings of out-group threat and facilitate more positive relationship patterns with out-group individuals as well (Phinney et al., 2007). This perspective suggests that ethnic identity may help reduce negative relational processes, regardless of group membership. One such process is relational ambivalence, referring to the joint experience of both positive

and negative emotions toward relationship partners. Ambivalence in relationships has been shown to influence psychological well-being negatively (Fingerman et al., 2008; Lee & Szinovacz, 2016). Although both ethnic identity and relationship ambivalence have been independently linked to well-being (e.g., Fingerman et al., 2008; Smith & Silva, 2011), no research has directly examined whether a strong sense of ethnic group identification serves as a protective factor against ambivalence in interpersonal relationships, thereby promoting psychological well-being.

The present study seeks to address this limitation in the literature by examining how the importance attached to ethnic identity might influence relationship ambivalence and, in turn, well-being. Specifically, it explores how the importance individuals place on their ethnic identity — irrespective of particular ethnic group membership — may reduce both direct and indirect ambivalence in their relationships, which, in turn, can positively influence their overall well-being. This research will be the first to examine whether the importance placed on ethnic identity functions as an antecedent of relationship ambivalence and whether this ambivalence serves as a mechanism linking identity to psychological well-being. By doing so, the study provides new insights into the complex dynamics between ethnic identity, relationship ambivalence, and psychological well-being.

### **Ethnic Identity and Psychological Well-Being**

Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986) posits that a person's sense of social identity is derived from various group memberships, such as ethnicity, gender, and nationality. According to SIT, positive social identification fosters enhanced self-esteem. Being part of a social group can enhance feelings of belonging, liking, and acceptance (Baumeister, 2011; Baumeister & Leary, 2017) and reduce subjective uncertainty (Hogg, 2005, 2009). These factors, in turn, positively influence psychological well-being. This perspective aligns with the social cure framework, which posits that a positive social identity can improve both psychological and physical health (Jetten et al., 2009, 2012). From the social cure perspective, group memberships serve as valuable resources for coping with life stressors, such as life transitions, especially when groups provide individuals with positive social identification (Jetten et al., 2009, 2012).

This idea extends to ethnic identity, a particular facet of social identity that is often subject to minority stress. Strong social support derived from ethnic group identification can reduce vulnerability against negative impacts of experiences such as discrimination on minority groups (Rivas-Drake et al., 2008; Sellers et al., 2003; Branscombe et al., 1999; Wong et al., 2003). This aligns with findings suggesting that individuals with positive ethnic identification tend to report better psychological well-being (Abu-Rayya, 2006; Kiang et al., 2006; Utsey et al., 2002) and higher self-esteem (Umaña-Taylor, 2004; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2002). Conversely, if individuals distance themselves from their ethnic identity, it may result in increased anxiety and depression (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995).

However, the interplay between ethnic identity and well-being is not straightforward and may be influenced by various mechanisms. While previous studies have primarily concentrated on how ethnic identity might reduce the effects of external stressors, particularly for minority individuals facing identity threats such as discrimination, an important next step is to examine ethnic identity in contexts where there is no immediate threat to one's identity. Ethnic identity is not solely significant for those in marginalized groups; it can also influence psychological well-being in the absence of external stressors. Effects of ethnic identity also operate within the context of interpersonal relationships, and these interactions can shape how individuals feel about themselves. The strength of ethnic identification can influence relationships both within one's ethnic group and beyond, potentially shaping the emotional dynamics of these relationships. In this context, it becomes valuable to examine relationship-related mechanisms that link ethnic identity to well-being. While ethnic identity may promote positive attitudes toward both in-group and out-group members, it may also serve multiple interpersonal functions, including the reduction of conflicting feelings toward relationship partners. In this regard, attention should be given to exploring how ethnic identity could lessen or intensify relationship ambivalence, as the balance of positive and negative emotions within close relationships can affect overall psychological well-being.

## **2. The Role of Relationship Ambivalence**

Relational ambivalence research has documented that people may simultaneously experience conflicting emotions toward a relationship partner (Connidis, 2010; Fingerman et al., 2004; Zayas & Shoda, 2015). Ambivalence is an inherent aspect of human relationships, reflecting the complexity and multifaceted nature of emotional bonds (Bleuler, 1914). However, it also points to underlying conflicts and tensions within those relationships (Lüscher, 2003). For instance, as the closeness of familial ties increases, so does the level of ambivalence. Intergenerational conflict is another significant factor contributing to relationship ambivalence, with numerous studies indicating that many adults feel mixed emotions toward their parents (Ferring et al., 2009; Lüscher, 2003; van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006; van Gaalen et al., 2010).

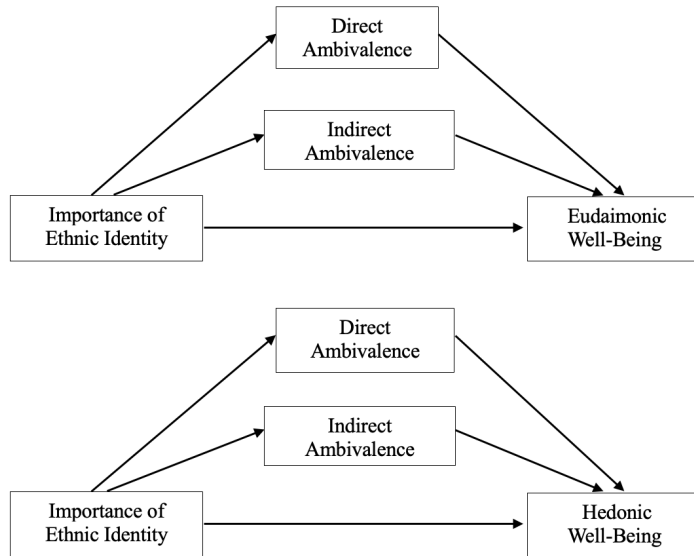
Ambivalence in relationships can be measured in two distinct ways, each offering different insights into its nature. Direct measures capture self-reported ambivalence measured through questions about whether their feelings toward a particular relationship or goal are mixed (Pillemer & Sutor, 2007). In contrast, ambivalence is assessed indirectly by measuring the positive and negative aspects of the relationship independently, afterwards applying the Griffin formula (Thompson et al., 1995) to quantify the level of ambivalence (Birditt et al., 2010; Fingerman et al., 2008; Willson et al., 2006). Several studies have compared the effectiveness of direct and indirect measures for assessing ambivalence, and their findings are mixed. These studies also discuss the possibility that each measure captures different facets of relationships (Connidis, 2015; Lendon et al., 2014; Sutor et al., 2011). Given these mixed results, measuring both forms of ambivalence in order to fully understand their distinct associations with well-being and ethnic identity is of significance.

The importance of studying ambivalence in relationships lies in its strong association with both individuals' psychological and physical well-being (Fingerman et al., 2008; Lee & Szinovacz, 2016; Rook et al., 2012; Uchino et al., 2012). Ambivalence in relationships with close others negatively predicts life satisfaction and mood, while positively predicting depression, stress, and anxiety (Fingerman et al., 2008; Lee & Szinovacz, 2016; Zoppolat et al., 2024). Given that ambivalent ties are closely linked to psychological well-being, understanding their mediating role is crucial. There are several empirically grounded reasons why ethnic identity may be associated with lower relationship ambivalence. First, positive ethnic identification can enhance individuals' sense of belonging and social acceptance (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). This sense of emotional security may motivate individuals to resolve conflicting feelings within close relationships. Second, a strong ethnic identity has been shown to reduce perceptions of threat, as suggested by the social identity perspective (Rousseau & Garcia-Retamero, 2007), which may in turn decrease the likelihood of interpreting relational interactions as conflictual. Third, individuals with higher levels of ethnic self-identification tend to report greater perceived social support within their relationships (Gallor & Fassinger, 2010). Greater social support may facilitate the development of more effective coping strategies (McDonald et al., 2020), which, in turn, may reduce ambivalence in close relationships. Because relationship ambivalence reflects unresolved emotional conflict toward close others, factors that enhance emotional security, reduce perceived threat, and increase social support are particularly relevant for understanding its maintenance. Despite these theoretically and empirically grounded links, the role of ethnic identity in shaping relationship ambivalence has not been directly examined. Furthermore, earlier studies examining how ambivalence and ethnic identity relate to well-being have mostly concentrated on the hedonic aspects of psychological well-being, including mood, life satisfaction, and happiness (e.g., Kiang et al., 2006; Zoppolat et al., 2024). On the other hand, it is also valuable to investigate how ethnic identity and relationship ambivalence might be related to eudaimonic aspects of well-being, which emphasizes the importance of engaging in purposeful living, as well as forming supportive interpersonal ties (Ryff, 1989).

### **3. The Present Study**

The aim of the present study is to examine how the importance of ethnic identity relates to relationship ambivalence and, in turn, predicts psychological well-being (both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being). The following hypotheses are proposed:

1. The importance of ethnic identity will be associated with lower levels of both direct and indirect relationship ambivalence.
2. Lower levels of direct and indirect relationship ambivalence will be associated with higher levels of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.
3. Relationship ambivalence will mediate the link between the importance attached to ethnic identity and psychological well-being (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Proposed Parallel Mediation Models

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Participants and Procedure

Voluntary adults were recruited via social media announcements in Turkey. A total of 422 adults completed the online survey conducted through Qualtrics. Among the participants, 255 were women and 167 were men. Participants were aged between 18 and 72 years ( $M = 27.81$ ,  $SD = 10.54$ ). Regarding relationship status, 103 were married, 174 were single, 15 were engaged, 120 were dating, and 10 were divorced. With regard to education, 47 participants had a high school education or lower, 353 were undergraduate students or held an undergraduate degree, and 22 were graduate students or held graduate degrees. This study was approved by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Anadolu University (Decision No: 1/62) on April 17, 2024. Before the study began, participants were asked to approve an online informed consent form.

### 5.2. Measures

#### 5.2.1. Importance of Ethnic Identity

To assess the importance that participants place on their ethnic identity, the “importance to identity” subscale of the Ethnic Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) was used. The subscale consists of 6 self-report items that evaluate how important one’s social group membership

is to their self-concept. Participants in this study were prompted to regard their ethnic group as a social group (e.g., “The ethnic group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am”). Participants rated the items on a 7-point response format (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree), and the mean of the scores was calculated to obtain an overall “importance of ethnic identity” score. ( $\alpha = .771$ ).

### **5.2.2. Relationship Ambivalence**

Before evaluating ambivalence in relationships, each participant was asked to indicate up to five frequent contacts. They were then instructed to respond to the following questions regarding these people.

#### **5.2.2.1. Direct Measure**

Participants rated three items (Pillemer & Sutor, 2002; 2004; Pillemer et al., 2007; Lendon et al., 2014) to assess their ambivalent feelings toward each of the individuals they identified. Participants responded to the first item, “*How often do you feel torn in two directions about this person?*” on a 5-point scale, with responses from 0 (never) to 4 (often); to the second item, “*I have mixed feelings about this person*” on a 4-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree); to the third item, “*This person and I often get on each other’s nerves but nonetheless feel close*” on a 4-point scale spanning from 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree). For each participant, an ambivalence score was calculated by taking the average of the ratings for each contact and dividing by the number of contacts.

#### **5.2.2.2. Indirect Measure**

The indirect measure of ambivalence assesses both positive and negative emotions toward the relationship partner (Fingerman et al., 2006; Lendon et al., 2014). Positive emotions were measured using three questions:

1. “How close do you feel to the person you’re describing?” (1 = not at all close, 4 = extremely close).
2. “How well do you get along with this person?” (1 = not at all well, 4 = extremely well).
3. “How good is your communication with this person?” (1 = not good at all, 4 = extremely good).

Negative emotions were assessed with three questions:

1. “How much conflict do you feel exists between you and this person?”
2. “How much do you feel this person criticizes you or your actions?”
3. “How often do you argue with this person?” (1 = never, 4 = extremely often).

The overall ambivalence score is calculated using the Griffin formula: “Ambivalence Score =  $[(\text{Positive} + \text{Negative})/2 - |\text{Positive} - \text{Negative}|] + 1.5$ ” (Thompson et al., 1995).

### **5.2.3. Psychological Well-Being**

#### **5.2.3.1. Eudaimonic Well-Being**

To assess eudaimonic aspects of well-being, the short version of the Psychological Well-being Scale (Ryff, 1989) was administered. This scale consists of 18 items divided across six subscales: “autonomy” (e.g., “I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people.”), “environmental mastery” (e.g., “The demands of everyday life often get me down.”), “personal growth” (e.g., “I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.”), “purpose in life” (e.g., “Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.”), “self-acceptance” (e.g., “I like most aspects of my personality.”), and “positive relations with others” (e.g., “I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.”). Participants reported to what extent they agree with the items using a 7-point response format (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The six subscale scores were averaged to derive an overall psychological well-being score. ( $\alpha = .710$ ).

#### **5.2.3.2. Hedonic Well-Being**

To assess hedonic well-being, a composite of life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect measures was used. Life satisfaction was measured with one item, in which participants rated their overall life on a 7-point response format (1 = worst, 7 = best). Participants’ affective experiences over the previous month were measured using five items for positive affect (e.g., happy) and six items for negative affect (e.g., nervous), as used in earlier studies (e.g., Selcuk et al., 2016). A composite score for hedonic well-being was derived by averaging the life satisfaction score, the positive affect score, and the reverse-coded negative affect items. ( $\alpha = .794$ ).

### **5.2.4. Demographics**

Participants provided self-reports of their demographic characteristics, including their gender, age, educational background, and current relationship status.

## **5.3. Data Analysis**

IBM SPSS was used to run all statistical analyses. Before testing the hypotheses, multiple regression was employed to assess whether the importance of ethnic identity and relationship ambivalence predicted psychological well-being. Next, the mediation hypothesis was tested using SPSS PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2013) to investigate whether ethnic identity predicts psychological well-being through relationship ambivalence. The indirect effects’ significance was examined using bootstrapping procedures.

## 5. Results

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among all variables examined. All variables demonstrated acceptable levels of skewness and kurtosis, except for direct ambivalence, which had a positively skewed distribution (skewness = 2.11). A log transformation was applied, reducing the skewness to .29. All the variables showed significant associations with each other. As expected, the importance of ethnic identity correlated negatively with both direct and indirect ambivalence and positively with eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. Direct and indirect ambivalence showed negative associations with both forms of well-being. Age was negatively related to both direct and indirect ambivalence and positively associated with both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. Gender (coded as - 1 for female and 1 for male) correlated positively with ethnic identity importance and hedonic well-being while correlating negatively with direct ambivalence. Education (coded as - 1 for high school or less and 1 for undergraduate or more) related positively with only the importance of ethnic identity, whereas relationship status (coded as - 1 for not being in a relationship and 1 for being in a relationship) was positively associated with both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being.

**Table 1.** Correlations Among Variables and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Ethnic identity		-.23***	-.24***	.18***	.14**	.03	.17***	.10*	.03
2. Direct ambivalence			.66***	-.36***	-.29***	-.17**	-.10*	-.04	-.09
3. Indirect ambivalence				-.26***	-.31***	-.11*	-.05	-.05	-.03
4. Eudaimonic well-being					.48***	.23***	.07	-.03	.23***
5. Hedonic well-being						.23***	.12*	.09	.29***
6. Age							.11*	-.05	.34***
7. Gender								-.02	.03
8. Education									-.01
9. Relationship status									
N	422	422	422	422	422	415	422	422	422
M(SD)	5.03(1.30)	.25(.15)	2.66(.88)	5.08(.63)	4.50(1.15)	27.81(10.54)			
Skewness	-.51	.29	.87	-.42	-.26	1.40			
Kurtosis	-.25	.13	3.25	.32	-.14	.89			

\*\*\*p < .001, \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05.

Before testing the mediation models, two multiple regression models were tested with direct ambivalence, indirect ambivalence, and the importance of ethnic identity as predictors, with eudaimonic and hedonic well-being as outcomes. Results showed that direct ambivalence negatively predicted eudaimonic well-being, while indirect ambivalence did not significantly predict eudaimonic well-being. Ethnic identity importance positively predicted eudaimonic well-being. Both direct ambivalence and indirect ambivalence negatively predicted hedonic well-being, while the importance placed on ethnic identity did not significantly predict hedonic well-being (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Results of Multiple Regression

Variables	$\beta$	$p$	95 % CI
<b>Outcome: Eudaimonic well-being</b>			
Importance of ethnic identity	0.095	.043*	[.002, .091]
Direct ambivalence	-0.317	.000***	[-1.779, - 0.805]
Indirect ambivalence	-0.031	.616	[-.107, .064]
R2 = .139			
<b>Outcome: Hedonic well-being</b>			
Importance of ethnic identity	0.053	.265	[-.036, .130]
Direct ambivalence	-0.145	.020*	[-1.987, - 0.173]
Indirect ambivalence	-0.204	.001**	[-.424, - .107]
R2 =.113			

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

The Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.885 for the first multiple regression model and 1.866 for the second, both indicating that the assumption of independence was satisfied in both models. Additionally, all independent variables had tolerance values greater than 0.1, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern.

## 6.1. Mediation Hypotheses

The hypothesis proposed that direct and indirect ambivalence in social relationships would mediate the link between the importance of ethnic identity and both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Results from PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2013) partially supported this hypothesis, with the mediation model being significant only for certain relationships. The mediation results for eudaimonic and hedonic well-being were reported separately.

### 6.1.1. Eudaimonic Well-Being

Results from a parallel mediation model showed that the importance attached to ethnic identity exhibited a positive direct effect on eudaimonic well-being,  $B = .046$ ,  $SE = .023$ ,  $p = .043$ , CI [.002, .091]. The importance of ethnic identity also indirectly predicted eudaimonic well-being through direct ambivalence ( $B = .036$ ,  $SE = .011$ , CI [.018, .059]), but not through indirect ambivalence ( $B = .004$ ,  $SE = .008$ , CI [-.012, .019]). The importance of ethnic identity reduced direct ambivalence ( $B = -.028$ ,  $SE = .006$ ,  $p < .001$ , CI [-.039, -.016]), and this reduction in direct ambivalence, in turn, increased eudaimonic well-being ( $B = -1.292$ ,  $SE = .248$ ,  $p < .001$ , CI [-1.779, -.805]; see Figure 2).

Participants' gender (coded as -1 for female and 1 for male), age, education (coded as -1 for high school or less and 1 for undergraduate or more), and relationship status (coded as -1 for not being in a relationship and 1 for being in a relationship) were separately included as covariates in the parallel mediation model. Gender did not significantly predict direct ambivalence ( $B = -.010$ ,  $SE = .008$ ,  $p = .172$ ), indirect ambivalence ( $B = -.012$ ,  $SE = .043$ ,  $p = .783$ ), or eudaimonic well-being ( $B = .013$ ,

$SE = .030, p = .663$ ). The indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on eudaimonic well-being through direct ambivalence remained significant after controlling for participants' gender,  $B = .034, SE = .010, CI [.015, .056]$ .

Age negatively predicted both direct ambivalence ( $B = -.002, SE = .001, p = .001, CI [-.004, -.001]$ ) and indirect ambivalence ( $B = -.009, SE = .004, p = .024, CI [-.017, -.001]$ ), and positively predicted eudaimonic well-being ( $B = .010, SE = .003, p < .001, CI [.005, .016]$ ). However, the indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on eudaimonic well-being through direct ambivalence was still significant after accounting for participants' age,  $B = .031, SE = .010, CI [.014, .051]$ .

Education did not significantly predict direct ambivalence ( $B = -.005, SE = .012, p = .691$ ), indirect ambivalence ( $B = -.032, SE = .067, p = .633$ ), or eudaimonic well-being ( $B = -.057, SE = .045, p = .214$ ). The indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on eudaimonic well-being through direct ambivalence was still significant after accounting for participants' education level,  $B = .035, SE = .010, CI [.017, .057]$ .

Relationship status did not significantly predict direct ambivalence ( $B = -.013, SE = .007, p = .088$ ) or indirect ambivalence ( $B = -.024, SE = .042, p = .569$ ) but positively predicted eudaimonic well-being ( $B = .124, SE = .028, p < .001, CI [.068, .179]$ ). The indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on eudaimonic well-being through direct ambivalence was still significant after accounting for participants' relationship status ( $B = .033, SE = .010, CI [.015, .055]$ ).

### 6.1.2. Hedonic Well-Being

Results from a parallel mediation model showed that the importance placed on ethnic identity did not directly predict hedonic well-being,  $B = .047, SE = .042, p = .265, CI [-.036, .130]$ . However, both the indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on hedonic well-being through direct ambivalence ( $B = .030, SE = .016, CI [.002, .066]$ ) and indirect ambivalence ( $B = .043, SE = .015, CI [.017, .074]$ ) were significant. The importance of ethnic identity reduced direct ambivalence ( $B = -.028, SE = .006, p < .001, CI [-.039, -.016]$ ) and this reduction, in turn, increased hedonic well-being ( $B = -1.080, SE = .462, p = .020, CI [-1.987, -.173]$ ). The importance of ethnic identity also reduced indirect ambivalence ( $B = -.164, SE = .032, p < .001, CI [-.227, -.100]$ ), and this reduction, in turn, increased hedonic well-being ( $B = -.265, SE = .081, p = .001, CI [-.424, -.107]$ ); see Figure 2).

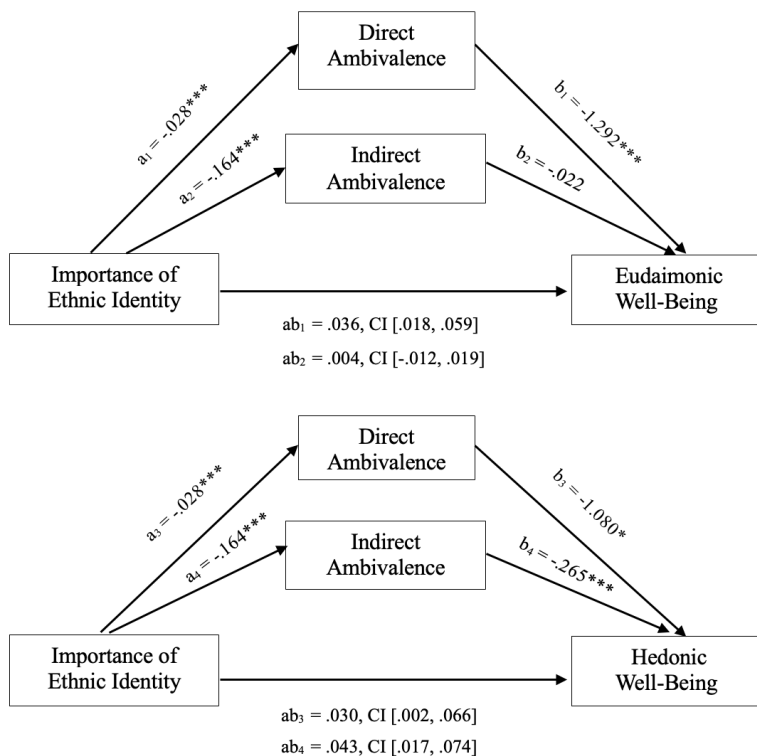
Participants' gender (coded as -1 for female and 1 for male), age, education (coded as -1 for high school or less and 1 for undergraduate or more), and relationship status (coded as -1 for not being in a relationship and 1 for being in a relationship) were separately included as covariates in the parallel mediation model. No significant gender differences were observed in hedonic well-being ( $B = .097, SE = .055, p = .077$ ). Both the indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on hedonic well-being through direct ambivalence ( $B = .027, SE = .016, CI [.0001, .0610]$ ) and indirect

ambivalence ( $B = .044$ ,  $SE = .015$ ,  $CI [.016, .076]$ ) remained significant after controlling for participants' gender.

Age positively predicted hedonic well-being ( $B = .020$ ,  $SE = .005$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CI [.010, .030]$ ). The indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on hedonic well-being through indirect ambivalence was still significant after controlling for participants' age,  $B = .040$ ,  $SE = .014$ ,  $CI [.012, .068]$ . However, the indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on hedonic well-being through direct ambivalence was no longer significant after controlling for participants' age,  $B = .024$ ,  $SE = .034$ ,  $CI [-.002, .057]$ . This suggests that age may be acting as a moderator rather than simply a covariate. A moderation analysis was performed to test whether age moderates the link between ethnic identity and hedonic well-being. Moderation results revealed a significant interaction between ethnic identity and age on hedonic well-being,  $B = .010$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $CI [.003, .018]$ . Johnson-Neyman's (1936) Region of Significance Analysis showed that the link between ethnic identity and hedonic well-being was significant for individuals aged 26 or older. This points out that the importance of ethnic identity positively influences hedonic well-being only for individuals over the age of 26.

Education did not significantly predict hedonic well-being ( $B = .147$ ,  $SE = .089$ ,  $p = .097$ ). Both the indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on hedonic well-being through direct ambivalence ( $B = .029$ ,  $SE = .016$ ,  $CI [.002, .065]$ ) and indirect ambivalence ( $B = .043$ ,  $SE = .015$ ,  $CI [.015, .073]$ ) remained significant after controlling for participants' education level.

Relationship status positively predicted hedonic well-being ( $B = .328$ ,  $SE = .054$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CI [.222, .433]$ ). The indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on hedonic well-being through indirect ambivalence was still significant after controlling for participants' relationship status,  $B = .046$ ,  $SE = .015$ ,  $CI [.018, .075]$ . However, the indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on hedonic well-being through direct ambivalence did not remain significant when accounting for participants' relationship status,  $B = .023$ ,  $SE = .015$ ,  $CI [-.003, .056]$ . This suggests that relationship status may be acting as a moderator rather than simply a covariate. A moderation analysis was performed to examine whether relationship status moderates the link between ethnic identity and hedonic well-being. The interaction was non-significant,  $B = .045$ ,  $SE = .042$ ,  $p = .288$ ,  $CI [-.038, .128]$ .



**Figure 2.** Parallel Mediation Analyses Predicting Well-Being Outcomes

Note.  $***p < .001$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $*p < .05$ .

## 6. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate whether ethnic identity predicts psychological well-being (both eudaimonic and hedonic), through direct and indirect relationship ambivalence. The findings provide substantial insight into the complex dynamics between ethnic identity, relationship ambivalence, and well-being. Specifically, the study revealed that ethnic identity contributes significantly to both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, but this relationship is mediated by relationship ambivalence. These findings provide meaningful implications, particularly in the context of ethnic identity's influence on personal and relational well-being.

As hypothesized, the importance attached to ethnic identity was identified as significant predictor of eudaimonic well-being. This suggests that individuals who value their ethnic identity highly are more likely to report greater eudaimonic well-being. These findings support earlier work suggesting that strong ethnic identification can foster psychological functioning (Abu-Rayya, 2006; Kiang et al., 2006; Utsey et al., 2002). Additionally, the study revealed that direct relationship ambivalence

played a mediating role in this association. The more individuals valued their ethnic identity, the less they directly reported ambivalence in their relationships, which, in turn, enhanced their eudaimonic well-being. This result is consistent with findings emphasizing the role of ethnic identity in increasing positive attitudes toward both in-group and out-group members (Corenblum, 2014; Phinney et al., 1997; 2007). Valuing one's ethnic identity may provide a sense of emotional security and belonging (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), which can facilitate the integration or resolution of conflicting emotions toward close others. In addition, a strong ethnic identity may reduce perceptions of interpersonal threat (Rousseau & Garcia-Retamero, 2007), thereby lowering the likelihood of interpreting relational exchanges as simultaneously supportive and distressing. The observed association may also reflect the role of ethnic identity in fostering greater perceived social support, which can promote more effective coping with relational stressors (Gallor & Fassinger, 2010; McDonald et al., 2020) and limit the persistence of unresolved emotional conflict. Taken together, these findings suggest the importance of high-quality close relationships as an important pathway through which ethnic identity contributes to greater well-being, which further reinforces the idea that group identities can promote well-being through positive relational experiences (Jetten et al., 2014).

Interestingly, while indirect relationship ambivalence had no mediating effect on the relationship between the importance placed on ethnic identity and eudaimonic well-being, direct ambivalence consistently emerged as a significant mediator after accounting for participants' age, gender, education, and relationship status. This underscores the importance of directly expressed ambivalence in understanding the benefits of ethnic identity on eudaimonic well-being. This suggests that the internal resolution of conflicting emotions toward close others may be more critical for deeper forms of well-being, which emphasizes psychological integration, meaning, and the capacity to maintain fulfilling relationships as key components (Ryff, 1989).

In contrast to eudaimonic well-being, hedonic well-being, which represents pleasure, happiness, and the pursuit of enjoyable experiences (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Kahneman et al., 1999) was not directly influenced by the importance attached to ethnic identity. This suggests that, while ethnic identity contributes to eudaimonic aspects of well-being, it may not have as straightforward an effect on momentary happiness or pleasure. However, the study did find that both direct and indirect relationship ambivalence served as mediators in the link between ethnic identity and hedonic well-being. Specifically, stronger ethnic identity was associated with lower direct and indirect ambivalence, which in turn relates to greater hedonic well-being. The notable distinction here is that indirect ambivalence was not associated with eudaimonic well-being, whereas it was significantly related to hedonic well-being. One possible explanation is that eudaimonic well-being involves an active investment in trusting close relationships (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008). These aspects of well-being are more likely to be shaped by explicitly experienced relational processes. In contrast, indirect ambivalence may reflect more passive relational tensions that do not necessarily prompt active reflection or meaning-making. As a result, indirect ambivalence may influence individuals' momentary emotional states rather than their deeper sense of meaning or purpose.

In accordance with the previous research, age significantly predicted both relationship ambivalence and well-being, with older participants experiencing less ambivalence and higher well-being. This suggests that as individuals age, they may become more adept at navigating emotional conflicts in relationships, potentially due to increased life experience or greater emotional regulation capabilities (Verstaen et al., 2020). Additionally, relationship status positively predicted both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, with participants who are in a committed relationship experiencing greater well-being. This result highlights the positive influence of close interpersonal relationships on psychological health (Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017). Controlling for these demographic factors did not alter the indirect effect of the importance placed on ethnic identity on eudaimonic and hedonic well-being through indirect ambivalence. However, the indirect effect of the importance attached to ethnic identity on hedonic well-being through direct ambivalence did not remain significant after accounting for participants' age and relationship status. Age, but not relationship status, interacted with ethnic identity to predict hedonic well-being, with the effect becoming significant after the age of 26. This result can be interpreted through the lens of identity development in adulthood (Kroger, 2007; Maehler, 2022; Marcia, 2002), which suggests that as people age, they achieve greater identity clarity, including ethnic identity. As people grow older, they may feel more comfortable in their ethnic identity, leading to enhanced well-being.

Gender and education level did not significantly affect the link between the importance attached to ethnic identity and well-being, or between ambivalence and well-being, indicating that these variables may not be key contributors to the specific dynamics explored in this study. While these variables have been shown to influence ethnic identity and well-being in other contexts (e.g., Destin et al., 2019; Martinez & Dukes, 1997), the current findings imply that the relationship ambivalence mechanism operates similarly across genders and educational backgrounds.

## **7. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study adds to the existing knowledge of how ethnic identity contributes to psychological well-being, yet some limitations remain. First, the study used a cross-sectional design, which does not allow for causal conclusions. Longitudinal designs are needed to more effectively capture the directionality and temporality of the relationships explored. Additionally, the study was conducted with participants from Turkey, which may restrict how these findings can be applied to other cultures. Given the cultural specificities of ethnic identity and relationship dynamics, it would be valuable to replicate this study in other countries with different ethnic compositions and social contexts.

Moreover, the role of intragroup vs. intergroup ambivalence could be examined more deeply to understand how ethnic identity specifically relates to conflict within or outside of ethnic groups, and in turn contributes to individual well-being. Additionally, future studies could examine how intersectionality (e.g., the combination of ethnic identity with other social identity dimensions, such as sexual orientation) influences relationship ambivalence and well-being. Understanding how multiple

identities intersect could provide a more detailed perspective on the determinants of well-being in ethnically diverse populations. Finally, future studies could investigate how social identity-based interventions, such as community programs or diversity training, might reduce ambivalence in close relationships. Social identity interventions could be part of broader social cure policies aimed at improving psychological functioning (e.g., Haslam et al., 2012). Researchers could assess whether such programs, when focused on ethnic identity, help individuals navigate and resolve conflicts in their close relationship, leading to greater well-being.

## 8. Conclusion

Taken together, this study underscores the important influence of ethnic identity in promoting both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, with relationship ambivalence mediating this relationship. The results indicate that ethnic identity can enhance well-being not only by providing feelings of purpose and belongingness but also by reducing emotional conflict within close relationships. These results highlight the dynamic connection between individual identity, social relationships, and well-being, presenting new evidence regarding the psychological benefits of ethnic identity and providing directions for future research and interventions aimed at enhancing psychological health through ethnic group affiliations.

### Ethics Committee Permission

This study was approved by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Anadolu University (Decision No: 1/62) on April 17, 2024.

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