

Attachment Security and Peer Pressure among Turkish University Students: The Mediating Role of Rejection Sensitivity

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Keywords

Attachment theory, attachment security, rejection sensitivity, peer pressure, emerging adults

Abstract

Despite the well-known association between emerging adults' attachment security and peer pressure, there is still a dearth of knowledge about the possible intervening mechanisms. The present study aimed to investigate the mediating role of rejection sensitivity in relation to attachment security and peer pressure in Turkish emerging adults. A total of 836 emerging adults (82% female) aged between 18 and 24 ($M_{age} = 21.58$, $SD = 1.50$) were assessed for perceptions about security of relationship with parents by using Kerns' Security Scale, for rejection sensitivity reports about families and social relationships by using Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, and for peer pressure perceptions about social relationships by using Peer Pressure Scale. Data was collected via an online survey. Results of the path analysis on the direct and indirect relationships among study variables showed that attachment security negatively predicted rejection sensitivity, as well as peer pressure. Rejection sensitivity was related positively to peer pressure. It is concluded that there is a significant mediating role of rejection sensitivity in the relation between attachment security and peer pressure. Our findings underscored the necessity of considering individual factors such as rejection sensitivity, when examining the relation between familial and social aspects of emerging adults.

Türk Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Güvenli Bağlanma ve Akran Baskısı: Reddedilme Duyarlılığının Aracı Rolü Öz

Beliren yetişkinlerde güvenli bağlanma ile akran baskısı arasındaki ilişki iyi bilinmesine rağmen bu ilişkideki olası aracı mekanizmalar hakkında alan yazında az sayıda bilgi bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, beliren yetişkinlerde güvenli bağlanma ile akran baskısı arasındaki ilişkide reddedilme duyarlılığının aracı rolünü incelemektir. Yaşları 18 ile 24 arasında değişen ($Or_{yaş} = 21.58$, $S = 1.50$), 836 Türk üniversite öğrencisinin (%82'si kadın) ebeveynlerine güvenli bağlanmalarına ilişkin algılarını değerlendirmek amacıyla Kerns Güvenli Bağlanma Ölçeği, aileleri ve sosyal ilişkileriyle ilgili reddedilme duyarlılıklarını değerlendirmek amacıyla Reddedilme Duyarlılığı Anketi ve sosyal ilişkilerine ilişkin algıladıkları akran baskısını değerlendirmek amacıyla Akran Baskısı Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Veriler çevrimiçi anket yoluyla toplanmıştır. Araştırma değişkenleri arasındaki doğrudan ve dolaylı ilişkilere ilişkin yol analizi sonuçları, güvenli bağlanmanın, akran baskısını ve reddedilme duyarlılığını negatif yönde yordadığını göstermiştir. Ek olarak, reddedilme duyarlılığı akran baskısını pozitif yönde yordamıştır. Bu bağlamda, reddedilme duyarlılığı, güvenli bağlanma ile akran baskısı arasındaki ilişkiye anlamlı bir şekilde aracılık etmiştir. Bulgular, beliren yetişkinlerde aile ve sosyal faktörler arasındaki ilişkiyi incelerken, reddedilme duyarlılığı gibi bireysel faktörlerin de dikkate alınması gerektiğinin altını çizmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler

Bağlanma kuramı, güvenli bağlanma, reddedilme duyarlılığı, akran baskısı, beliren yetişkinlik

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The attachment bond is defined as a dyadic and reciprocal relationship existing between the infant and caregiver (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1979). Attachment, according to Ainsworth (1963), is a “secure base from which to explore” and this idea has since remained a fundamental principle of attachment theory. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), attachment is classified as secure or insecure. A securely attached individual, who is loved, accepted, appreciated, and valued by his/her caregiver, tends to establish healthy motives such as trust, confidence, and resilience (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Karen, 1990); an insecurely attached individual, who is neglected, rejected, criticized, and devalued by the caregiver, tends to develop unhealthy motives, such as doubt, uncertainty, and mistrust (Engels et al., 2001). Moreover, secure attachment is found to be highly related to psychological and physical well-being, emotional adjustment, self-esteem, self-worth, and self-respect (Engels et al., 2001; Karen, 1990), and insecure attachment, to negative emotion regulation, lower levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, more dysfunctional anger, poor social and personal adjustment, and higher levels of internalizing symptoms (Allen et al., 1998; Engels et al., 2001; Karen, 1990). Although it is considered that the development of attachment in human infants started within the first nine months of life (Mace & Margison, 1997), Bowlby (1988) argued that it continues throughout life. This is a crucial point, since the security of the early parent-child bond is reflected in the child’s interpersonal relationships across the life span (Schneider et al., 2001; Spruit et al., 2020).

Attachment security patterns may tend to operate automatically and unconsciously and transfer to other relationships, among others, to the peer relationship (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Relationships with others, specifically with peers, are important during early years, and this importance grows relative to other relationships, during and after the adolescence period. For example, during infancy and childhood period, individuals with a secure attachment bond become more successful in meeting the challenges associated with forming and keeping healthy peer relationships (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). However, those without a secure attachment with their caregivers may have difficulty in their relationships and building a sense of confidence or trust in others (Hong & Park, 2012). Furthermore, during adolescence years, securely attached individuals become more successful in establishing autonomy, while maintaining a sense of closeness with their peers (Allen et al., 2007). More importantly, during the university years, previous research has consistently shown that individuals with a secure attachment to their parents are likely to have secure relationships with peers (e.g., Laible et al., 2000). Research has shown that their feeling of security makes them less affected by detrimental peer relationships, and more importantly, any pressures from their peers (Laghi et al., 2009).

Peer pressure is broadly defined as peer attempts to compel or coerce an individual to engage in specified behaviors (Sim & Koh, 2003). Individuals respond either by accepting it and conforming to their peers’ norms, expectations, or demands, or by ignoring it, and by confronting it with a counter influence (Rihtarić & Kamenov, 2013). Erözkan (2009) argues that the ability of an individual to interact socially with peers is a crucial skill, and central to establishing other measures of life quality. Pressure from peers remains one of the most pernicious risk factors later in life (Erözkan, 2009; Rihtarić & Kamenov, 2013). Individuals who perceive pressure from their peers tend to show low self-esteem (Uslu, 2013) and engage in risk-taking behaviors, such as delinquency, substance use, and school misconduct, as well as diminished school performance (Bámaca & Umaña-Taylor, 2006; Fletcher et al., 1995; Santor et al., 2000), psychosocial difficulties, including school difficulties, problem behavior, and loneliness (Graham & Juvonen, 2001). Furthermore, in line with attachment theory, securely attached individuals do not readily accept pressure from their peers, to engage with their peers during a discussion, and freely show their autonomous ideas whenever confronted with disagreement (Allen et al., 2007). On the other hand, children’s desire to be accepted, and

avoidance of rejection (by their peers) is compatible with the broader human motivations of belonging (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Furthermore, given that adolescents generally respond to peer pressure by accepting it and conforming to their peer's norms, expectations, or demands (Rihtarić & Kamenov, 2013), it may be inferred from the attachment literature that insecure adolescents may readily conform to these pressures.

Erözkan (2009) stated that as well as insecure attachment, and rejection sensitivity may also lead to problems in interpersonal relationships, as well as children's functioning. Rejection sensitivity is the tendency of individuals to expect, readily perceive and react strongly to rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Rejection sensitivity is defined as a cognitive-affective processing system that develops as a result of prior rejection experiences, such as with parents (Downey et al., 1999). According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973; 1982) and the rejection sensitivity model of Downey et al. (1994), parents who respond to the security needs of their children with rejection make children sensitive to rejection (Feldman & Downey, 1994; Downey & Feldman, 1996; Pachankis et al., 2008). Bowlby (1988) asserts that sensitivity towards rejection leads to difficulties in interpersonal relationships, including, as focused on the current study, peer relationships. During peer relations, individuals who are high on rejection sensitivity are highly anxious about being rejected by their peers (Downey & Feldman 1996) and readily accept peer pressure in order not to be rejected in social contexts (Ayduk et al., 2003; Brown, 1982). Relatedly, when individuals feel pressure from peers, they usually react with some degree of distress (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gupta, 2008), hostility, jealousy, and withdrawal (Natarajan et al., 2011). Earlier prolonged rejection by parents and/or peers is considered a potential cause of higher rejection sensitivity (Rosenbach & Renneberg, 2014). Therefore, in light of the literature, this study will examine the mediating role of rejection sensitivity in the relation between attachment security and peer pressure.

We worked with emerging adults because emerging adulthood is a period of profound developmental changes, as well as a developmental period in which individuals create new bonds with significant people around them (Arnett, 2004). During this period, the perceived quality of one's peer relationships becomes considerably more important compared to the relationship with parents (Doumen et al., 2012). Many emerging adults leave their hometowns to attend college and interact mostly with friends, which may change the relative importance of peers and parents (Angela et al., 2020; Doumen et al., 2012). Previous research states that attending a college in another city away from parents leaves emerging adults vulnerable to peer pressure (e.g., Angela et al., 2020). Moreover, compared to children, emerging adults are exposed to peer pressure at least as much as adolescents (Lansu & Cillessen, 2012). Rejection sensitivity has been found to be relatively stable over short periods of time in adolescence and early adulthood periods (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey et al., 1998; London et al., 2007), but no research has specifically investigated the stability of rejection sensitivity during emerging adulthood. Therefore, in this study, we focused on the emerging adulthood period, while examining the relationship between study variables.

Our study makes some important and novel contributions to the existing literature. Previous studies have been conducted mostly in Western cultural contexts and it is well-known that early parent-child interactions may vary as a function of cultural background (e.g., Kirchhoff et al., 2019). Therefore, our focus on a non-Western cultural context showing both individualistic and collectivistic characteristics, namely, Türkiye (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996), will contribute to the literature. Additionally, examining the stated relations with an emerging adult sample will widen our knowledge about the relationship between study variables and their unique paths, in this important period of life. Moreover, although the relationships between attachment security and peer pressure (Lotar, 2011; Allen et al., 2007), attachment security and rejection sensitivity (Horney, 1937;

Erikson, 1959; Bowlby, 1988; Khoshkam et al., 2012; Özen et al., 2011) were examined separately in previous studies, the relationships among these variables in combination have yet to be examined. In addition, no studies have tested the possible intervening role of rejection sensitivity in the relationship between attachment security and peer pressure. Therefore, guided by the attachment theory, this study aimed to examine the mediating role of rejection sensitivity in the relation between attachment security and peer pressure in Turkish emerging adults. It was hypothesized that emerging adults' attachment security would be negatively related to rejection sensitivity which, in turn, would be positively related to peer pressure. Thus, we also hypothesized that rejection sensitivity would mediate the relationship between attachment security and peer pressure in the emerging adulthood period.

Method

Participants

Participants were 836 university students (82% of them were female) between the ages of 18 and 24 years old ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.58$, $SD = 1.502$). Participants were from different regions of Türkiye and most (88%) were from large urban cities. Additionally, 5.6% of the participants were English Preparatory Program students, 22.2% were freshmen, 19% were sophomores, 22.4% were juniors, 24.6% were seniors, and 6.1% were master or PhD students. For most participants, their parents were married and living together (86.2%). The largest proportion of emerging adults were living with their family (49.8%); 24% were living in a student house, 12.2%, in a university dormitory, 9.1%, in a private dormitory, and 4.9%, in other places. The educational status of the participants' mothers and fathers was obtained through demographic questions. Among the mothers, 31.2% graduated from primary school, 15.4%, from secondary school, 27.9%, from high school, and 25.5%, from university or above. Among the fathers, 17% graduated from primary school, 15.8%, from secondary school, 32.3%, from high school, and 34.9%, from university or above.

Measurements

Kerns' Security Scale (KSS): The KSS assesses emerging adults' sense of attachment security. The KSS was developed by Kerns et al. (1996) and adapted into Turkish by Sümer and Anafarta-Şendağ (2009). Sümer and Anafarta-Şendağ used the standard translation-retranslation method in translating the scale. At first, The KSS was translated into Turkish by the two experts in the field, then the agreed Turkish form was translated back into English by another expert in the field. The 15-item scale was presented with the conjunction 'but' (e.g., "Some kids find it easier to trust their parents, BUT other kids are not sure if they can trust their parents.") in the form of Harter (1982) type scale. Participants first determined the most appropriate statement for themselves, and then they looked at the left or right side of the conjunction. They rated the most appropriate statement about their parents on a 2-point Likert-type scale (1 = "really like" or 2 = "sort of like"). Higher scores indicated greater attachment security to the parents. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the KSS for the present sample was .82.

Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ): The RSQ assesses emerging adults' sense of rejection sensitivity about their families and social relationships. The questionnaire was developed by Downey and Feldman (1996) and adapted into Turkish by Özen et al. (2011). Özen et al. (2011) translated RSQ both English into Turkish and translated back from Turkish to English using back-translation considering culture-specific components by bilingual social psychologists. Downey and Feldman's RSQ contains 18 statements, however in the adaptation process eight items were added by considering the cultural situations that are frequently faced in Türkiye. The Turkish questionnaire has a total of 26 items, including rejection concern (e.g., "How concerned

or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to lend you his/her notes?") and acceptance expectancy (e.g., "I would expect that the person would willingly give his/her notes.") subscales. The respondents rated the rejection concern items over a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = "Very unconcerned" to 6 = "Very concerned") and the acceptance expectancy items over a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = "Very unlikely" to 6 = "Very likely"). The rejection sensitivity total score was calculated by aggregating the scores of individuals on rejection concern and acceptance expectancy subscales containing items of hypothetical circumstances where sensitivity to rejection from others is considered. The higher score indicated higher rejection sensitivity. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the RSQ for the present sample was .86. For the subscales rejection concern and acceptance expectancy the Cronbach's alpha reliabilities the present sample were .91 and .92, respectively.

Peer Pressure Scale (PPS): The PPS assesses emerging adults' peer pressure perceptions about their social relationships. It was developed by Kiran-Esen (2003). The 31-item scale (e.g., "I do whatever they want so that my friends don't think I'm scared") was rated over a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = "never" to 5 = "always"). The original scale has 34 items, but the following three were dropped from the current study because of participants' sensitivity ("Since people my age have sexual experiences, I also try them.", "My friends put pressure on me to have sexual experiences.", and "Because my friends do, I also access porn sites on the internet."). The higher score indicated high levels of peer pressure. Cronbach's alpha reliability of the PPS for the current sample was .92.

Procedure

The present study was conducted online via surveeey.com. Before the application, firstly, ethical approval was taken from the Izmir University of Economics Ethics Committee (B.30.2.İEU.0.05.05-020-097). Then, the survey link was distributed over social media (e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram). During the application, firstly, participants were sent the informed consent including all the details of the purpose of the study, the general procedure, and the information about voluntary participation. All respondents were assured about the confidentiality of the study, the anonymity of their responses, and the right to leave the study at any time. The participants who agreed to participate in the study voluntarily continued to answer the demographic questions including their age and gender, as well as the questionnaire set including Kerns' Security Scale (KSS), Rejection Sensitivity Scale (RSC), and Peer Pressure Scale (PPS). All scales were presented in Turkish. The completion of the questionnaires lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Results

Firstly, the descriptive statistics and the bivariate correlations of the study variables were computed. Then, *t*-test analyses were handled to examine gender differences. Lastly, the main hypotheses were tested via path analysis with three manifest variables (i.e., attachment security, rejection sensitivity, and peer pressure). In the present study, the lavaan software package (Rosseel, 2012) for R with the estimator of maximum likelihood (ML) was used to perform the analysis. We determined the goodness of fit of the models in terms of the cutoff values close to .95 for CFI and .05 for SRMR and RMSEA (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and the bivariate correlations among the study variables. As shown in Table 1, attachment security correlated negatively with rejection sensitivity, as well as peer pressure. Moreover, rejection sensitivity correlated positively with peer pressure. Lastly, the age of the participants was associated positively with attachment security. Additionally, *t*-test analyses of gender differences in the study

variables produced a significant difference for peer pressure ($t(834) = -8.588, p < .001$). According to the results of t -test analyses, males ($M = 1.81; SD = 0.60$) reported more peer pressure compared to females ($M = 1.45; SD = 0.43$). Based on the initial results, we controlled adolescent's gender and age in our model.

A path model was set to measure the mediating role of rejection sensitivity in the relation between attachment security and peer pressure (see Figure 1). The model yielded a perfect fit ($S-B\chi^2 [7; N = 836] = 154.533, p < .001, CFI = 1.000, SRMR = .000, RMSEA = .000$). Specifically, attachment security negatively predicted rejection sensitivity ($B = -.26, SE = .04, z = -7.09, \beta = -.24, p < .001$). Rejection sensitivity positively predicted peer pressure ($B = .10, SE = .03, z = 3.56, \beta = .12, p < .001$). Moreover, attachment security negatively predicted peer pressure ($B = -.08, SE = .03, z = -2.66, \beta = -.09, p = .008$). Additionally, as for the demographics, gender positively predicted peer pressure ($B = .37, SE = .04, z = 8.92, \beta = .29, p < .001$) and negatively predicted rejection sensitivity ($B = -.10, SE = .05, z = -1.99, \beta = -.07, p = .047$). That is, females reported more peer pressure and less rejection sensitivity compared to males. Lastly, age predicted none of the variables in the analysis.

We further examined whether the indirect paths were significant. Consistent with our hypothesis, a test of indirect effect with a bootstrap based on 5000 replications showed that attachment security was significantly associated with peer pressure through rejection sensitivity ($B = -.026, SE = .009, z = -2.838, \beta = -.029, p = .005$). These results suggested that rejection sensitivity played a significant mediating role in the relationship between attachment security and peer pressure.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Attachment Security	836	2.66	0.52	-		
2. Rejection Sensitivity	836	2.99	0.58	-.24**	-	
3. Peer Pressure Scale	836	1.51	0.48	-.13*	.12**	-
4. Age	836	21.58	1.50	.09*	-.04	-.02

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

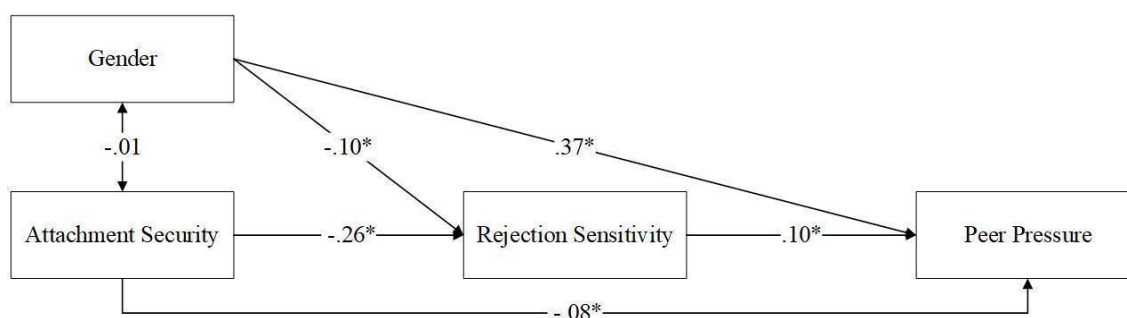


Figure 1. The Path Model Showing the Mediating Role of Rejection Sensitivity in Relation Between Attachment Security and Peer Pressure. Note. * $p < .05$. For the sake of clarity, non-significant age paths were not shown on the figure. Gender was coded as 1 for female and 2 for male.

Discussion

In the present study, we aimed to test the intervening role of rejection sensitivity in the relation between attachment security and peer pressure. To fulfill this aim, we examined attachment security, rejection sensitivity, and perceived peer pressure reports of emerging adults by recruiting a large sample from a non-Western cultural context. The results of the path model showed that securely attached emerging adults were less sensitive to rejections and that less rejection-sensitive individuals more effectively resisted peer pressure. The findings were consistent with the assumptions of attachment theory and underscored the importance of attachment security established with parents for individuals' functioning. The main findings that emerged from this study revolve around three main issues: The association between attachment security and rejection sensitivity, the link between rejection sensitivity and peer pressure, and the indirect relation between attachment security and peer pressure through rejection sensitivity.

In line with our first hypothesis and consistent with the attachment theory, we found that attachment security was negatively related to rejection sensitivity. Many influential theorists such as Horney (1937), Erikson (1959), and Bowlby (1988) support the notion that rejection sensitivity is mainly caused by insecure relations with parents. Moreover, previous research consistently showed a significant positive relationship between insecure attachment and rejection sensitivity, not only in Western cultures (e.g., Downey & Feldman, 1996; Kennedy, 1999; Roelofs et al., 2013), but also in various non-Western cultures: Indian (Natarajan et al., 2011), Persian (Khoshkam et al., 2012), and Turkish (Erözkan, 2009; Erözkan & Kömür, 2006). Specifically, Feldman and Downey (1994) documented that securely attached early adults were significantly less rejection-sensitive than either avoidant or ambivalent counterparts. This finding supports the claim that rejection sensitivity may stem from insecure relations with parents. They also concluded that children rejected by parents, whether overtly or implicitly, may learn to expect, and be concerned about, rejection in new situations, and interpret ambiguous social cues as rejection, and be unable to form secure attachments to others, specifically with peers, or romantic partners. In another study, Erözkan (2009) found significantly higher rejection sensitivity levels for the group of university students with attachment insecurity compared to those with high attachment security. Therefore, it can be said that our finding showing a negative relation between attachment security and rejection sensitivity is consistent with the previous literature. In other words, if individuals' attachment to their parents is secure, they are likely to be less sensitive to rejection. This finding provides crucial insight into the significance of individuals' attachment relations with parents when there is a potential for rejection across a range of interpersonal situations. In accordance with our second hypothesis, rejection sensitivity was found to be positively associated with peer pressure. Although, to our knowledge, no study examines the relationship between peer pressure and rejection sensitivity, the peer relationship literature provides some insight into this relationship. In some previous studies, they stated that peer relationships can be characterized in terms of likeability or social acceptance by other group members (e.g., popularity or rejection) (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Hawley, 2002). Thus, in a peer relationship, individuals try to buttress their social status and guard against rejection (Eder, 1985; Parker & Gottman, 1989). Therefore, children with excessive sensitivity to rejection readily perceive intentional rejections by their peers (Parker et al., 2006). Given that, during this developmental period, peers become important for emerging adults, and they tend to accept their pressure to avoid rejection. Moreover, study findings of Downey et al. (1998) showed that rejection sensitivity affected how individuals think, feel, and behave in their relationships with their peers. This finding leads to the conclusion that a highly sensitive emerging adult tends to think that rejection is unavoidable, feel insecurity, anxiety, and fear whenever they confront rejection, and tend to behave in a way

so as to avoid rejection by their peers, so readily accept the pressure from peers. Given the lack of direct study findings about the relationship between peer pressure and rejection sensitivity, this indirect evidence can be viewed as a sign of support for our assumptions. However further research is needed to support the direct relationship between these variables.

In accordance with our last hypothesis, attachment security was significantly associated with peer pressure through rejection sensitivity. Although there is no research examining the intervening role of rejection sensitivity within the stated relation, in line with the assumptions of the attachment theory and the previous research, we can conclude that prior rejection experiences may make people more sensitive to the probability of rejection (Ishaq et al., 2015; Downey et al., 1997; Downey et al., 1998), which may make individuals sensitive to peer pressure (McLachlan et al., 2010). In other words, early relational experiences with parents, like attachment security, are related to how much rejection an individual would perceive from their relationships with others (Feldman & Downey, 1994). For instance, if the relationship with the parents is secure, that individual tends to be less sensitive to rejection from others, and vice versa. Moreover, individuals high in rejection sensitivity may adopt dysfunctional coping responses which may impact how they respond to actual encounters with peers, both behaviorally and emotionally (Marston et al., 2010; Ayduk et al., 2001; Downey et al., 1998; Sandstrom et al., 2003). That is, if an individual is highly sensitive to rejection, they may become emotionally vulnerable to pressures from others, especially from peers, and may behave in a more accepting manner whenever they encounter pressure. On the other hand, individuals who are not highly sensitive to rejections may resist perceived pressure from their peers or may readily reject the pressure.

Given that all individuals desire acceptance and approval, especially in their interpersonal relations, having an insecure attachment, as well as being sensitive to rejections, may make them more vulnerable to difficulties in their relationships (Erözkan, 2009) with their peers. Specifically, these individuals with less secure attachment and, in turn, are more sensitive to rejection, may perceive more pressure from their peers during their interactions. As another possible explanation, the social-cognitive perspective states that internal working models of individuals may influence how they perceive and deal with interpersonal relations (Downey et al., 1998). From this notion, it can be said that, in our study, individuals with insecure internal working models perceive interpersonal relations as more negative and involving pressure. Moreover, because of their expectations of rejection, these individuals readily perceive pressure in others' ambiguously intentioned behaviors.

Additionally, we also tested the role of age and gender in our model. The results of the present study showed that gender was positively related to peer pressure and related negatively to rejection sensitivity. Although some research found males to be the more susceptible to peer pressure, and the less sensitive to peer rejection (e.g., Allen et al., 2012; Bradley & Wildman, 2002; Brown et al., 1986), some others have also documented the absence of significant gender disparities in rejection sensitivity (İbrahim et al., 2015; Richter & Schoebi, 2021). Our findings are consistent with previous research (Brown, 1982; Marston et al. 2010; London et al., 2012) which show that, in fact, females appeared to be under more pressure, but are less sensitive to rejections compared to males. Therefore, this finding should be interpreted critically since the number of male and female participants was not balanced. Lastly, age was not associated with any of the variables in the study. The association of gender and age with the study variables (i.e., rejection sensitivity, attachment security, and peer pressure) suggests valuable insights for understanding social dynamics, as gender and age are known to significantly shape social interactions. Furthermore, gender roles and societal norms experienced at different stages of life have been found to influence interpersonal dynamics and relationship patterns, and in particular the stability of rejection sensitivity tends to persist for short periods of time throughout

adolescence and early adulthood (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey et al., 1998; London et al., 2007). Thus, gender and age may influence specific behavioral patterns and sensitivities. As the current study focused only on emerging adulthood and had inequalities in the number of male and female participants, more balanced and diverse samples can be collected to talk about more precise patterns related to gender and age.

The present study has several limitations that should be underscored. First, the number of male and female participants was unequal, which prevents generalization of the findings to both genders. Therefore, future studies should balance the number of male and female participants to obtain a more representative sample, thus allowing gender comparisons. Second, because the survey link distributed through social media was accessible to participants from all regions of Türkiye who completed these scales online, we excluded items with sensitive content from the peer pressure scale. The exclusion of some items from the scale due to their sensitivity may have an effect on the consistency and accuracy of the scale. Therefore, in future studies, information about these sensitive items can be included in the informed consent prior to participation in the study, and people can be given the option not to participate in the study. Third, the limitations of a cross-sectional design make it difficult to establish causal relationships, as temporal sequences remain ambiguous. Consequently, the use of longitudinal approaches in subsequent studies may shed light on the dynamic nature of the phenomena under investigation. Furthermore, to enrich our understanding, it would be beneficial for future research to include parental assessments of attachment security alongside those of emerging adults. This integration of parental perspectives offers valuable insights into attachment dynamics and promotes a more holistic understanding of the subject. Additionally, examining such relationships with other cultural contexts would allow comparisons and generalizations to be made, especially about culture-related constructs. Finally, although online data collection makes it easier to reach more people in a limited amount of time, emerging adults who believe in the anonymity of their responses in an online environment tend to report in less socially desirable ways and provide more reliable responses, and paper and pencil and online data collection methods have been found to be generally equivalent (Weigold et al., 2013), there are some limitations, such as the inability to sample the participants who do not have access to computers, mobile devices, or the internet. Therefore, other data collection strategies could be considered in future studies to reach a more diverse group of participants.

In conclusion, the current study makes a practical and scientific contribution to the literature and also provides benefits to both counselors and researchers studying and examining the dynamics of family and social processes in a non-Western sample. First, the relationships between attachment security and peer pressure as well as rejection sensitivity have been examined separately in previous studies, but this is the first study examining the relationships among these variables and using rejection sensitivity as a mediator between attachment security and peer pressure. Therefore, understanding the social and cultural dimensions of rejection sensitivity is critical to contextualizing its significant mediating role in the above relationship. Cultural norms, values, and socialization practices are known to significantly influence individuals' responses to rejection and peer dynamics, especially in collectivist cultures that emphasize interdependence. In such cultures, individuals' early attachment patterns are shaped culturally, and they may be more sensitive to social rejection, leading to increased rejection sensitivity and susceptibility to peer pressure. Thus, focusing on a large sample from a predominantly collectivist culture (i.e., Türkiye) is another contribution of the current study. Finally, there is little research on emerging adults' rejection sensitivity and its relationship with attachment security and peer pressure; therefore, it is important to consider this age group to broaden our knowledge of the relationship between study variables and their unique paths. While examining the dynamics of family and social relations of emerging adults, it is necessary to consider attachment security between emerging adults and their parents. In this regard, attachment theory provided a useful framework to identify the specific

processes possibly underlying family and social relations. Such knowledge potentially serves as a foundation for developing and refining interventions aimed at improving parent-child interactions and personal-social relationships.

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