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Feeling Entrapped in Relationships: A Dyadic Model of Entrapment, Obsessive Distrust, Relationship Satisfaction, and Gender Asymmetry

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ABSTRACT

This study examined associations among entrapment, obsessive distrust, and relationship satisfaction using the Actor–Partner Interdependence Mediation Model within a Family Systems framework. Data from 467 couples (N = 934) indicated that entrapment predicted greater obsessive distrust and lower relationship satisfaction at the actor level. Obsessive distrust predicted lower actor and partner relationship satisfaction. An asymmetric partner effect also emerged: males' entrapment predicted females' obsessive distrust, whereas the reverse effect was nonsignificant. These findings underscore dyadic interdependence and gender-specific relational patterns.

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Entrapment; obsessive distrust; relationship satisfaction; dyadic

Introduction

The modern family system is under intense pressure and stress due to macro-level risk factors brought about by global socio-economic transformations, social events, natural disasters, and digitalization (Galeano et al., 2024). Compared with traditional family structures, the modern family system is characterized by greater diversity in family forms, more flexible family roles, and increased exposure to rapid social, economic and technological changes (Pearce et al., 2018). These crises not only affect family members on an individual level but also influence interactional processes within the family system (Oleschuk, 2022). Despite these structural changes, the family continues to represent one of the most important social institutions, and romantic partnerships remain the foundation of family systems (Grüning Parache et al., 2024). Data from the United States indicate that millions of individuals have continued to form marital relationships over the past decade despite changing family formation patterns (Statista, 2024). Similarly, the results of the Family Structure Survey conducted by the

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Turkish Statistical Institute (2025) clearly demonstrate that the family occupies a central place in individuals' emotional lives. One of the primary theoretical perspectives for understanding these interactional processes is Family Systems Theory. Within this framework, the family consists of three basic subsystems: (1) the spouse, (2) the parents, and (3) the siblings (Calatrava et al., 2022). The spouse subsystem, which represents the starting point of a family system, refers to a process based on the dynamic interaction between partners. The primary responsibilities of individuals within this subsystem include learning to build a shared life with their partner, sharing responsibilities, and adapting to their partner's life (Wu et al., 2024). Spousal subsystems that successfully fulfill these functions are described as "functional." Indeed, research shows that in relationships where mutual interaction and a healthy division of roles are established, relationship satisfaction is significantly higher (Mallory, 2022).

However, the developmental trajectory of the couple subsystem may not always progress in a positive direction. There are many risk factors that threaten the relational dynamics between partners. Recent studies emphasize that partners' individual characteristics play a critical role in determining overall relationship quality (Raposo et al., 2024). These findings demonstrate that individuals' daily psychological processes are directly linked to relational outcomes (Devenport et al., 2023; Rusli, 2025). In the current era, a global mental health crisis is emerging that undermines individuals' psychological resilience. Epidemiological data from the World Health Organization (2025) indicate that the uncertainties brought about by modern life have significantly increased symptoms of anxiety and depression. Such multiple neurotic patterns can create a sense of entrapment by triggering individuals' negative core beliefs rooted in helplessness and inadequacy (Wu et al., 2026). Entrapment is defined as a psychological state in which individuals perceive themselves as unable to escape from adverse internal or external circumstances despite a strong desire to do so (De Beurs et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2011). This subjective perception is characterized by feelings of defeat, helplessness, and a lack of perceived escape rather than by the objective severity of external circumstances. Entrapment may manifest as the individual finding themselves unable to respond under intense stress and a perceived sense of threat. Clinical studies provide evidence that the feeling of being stuck is a major risk factor for mental health (Atta et al., 2025). Teismann and Brailovskaia (2020) state that being stuck has a significant impact on psychological functioning and suicidal ideation. Additionally, this condition has significant associations with depression, hopelessness, and cognitive control processes (Choi & Shin, 2023; Earl et al., 2026). Atta et al. (2025) note that entrapment serves as an important predictor in forecasting verbal

aggression and self-harm behaviors. In summary, while the feeling of entrapment poses a serious threat to individual mental health, when considered within the context of couple relationships, it directly jeopardizes the interactions established by individuals in the couple subsystem with their partners (Akyıl et al., 2025). The mental health literature indicates that emotional states such as entrapment and helplessness constitute a serious risk factor for relational functioning.

During this "polycrisis" period marked by multidimensional challenges, there may be a significant increase in individuals' perceived loss of control and intolerance for uncertainty (Yang & Wang, 2026). In a climate of uncertainty, individuals may experience difficulties in their interactions with their social circles and face breaches of basic trust. For individuals in romantic relationships, this uncertainty-based perception of distrust can be directly reflected within the relationship. The perception of distrust developing in relationships can become a critical risk factor for the relationship's sustainability, quality, and the mental health of the individuals involved (Arikewuyo et al., 2021). Additionally, a shaken sense of trust within the couple's subsystem can lead to complications such as the solidification of negative beliefs about the partner and separation anxiety (Yılmaz et al., 2023). Alongside trust issues experienced within a relationship, individuals may develop obsessive beliefs that their partner is untrustworthy. This cognitive process, conceptualized in the literature as obsessive distrust, refers to a state of obsessive suspicion regarding the partner's honesty, fidelity, and intentions (Strauss et al., 2020). Unlike ordinary levels of distrust, obsessive distrust manifests itself in the individual's constant monitoring of their partner and intrusive questioning of their behavior (Wong et al., 2017). Research indicates that obsessive distrust is a significant risk factor for relational processes. Brandes et al. (2020) emphasize that obsessive distrust is associated with a general climate of distrust between partners and with violent behavior. Similarly, the level of obsessive distrust is directly linked to jealousy between partners and ruminative (repetitive) thought patterns regarding the relationship (Kılıç & Altınok, 2021). As seen, the perception of obsessive distrust experienced within the relational context is intertwined with all other relational dynamics.

However, this chain of interactions ultimately leads to destructive outcomes for relationships. The overly controlling and repetitive nature of obsessive distrust weakens the emotional bond between partners, triggering emotional reactivity and emotional disengagement behaviors (Leclerc et al., 2022). Such emotional conflicts experienced between partners and repetitive negative perceptions at the cognitive level constitute a primary risk factor for relationship satisfaction, one of the core outcomes of romantic relationships (Knox et al., 2024). In the literature, relationship satisfaction is

defined as partners' subjective evaluations of the pleasure, fulfillment, and overall quality they derive from their romantic partnership (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). Relationship satisfaction is not merely an indicator of individual well-being but also a central element reflecting the relational functionality and emotional balance of the couple subsystem (Arnocky et al., 2024). In this regard, relationship satisfaction serves as an overarching final outcome for relational processes. Numerous factors, such as demographic variables, parenting status, and the tendency toward individualization, are directly linked to relationship satisfaction (Mallory, 2022). As noted by Ventura-León et al. (2025), relationship satisfaction occupies a central network position within the interaction processes between partners, and various relational dynamics cluster around this focal point. Research indicates that relationship satisfaction interacts with numerous elements across a multidimensional spectrum. Schulz et al. (2025) note that jealousy, self-esteem, emotional control, and sociocultural factors are associated with relationship satisfaction. Similarly, relationship satisfaction has an inseparable connection with fundamental processes such as intimacy, commitment, and passion within the broader relational network (Ventura-León & Lino-Cruz, 2023). In this regard, it is evident that relational satisfaction between couples is in a constant dynamic interaction with both individual and broader social processes.

The Present Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the relationships between partners' levels of entrapment, obsessive distrust, and relationship satisfaction within the spouse subsystem, using a multidimensional dyadic model. The existing literature has primarily focused on the relationships of entrapment and obsessive distrust with individual mental health indicators (Atta et al., 2025; Choi & Shin, 2023; Strauss et al., 2020; Teismann & Brailovskaia, 2020). However, it has been suggested that these variables may be reciprocally related to partner-to-partner interaction processes within romantic relationships. Accordingly, there is a need to examine these variables within the context of relational patterns between couples. Particularly given that the variables of entrapment, obsessive distrust, and relationship satisfaction may be interrelated, it becomes important to address these relationships at the dyadic level. In this context, the present study examines the relationships between feelings of entrapment, obsessive distrust, and relationship satisfaction within the framework of the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIMeM). Ledermann and Kenny (2012) note that this model is an effective method for understanding the nature of family and couple dynamics. In this

regard, the study aims to contribute to the literature by examining the relationships among these variables at both the individual and partner levels.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 467 couples ($N = 934$) were included in the study. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 79. The mean age of female participants was 26.34 (SD = 9.71), while the mean age of male participants was 28.06 (SD = 10.96). When examining the relationship statuses of the participants, it was found that 317 couples (67.9%) were married, whereas 150 couples (32.1%) were in romantic relationships. When examining the distribution according to relationship duration, the mean duration was 67.98 (SD = 96.83) months. Regarding whether participants had children, it was found that 355 couples (76.0%) did not have children, while 112 couples (24.0%) had at least one child. Regarding the employment status of the participants, 255 women (54.6%) were students, 54 (11.6%) were employed in the public sector, 86 (18.4%) were employed in the private sector, and 72 (15.4%) were unemployed. Among the male participants, 187 (40.0%) were students, 74 (15.8%) were employed in the public sector, 178 (38.1%) were employed in the private sector, and 28 (6.0%) were unemployed.

Measures

Entrapment Scale

This scale was developed by De Beurs et al. (2020) to measure the perceived level of entrapment feelings. The scale adapted was to Turkish by Türk et al. (2024). The scale consists of eight items and one dimension and is a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all like me to 5 = extremely like me). Higher scores indicate greater level of entrapment feelings. In the adaptation study, the reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .88.

Obsessive Distrust Scale

This scale was developed by Brandes et al. (2020) to measure the perceived distrust of romantic partner. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Açar and Inozu (2024). The scale consists of eight items and one dimension and is a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate stronger obsessive thoughts about the partner's untrustworthiness. In the adaptation study, the reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .94.

Relationship Satisfaction Scale

This scale was developed by Hendrick (1988) to measure relationship satisfaction in romantic or marital relationships. The Turkish version of the scale was adapted into Turkish by Curun (2001). This one-dimensional scale consists of seven items, 7-point Likert-type. High scores indicate that participants are more satisfied with their relationships/marriage. In the adaptation study, the reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .86.

Data Analysis

In this study, the relationships between variables and couples were examined using the actor-partner interdependence mediation model. Ledermann and Kenny (2012) state that this model is a useful method for understanding the nature of family and couple dynamics. One widely used technique in this field is the Actor–Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM), which facilitates the simultaneous examination of both direct and indirect effects at both the actor and partner levels. In recent years, APIMeM has become increasingly popular in family and couple research (Savord et al., 2023). The actor-partner interdependence mediation model explains the direct and indirect effects that couples have on themselves and each other. Then, preliminary analyses were carried out to calculate the descriptive statistics of the participants, normality distributions of the variables, and reliability values. Furthermore, the relationships between variables were examined by performing correlation analysis. Taking into account the suggestion of Little et al. (2002), the item parceling technique was used for unidimensional scales in the structural model to reduce error rate. During the item parceling process, unidimensional scales were divided into two parcels based on odd and even numbered items. In this model, both the significance of the path coefficients and the fit index values such as Chi-square/degree of freedom ($\chi^{2/}$df), CFI, TLI, GFI, SRMR, and RMSEA were taken into account. Among these fit index values, $\chi^{2/}$df should be less than 5.00 (Alavi et al., 2020); CFI, IFI, GFI should be greater than 0.90, and SRMR and RMSEA should be less than 0.08 (Ximénez et al., 2022). Lastly, the indirect effects of the relationships between the variables were examined using the bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure in 5000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval. IBM SPSS 27 and AMOS Graphics 24 statistical package programs were used in all analyses.

Results

Preliminary Analysis and Correlation Results

Table 1 presents the reliability coefficients, descriptive statistics, and zero-order correlations among the study variables. All variables

Table 1. Reliabilities, descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables.

	Reliabilities and descriptive statistics					Correlations				
Variable	α	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4	5
1. EP (Female)	.904	06.66	4.92	0.293	−1.096	–				
2. EP (Male)	.857	04.89	4.41	0.718	−0.425	.368**	–			
3. OD (Female)	.890	06.64	7.44	1.404	1.496	.346**	.196**	–		
4. OD (Male)	.816	04.90	6.32	1.855	3.643	.119**	.344**	.301**	–	
5. RELS (Female)	.876	42.09	6.44	−1.584	2.766	−.344**	−.222**	−.589**	−.262**	–
6. RELS (Male)	.851	43.84	5.65	−2.205	1.283	−.199**	−.318**	−.321**	−.320**	.601**

Note. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$; EP: Entrapment, OD: Obsessive distrust, RELS; Relationship satisfaction.

demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .82 to .90. Skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable limits, indicating no substantial deviation from normality. For female participants, entrapment was positively associated with female obsessive distrust (r = .346, p < .01) and negatively associated with female relationship satisfaction ($r = -.344$, p < .01). Female obsessive distrust was also negatively associated with female relationship satisfaction ($r = -.589$, p < .01). In addition, female participants' entrapment was positively associated with male entrapment (r = .368, p < .01), male obsessive distrust (r = .119, p < .01), and negatively associated with male relationship satisfaction ($r = -.199$, p < .01). Female obsessive distrust was positively associated with male obsessive distrust (r = .301, p < .01) and negatively associated with male relationship satisfaction ($r = -.321$, p < .01). For male participants, entrapment was positively associated with obsessive distrust (r = .344, p < .01) and negatively associated with male relationship satisfaction ($r = -.318$, p < .01). Male obsessive distrust was negatively associated with male relationship satisfaction ($r = -.320$, p < .01). In addition, male participants' entrapment was positively associated with female obsessive distrust (r = .196, p < .01) and negatively associated with female relationship satisfaction ($r = -.222$, p < .01). Male obsessive distrust was positively associated with female entrapment (r = .119, p < .01) and negatively associated with female relationship satisfaction ($r = -.262$, p < .01). Finally, relationship satisfaction was positively associated between partners (r = .601, p < .01).

Measurement Model

The measurement model consists of six latent variables: male's entrapment, male's obsessive distrust, male's relationship satisfaction, female's entrapment, female's obsessive distrust, female's relationship satisfaction, and twelve observed variables: two for male's entrapment, two for male's obsessive distrust, two for male's relationship satisfaction, two for female's

entrapment, two for female's obsessive distrust, two for female's relationship satisfaction. According to the results the model fit was satisfactory (χ^2/df = 4.323; CFI = 0.965; GFI = 0.944; NFI = 0.955; TLI = 0.941; IFI = 0.965; SRMR = 0.0418; RMSEA = 0.084). Indicating that the indicators adequately represented the latent constructs.

Structural Model

Structural equation modeling findings showed that the structural model fit was satisfactory (χ^2/df = 4.380; CFI = 0.963; GFI = 0.940; NFI = 0.952; TLI = 0.940; IFI = 0.963; SRMR = 0.0574; RMSEA = 0.084). In conclusion, according to the model, obsessive distrust mediates the relationship between entrapment and relationship satisfaction in couples based on actor paths. Regarding actor paths, females' entrapment positively predicted females' obsessive distrust (β = .335, p < .01) and negatively predicted females' relationship satisfaction (β = −.157, p < .01). In addition, females' obsessive distrust negatively predicted females' relationship satisfaction (β = −.577, p < .01). Also males' entrapment positively predicted males' obsessive distrust (β = .401, p < .01) and negatively predicted males' relationship satisfaction (β = −.178, p < .01). Males' obsessive distrust also negatively predicted males' relationship satisfaction (β = −.228, p < .01). At the partner paths, males' entrapment positively predicted females' obsessive distrust (β = .092, p < .05), whereas females' entrapment did not significantly predict males' obsessive distrust (β = −.015, p > .05). Females' obsessive distrust negatively predicted males' relationship satisfaction (β = −.291, p < .01). Males' obsessive distrust negatively predicted females' relationship satisfaction (β = −.115, p < .01). All standardized coefficients are presented in Figure 1.

Bootstrapping

Bootstrapping analyses with 95% confidence intervals were conducted to examine indirect associations within the dyadic model. For females, entrapment was indirectly associated with both their own relationship satisfaction (β = −.281, 95% CI [−.427, −.170]) and males' relationship satisfaction (β = −.067, 95% CI [−.111, −.039]) *via* females' obsessive distrust. In contrast, the indirect associations *via* males' obsessive distrust were not statistically significant (β = −.001, 95% CI [−.019, .018]; β = −.001, 95% CI [−.023, .016]). For males, entrapment was indirectly associated with their own relationship satisfaction *via* males' obsessive distrust (β = −.070, 95% CI [−.134, −.027]). The indirect association from males' entrapment to females' relationship satisfaction *via* males' obsessive

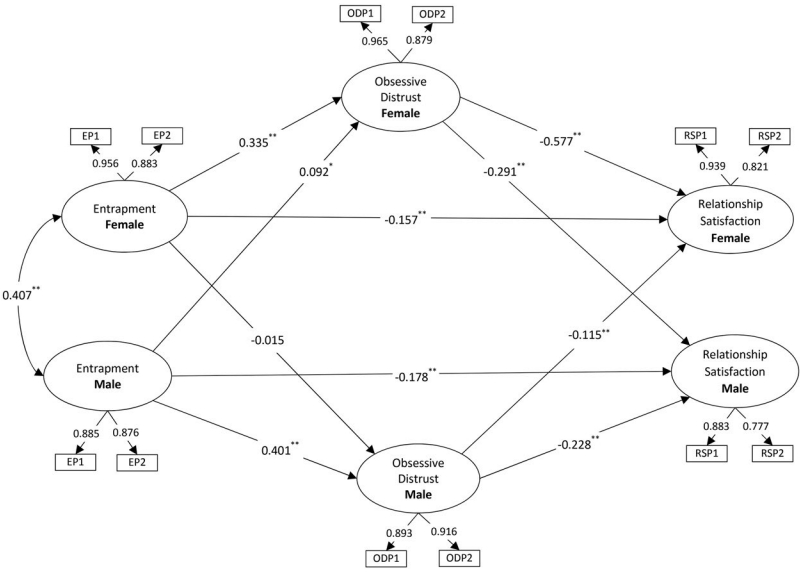


Figure 1. Actor-partner Interdependence mediation model. *Note*. Values shown are standardized coefficients.
EP: Parcels of entrapment; ODP: parcels of obsessive distrust; RSP: Parcels of relationship satisfaction.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

Table 2. Parameters and 95% C. I. for the paths of the final dyadic model.

		95 % Confidence Interval	
Model Pathways	Estimated	Lower	Upper
Indirect link			
Females' entrapment → Females' obsessive distrust → Females' relationship satisfaction	−.281	−.427	−.170
Females' entrapment → Females' obsessive distrust → Males' relationship satisfaction	−.067	−.111	−.039
Females' entrapment → Males' obsessive distrust → Males' relationship satisfaction	−.001	−.019	.018
Females' entrapment → Males' obsessive distrust → Females' relationship satisfaction	−.001	−.023	.016
Males' entrapment → Males' obsessive distrust → Males' relationship satisfaction	−.070	−.134	−.027
Males' entrapment → Males' obsessive distrust → Females' relationship satisfaction	−.063	−.155	.016
Males' entrapment → Females' obsessive distrust → Females' relationship satisfaction	−.096	−.252	.030
Males' entrapment → Females' obsessive distrust → Males' relationship satisfaction	−.023	−.059	−.006

distrust was not statistically significant (β = −.063, 95% CI [−.155, .016]). Similarly, the indirect association from males' entrapment to females' relationship satisfaction *via* females' obsessive distrust was not statistically significant (β = −.096, 95% CI [−.252, .030]). Finally, males' entrapment was indirectly associated with their own relationship satisfaction *via* females' obsessive distrust (β = −.023, 95% CI [−.059, −.006]). Detailed information is provided in Table 2.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study is to examine the relationships between partners' feelings of entrapment, levels of obsessive distrust, and relationship satisfaction within the spouse subsystem from a dyadic perspective. The findings obtained within the scope of the study were analyzed within the framework of the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIMeM). The findings indicate that there are significant relationships between the mentioned variables at both the actor and partner levels. When examined from the actor's perspective, a consistent pattern was observed between obsessive distrust and the relationship between entrapment and relationship satisfaction in both females and males. From the partner's perspective, it was determined that the levels of obsessive distrust in both females and males were significantly associated with each other's relationship satisfaction. Additionally, it was found that males' levels of entrapment significantly predicted females' levels of obsessive distrust; conversely, females' levels of entrapment did not significantly predict males' levels of obsessive distrust. These findings point to a gender-based asymmetry in partner-to-partner effects.

Findings regarding actor effects, consistent with the literature, indicate that individuals' internal psychological dynamics are closely related to their perceptions of relational trust and levels of satisfaction (Bibby et al., 2023). These findings can be interpreted as a search for systemic balance within the framework of the Family Systems Approach. According to the Family Systems Approach, members of the couple subsystem are engaged in a search for homeostasis, which means emotional balance, within their interaction processes (Calatrava et al., 2022). The uncertainties brought about by modern life may be associated with individuals experiencing a sense of being stuck within the context of romantic relationships. Such a sense of entrapment may challenge the system's balance by being associated with a decrease in emotional accessibility and mutual sharing within the couple subsystem. In this context, individuals may develop a perception of loss of control regarding their ability to maintain their positions within the system. Indeed, research indicates significant associations between the perception of emotional control loss, a decrease in trust toward the partner, and an increase in dysfunctional cognitive patterns (Bao et al., 2024). The effort to compensate for a diminishing sense of control and to transform uncertainty within the system into an artificial clarity may run parallel to patterns of obsessive distrust that involve constantly monitoring one's partner. However, this obsessive attempt at control may be inversely related to the perceived intimacy and mutual trust within the spouse subsystem. In this process, the weakening perception of trust appears to be associated with a decrease in relationship satisfaction, one of the fundamental outcomes of romantic relationships.

When examining the findings at the partner level in the dyadic model, it is first observed that there is a positive correlation between partners' levels of entrapment. This finding is consistent with research findings indicating that partners' emotional experiences progress in a similar trajectory (Spencer et al., 2024). This finding can be evaluated within the framework of Bowen's concepts of intra-family reflection and differentiation. According to this approach, individuals tend to form relationships with people who share similar emotional regulation patterns and levels of differentiation (Brown & Errington, 2024). The positive correlation in partners' levels of entrapment can also be explained in this way. Individuals may tend to initiate relationships with those who share similar emotional experiences, and their emotional experiences may mutually shape one another. Another notable finding at the partner level is a gender asymmetry. According to the findings, while men's levels of entrapment significantly predict women's obsessive distrust, women's levels of entrapment do not significantly predict men's obsessive distrust. This gender asymmetry presents a finding that differs from the existing literature (Lingán-Huamán et al., 2025). In more communitarian cultural contexts such as Turkey, the meanings attributed to partners' emotional and behavioral cues may vary. In such contexts where relationality and family cohesion take center stage, it is argued that women may demonstrate greater sensitivity toward relational processes; conversely, men's ways of perceiving and expressing emotional processes may differ (Aflatooni & Daneshpour, 2026). In this context, the emotional problems, internal conflicts, and feelings of helplessness experienced by men in relationships may be more easily noticed by women. The emotional changes observed may be perceived as a relational threat from the women's perspective. Additionally, they may be associated with obsessive-like perceptions of distrust. From the men's perspective, however, the opposite may be true. Research indicates that emotional awareness and the ways in which emotions are expressed can vary between genders (Deng et al., 2023). In this regard, it is conceivable that men in Turkish culture may have differing levels of awareness regarding their partners' emotional processes. In line with cultural norms, men may perceive their partners' emotional processes not as a threat to the relationship but as a temporary individual stress situation.

According to the latest findings at the partner level, obsessive distrust significantly predicts relationship satisfaction among partners. This finding is consistent with research indicating that relational processes involve mutual interaction between partners (Wang et al., 2026). From the perspective of family systems, findings can be examined through the lens of the functionality of the couple subsystem and the concept of boundaries in Structural Family Therapy. A perception of obsessive distrust within the couple subsystem may drive one partner to constantly monitor the other. Additionally, even the emotional violation of boundaries can lead

to the emergence of unclear boundaries within the couple subsystem. According to the structural family approach, unclear boundaries can lead to emotional reactivity (Dolz-Del-Castellar & Oliver, 2021). Consequently, individuals may begin to exhibit emotionally unstable reactions toward their partners. As emotional balance is disrupted, individuals may fail to derive fulfillment from the couple subsystem, and their sense of satisfaction with the relationship may diminish.

Limitations and Future Research

In addition to the meaningful contributions of the findings from this study, there are also certain limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of the study prevents causal inferences from being drawn between variables. Although consistent with the dyadic approach, it is recommended that longitudinal and experimental studies be conducted in future research to better understand temporal and causal relationships. Second, the scales used in the study were self-report-based. This may introduce potential limitations, such as the social desirability effect. Therefore, it is recommended that future research utilize different data collection methods, such as clinical observations, interviews, and interaction analyses. Third, this study was conducted within a specific cultural context, namely in Türkiye. This may limit the generalizability of the findings to different cultural contexts. In particular, the gender asymmetry observed in this study suggests that the cultural context may be significant. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies be replicated in different cultural contexts. Fourth, a large portion of the sample consists of married couples without children. It is recommended that the model be tested with more heterogeneous study groups in future studies. Finally, although the sample included both married couples and individuals in romantic relationships, a considerable proportion of the participants were relatively young adults and university students. Accordingly, many participants may have been navigating developmental tasks associated with dating, relationship formation, and adjustment to intimate partnerships. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to older adults or couples in later stages of long-term relationships. Future studies should examine these associations across different developmental stages, relationship durations, and more heterogeneous samples.

Implications

The findings of this study provide significant theoretical contributions to the literature on intimate relationships and the family systems approach. First, the study demonstrates that entrapment and obsessive distrust are not processes related solely to individual-actor processes, but rather interact

with partners' cognitive and emotional processes. By demonstrating that the feeling of entrapment predicts relationship satisfaction not only directly but also through a repetitive cognitive process such as obsessive distrust, the study offers a new theoretical perspective on the functioning of the couple subsystem. Furthermore, unlike Western-centered studies, the gender asymmetry observed in the Turkish sample indicates that cognitive and emotional processes in close relationships must be considered in conjunction with cultural structures and gender roles.

The research findings also provide important clinical practice recommendations for mental health professionals, family counselors, and social workers. It is recommended that counselors and therapists focus not only on relational dynamics but also on the sense of entrapment experienced by partners due to macro-level risk factors when working with couples seeking help for relationship problems. In practical settings, it is recommended that male partners be encouraged to share their feelings and thoughts with their partner within the relationship, and that psychoeducation be provided on this topic. The potential consequences of not sharing feelings can be explained using examples from research, and partners can be encouraged to establish healthy boundaries as part of primary prevention. Additionally, while encouraging partners to develop healthy boundaries, the perception of relational uncertainty that may arise from the failure to share emotions can be integrated into intervention programs as a factor potentially linked to obsessive distrust. Finally, incorporating psycho-educational modules into premarital education programs that address how individual stress processes can affect the foundation of trust between partners can be considered a preventive intervention.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the relationships between entrapment, obsessive distrust and relationship satisfaction emerge not only at the individual level but also within the context of mutual interactions between partners. The findings reveal that individuals' internal psychological processes in romantic relationships are mutually interrelated within the couple subsystem and that these processes are linked to relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the gender-based asymmetrical pattern observed in the study indicates that relational processes cannot be evaluated independently of their cultural context. These dynamics, examined within the framework of family systems, provide a comprehensive framework for both theoretical literature and clinical practice regarding how individual struggles manifest in relational processes. For a functional spouse subsystem, it appears important for partners to be attuned to each other's emotional processes as it is to be aware of the complex interplay between individual stressors and relational

boundaries. In this regard, the study suggests that integrating dyadic approaches with cultural sensitivity may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of romantic relationships.

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Ethical Approval

This research was ethically approved by Yıldız Technical University Institute of Social Sciences Ethics Committee with document number E-20260509551.

Author Contribution

Seydi Ahmet Satici and M. Engin Deniz were the academic advisors and general supervisors of the study. Ali Berke Körün carried out the data analyses and interpreted the findings. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the study and reached a consensus on the version to be published.

Consent to Participate

Informed consent was obtained from all the individual participants that were included in the study.

Consent to Publish

Consent for scientific publication has been obtained from all participants.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Availability of Data and Material

Data will be available on request.

Pre-Registration Statement

This study was not pre-registered.

Proof of English Editing

This manuscript has been thoroughly proofread and revised for academic English by Yıldız Technical University Foreign Languages Department.

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