

## The Relationship Between Perceived Parental Rejection and Dating Anxiety: The Mediating Role of Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions

**Hatice Epli<sup>i</sup>**

Ondokuz Mayıs University

**Meryem Vural Batık<sup>ii</sup>**

Ondokuz Mayıs University

**Nurdan Doğru Çabuker<sup>iii</sup>**

Ondokuz Mayıs University

**Seher Balcı Çelik<sup>iv</sup>**

Ondokuz Mayıs University

### Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the mediating role of interpersonal cognitive distortions between perceived parental rejection and dating anxiety in emerging adults. The study also examined whether gender and grade level also differ in terms of dating anxiety. Participants were 574 (334 women, 240 men) university students studying in a state university in Turkey who were reached with stratified sampling method. The data were collected with Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire-Short Form, Dating Anxiety Scale and Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions Scale. The results of the study showed positive correlations between perceived parental rejection and dating anxiety and interpersonal cognitive distortions. According to the path analysis results, interpersonal cognitive distortions were partial mediator in relationship between perceived maternal rejection and dating anxiety. However, it was found that paternal rejection had a direct effect on dating anxiety, and cognitive distortions did not have a mediating role on this relationship. It was found that dating anxiety did not differ significantly in terms of gender, while it differed in terms of grade level. Warmth and acceptance centred parent-child relationship can be considered as a protective factor that can increase the dating anxiety by increasing the cognitive distortions.

**Keywords:** Parental Acceptance-Rejection, Interpersonal Cognitive Distortion, Dating Anxiety, Emerging Adult, Mediating Role.

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<sup>i</sup> **Hatice Epli**, Ph.D., Department of Educational Science, Ondokuz Mayıs University, ORCID: 0000- 0001-9122-1922

**Correspondence:** hatice.epli@omu.edu.tr

<sup>ii</sup> **Meryem Vural Batık**, Ph.D., Department of Special Education, Ondokuz Mayıs University, ORCID: 0000-0002-7836-7289

<sup>iii</sup> **Nurdan Doğru Çabuker**, Res. Assist., Department of Educational Science, Ondokuz Mayıs University, ORCID: 0000- 0001-7976-8829

<sup>iv</sup> **Seher Balcı Çelik**, Prof. Dr., Department of Educational Sciences, Ondokuz Mayıs University, ORCID: 0000-0001-9506-6528

## INTRODUCTION

Perceptions of children about their relationships with their parents in early years of their lives are effective on their development in adolescence and adulthood (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002). University years defined as “emerging adulthood”, which is an important period that makes it difficult for individuals to adapt, take place between the ages of 18 and 25, they occur after adolescence and before adulthood; and they are defined as a period in which both various opportunities are seized and also certain difficulties are experienced regarding work, love and the world (Arnett, 2000). The aforementioned life period is evaluated somewhere between adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2007) and it can be expressed as a difficult period in which responsibilities are taken for many areas of individual’s life and maturation processes are experienced. If individuals are not resistant to the difficulties brought by this process, they feel powerless in the face of problems and the process of adaptation to this period becomes difficult.

In parallel with the formation of family relationships, individuals develop adaptation problems in the later life periods and their perceptions about acceptance or rejection in the family have an important role in the emergence of these adaptation problems (Bouma, Ormel, Verhulst, & Oldehinkel, 2008; Davies & Windle, 1997). Studies conducted support that parental acceptance and rejection affect both the course of all developmental areas of the individuals and their lives in adulthood (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2005; Sanders, 2000; Varan, 2005). PART-Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory which was developed by Rohner and which is defined as a socialization theory examining the effects of perceived parental acceptance and rejection on individuals’ lives in childhood and later developmental periods was born out of this need (Rohner, 1975; 1986). PARTheory acts with the basic assumption that all individuals in the world need to receive a positive response or warmth from people who are of primary importance to them in their lives (Rohner 1986). The theory originally called PARtheory mostly focused on the perception of parental acceptance and rejection and its connection with adjustment in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. In 2000s, it became interested not only in parent-child relationship but also in close relationships in adulthood and other important relationships in life. The theory which focused on parents was transformed and renamed as Interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory (IPARTheory) which focused on interpersonal relationships. However, parts of the theory still continue to include the consequences, reasons and other connections of children’s perceptions of parental acceptance and rejection and adults’ memories of parental acceptance and rejection in their children (Rising and Rohner 2020).

Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory) builds acceptance-rejection region on a continuous line. It assumes that parental acceptance is on the positive end of continuity on a linear line, while parental rejection is on the negative end. Parental acceptance indicates a relationship in which parents feel and express love, affection and comfort towards their children, while parental rejection indicates lack of love, affection and comfort parents show towards their children (Khaleque & Rohner, 2001). Theory acts on the basic assumption that all people in the world need to get positive reaction from people important for them, in other words, to feel warmth from them (Rohner & Khaleque, 2005).

In the related literature, it has been shown that parental rejection is associated with variables related with interpersonal relationships such as rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Ibrahim, Rohner, Smith, & Flannery, 2015), fear of intimacy (Rohner, 2016a), loneliness (Rohner, 2016b), negative sense of identity (Bilen, 2013), problems in social relationships (Kandemir Özding, 2019; Paley, Conger, & Harold, 2000). Studies examining the effects of parents on individuals’ romantic relationships have shown that parents’ warmth and support helps individuals to develop healthy romantic relationships (Akün, 2019; Collins & Read, 1990; Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2011; Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, & Kiessinger, 2001). In addition, Del Toro (2012) showed that parental attitude predicted anxiety about romantic relationship. These studies reveal the long-term effect that parental influence may have on the individual’s later romantic life.

Khaleque and Rohner's (2002) meta-analysis on Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory) shows that acceptance or rejection by parents does not affect only children's emotional and behavioural development but also their social and cognitive development. The theory emphasizes that parental rejection leads to a negative worldview in individuals and in later stages of development individuals' cognitive schemes are distorted and they become extremely sensitive to rejection. This situation causes individuals to misinterpret social clues and to have a negative mental pattern both about themselves and others (Rohner & Khaleque, 2010).

Mental representations created by perceived parental acceptance-rejection in childhood affect the psychological adaptation both in childhood and adulthood and personality patterns and social relationships (Rohner, 2004) and they include individuals in a risk group that consists of life long social and emotional problems (Khaleque & Rohner, 2001). These mental representations for mothers and fathers are also the determinant of orientation towards romantic relationships (Hendrix, 1990).

Studies conducted show that parental rejection is associated with cognitive distortions (Cassidy, Kirsh, Scolton, & Parke, 1996; Dodge, 1993; Özbiler, Taner, & Yalçinkaya, 2019; Salama, 1990; Tezcan, Erden, & Yiğit, 2017). Rejection causes cognitive automatic thought patterns that form a basis for the emergence of the expectation of rejection in adulthood and this affects their approach in all their close relationships (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Levy, Ayduk, & Downey, 2001) because rejected individuals do not consider themselves worth loving (Rohner, 2004).

In university years, which are accepted as the last adolescence period in which transition to adulthood from adolescence is experienced, problems about romantic relationships are considered as one of the important problem areas of individuals (Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999). Romantic relationships in this period provide very important opportunities for individuals to better adapt to adult life by gaining the necessary behaviours (Furjman & Schaffer, 2003; Mosher & Danoff-Burg, 2007; Moss & Schwebel, 1993; Ponzetti & Cate, 1988). In addition to these positive aspects, dating anxiety which may occur as a result of the effects of some cognitive patterns (Allen, Bourhis, Emmers-Sommer, & Sahlstein, 1998) is expressed as experiencing anxiety and distress in establishing and maintaining romantic relationships with someone from the opposite sex (Chorney & Morris 2008; Hope & Heimberg, 1990).

Studies conducted show that dating anxiety is associated with some variables that may be considered negative. Significant relationship has been shown between dating anxiety and peer relationship anxiety and depression (Glickman & La Greca, 2004), negative interaction (La Greca & Mackey, 2007), social anxiety, social media use (Stevens & Morris, 2007), life satisfaction (Adamczyk & Segrin, 2016), and problematic internet use and loneliness (Odacı & Kalkan, 2010). In addition, it has been shown that individuals with low social skills experience more dating anxiety (Larsen & Shackelford, 1996) and young people with high social anxiety show behaviours such as postponing establishing relationships or dating or avoiding romantic relationships (Davila & Beck, 2002; La Greca & Harrison, 2005). When the studies above are examined, it can be seen that studies related with dating anxiety are mostly associated with social relationship patterns. And also, there are limited numbers of studies showing the relationship between dating anxiety and early life experiences. For example, Kalkan and Karadeniz-Özbek (2011) emphasized the relationship between dating anxiety and early life experiences. In their study it was found that childhood abuse experiences were significant predictors of dating anxiety.

Parental acceptance-rejection perception, which is one of the concepts related with early life experiences, shows that behaviours and approaches in adult emotional relationships are associated with perceived parental acceptance-rejection in childhood (Ali, Khaleque, & Rohner, 2015). Attention expected from the primary caregiver in early childhood is replaced with the attention expected from friends and romantic partner in adolescence and adulthood (Rohner, 2008) and consequently individuals reflect the relationship they build with their parents in their childhood to their relationships in their adulthood (Downey & Feldman (1996). Individuals who experience rejection in early periods

of their lives may choose not to get in a romantic relationship to protect themselves from being rejected (Downey, Bonica, & Rinco, 1999), may show hostile or avoidant reactions to romantic relationship (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey, Feldman, & Ayduk, 2000) and they tend to become self-sufficient individuals (Gullestad, 2001; Zvělc, 2010).

Dating anxiety, which has not been researched sufficiently although it is a common problem among university students (Chorney & Morris), has been associated with cognitive variables such as cognitive distortions and beliefs associated with both the source and the continuation of the problem (Neumann, Critelli, Tang, & Schneider, 1988). Cognitive distortions, which are also called systematic errors in the information processing period and which form the basis of individual's negative thoughts (Beck, 2005), can cause individuals to interpret the events they experience or come across according to their own belief system different from what they really are and thus to have negative thoughts (Mobini et al., 2005; Szentegotai & Freeman, 2007).

When the related literature is considered, it is important to reveal parent and child experiences related with early life periods and individuals' romantic relationship patterns in terms of taking protective and preventive measures. In addition, it is also thought that they can be taken into consideration during the process of shaping interventions on emerging adults experiencing dating anxiety. In line with these explanations, the aim of this study is to examine the mediating role of cognitive distortions in the relationship between perceived parental rejection in childhood and dating anxiety. In other words, it is argued that childhood parental rejection will have an effect on cognitive distortions in relationships in later periods of life and that these cognitive distortions will affect level of dating anxiety. In addition, it will also be examined whether gender and grade level cause a difference in terms of the variables of the study. Accordingly, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. Are there significant relationships between parental rejection perception, dating anxiety and interpersonal cognitive distortions?
2. Do interpersonal cognitive distortions have a mediating effect in the relationship between parental rejection perception and dating anxiety?
3. Does dating anxiety differ significantly in terms of gender and grade level?

## METHOD

### Research Model

Correlational survey model was used in the present study. Correlational survey model is a research model which aims to determine the presence and degree of change between two or more variables (Karasar, 2009). Within the scope of this model, the present study will examine the relationships between parental rejection perception, dating anxiety and interpersonal cognitive distortions. Figure 1 shows the research model.

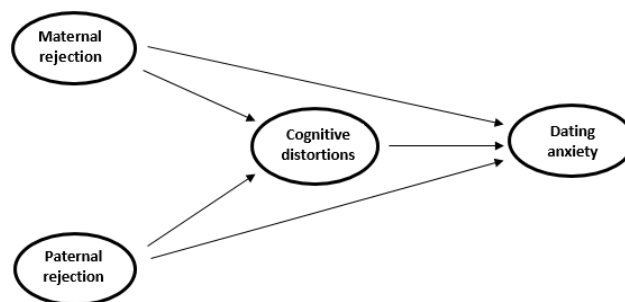


Figure 1. Research Model

## Participants

The study group consists of 574 university students studying in a state university in Turkey who were reached with stratified sampling technique. It is a sampling type which aims to represent the sub-groups/layers in the sample in proportion to their weights in the population (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2019). Accordingly, considering the number of students studying in faculties, their distributions by grade level and gender were taken into consideration. 334 (58,2%) of the university students who participated in the study were women, while 240 (41,8%) were men. 26% of the participants were in their first grade, 24,6% were in their second grade, 25,6% were in their third grade and 23,9% were in their third grade. Participants' ages ranged between 18 and 28 and average age was found as 20.89.

## Materials

The data in the study were collected with Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire-Short form (PARQ), Dating Anxiety Scale (DAS), Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions Scale (ICDS) and Information Form.

*Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire – Short Form (PARQ-S):* The questionnaire developed by Rohner (1975) has three versions as adult, child and parent for the sixty-item standard form. PARQ-S, which was turned into a short form with 29 items in 2005 by Rohner, was adapted into Turkish by Dedeler, Akün and Durak-Batıgün (2017). The Questionnaire finds out how adults perceive their parents' behaviours to them were when they were between 7 and 12 years old. In other words, the related measurement instrument evaluates the parental acceptance-rejection perceptions individuals remember about their childhood. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 24 and the highest score is 96. A high score taken from the 4-Likert type questionnaire shows high perceived parental rejection. When the reliability coefficients of the questionnaire were examined, Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficients were found to range between .75 and .92 for mother form and between .85 and .96 for father form. Validity level of the questionnaire was tested with construct validity, criterion related validity and distinctive validity criteria and it was stated that the questionnaire was a valid and reliable scale in Turkey sample (Dedeler et al., 2017). In the current study, internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach alpha) was found as as .66 for both mother and father form.

*Dating Anxiety Scale (DAS):* The scale, which was developed by Kalkan (2008) to find out the dating anxiety adolescents experienced during their relationship with the opposite sex, consists of 46 questions. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 46 and the highest score is 230. High score taken from the 5-Likert type scale shows that dating anxiety is high. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated as .96. As a result of validity and reliability studies, the scale was found to have a valid and reliable quality (Kalkan, 2008). According to the reliability analysis results conducted on university students, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .85 (Çiftçi & Gülaçtı, 2019). Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient obtained from the present study was .97.

*Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions Scale (ICDS):* The scale was developed by Hamamcı and Büyüköztürk (2004) to evaluate individuals' cognitive distortions in their social relationships. The 5-Likert type scale has 19 questions. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 19 and the highest score is 95. High scores taken from the scale show that individuals have cognitive distortions. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was found as .67. As a result of the validity and reliability studies conducted, it was stated that the scale had a valid and reliable quality (Hamamcı & Büyüköztürk, 2004). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated as .80.

*Information Form:* This form which was developed by the researchers includes questions regarding the socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender and grade level.

### Procedure

First of all, the ethical permissions were taken from Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee in University of Ondokuz Mayıs. The data were collected from volunteering university students studying at different faculties of a state university during class hours. The participants were informed about the aim of the study and questions about research and/or data collection instruments during the application were answered by the researchers. The response time took approximately 20 minutes.

### Data Analysis

First, normality and homogeneity assumptions were examined. Kurtosis and skewness coefficients were found as .51 and 1.04 for PARQ-S, as -.27 and .58 for DAS, as .72 and .19 for ICDS. Kurtosis and Skewness coefficients being within  $\pm 1,5$  and close to 0 is evaluated as a proof of normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2020). According to this, the data of dating anxiety scale were found to be normally distributed. Multivariate normality assumptions of perceived parental rejection, cognitive distortions and dating anxiety variables were examined with Scatter Plot Matrix. When Scatter Plot diagram was examined, it was found that the distribution was close to ellipsis shape and the data were normally distributed. Next, the homogeneity of variances was examined with Levene test for univariate analyses, while it was examined with Box's M test for multivariate analyses. As a result of Levene test ( $p=.473$ ,  $p>.05$ ) and Box's M test (Box's  $M=22.063$ ,  $p=.411$ ), the groups were found to be similar and the assumption of homogeneity of variances was found to be met.

After normality and homogeneity assumptions were met, path analysis was conducted to find out the mediating effect of cognitive distortions in the relationship between parental rejection and dating anxiety. In path analysis, direct and indirect effects between the variables can be determined and the amount of error resulting from measurement can be minimized (Yener, 2007). A model was formed in line with the information regarding the effects of parental rejection perception on romantic relationships. Direct and mediating effects of the variables were calculated with path analysis and model fit indices were examined.

Finally, two-way ANOVA and Bonferroni test were conducted to test whether dating anxiety levels of university students differed significantly in terms of gender and grade level. The data obtained were analysed by using SPSS 22 and AMOS 20 programs. The significance of the statistics obtained was tested at the .05 level.

## RESULTS

### *1- Are there significant relationships between parental rejection perception, dating anxiety and interpersonal cognitive distortions?*

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficient values of perceived parental rejection, interpersonal cognitive distortions and dating anxiety variables.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients**

| Variables                 | N   | Mean   | SD    | $\alpha$ | 1 | 2     | 3    | 4     |
|---------------------------|-----|--------|-------|----------|---|-------|------|-------|
| Maternal rejection (1*)   | 574 | 34.54  | 10.43 | .66      | - | .68** | .24* | .18** |
| Paternal rejection (2*)   | 574 | 38.00  | 13.28 | .66      |   | -     | .23* | .14** |
| Dating anxiety (3)        | 574 | 104.57 | 37.40 | .97      |   |       | -    | .34** |
| Cognitive distortions (4) | 574 | 50.67  | 9.82  | .80      |   |       |      | -     |

\*\* $p<.001$

\* High score taken from the PARQ-S scale shows high level of perceived rejection

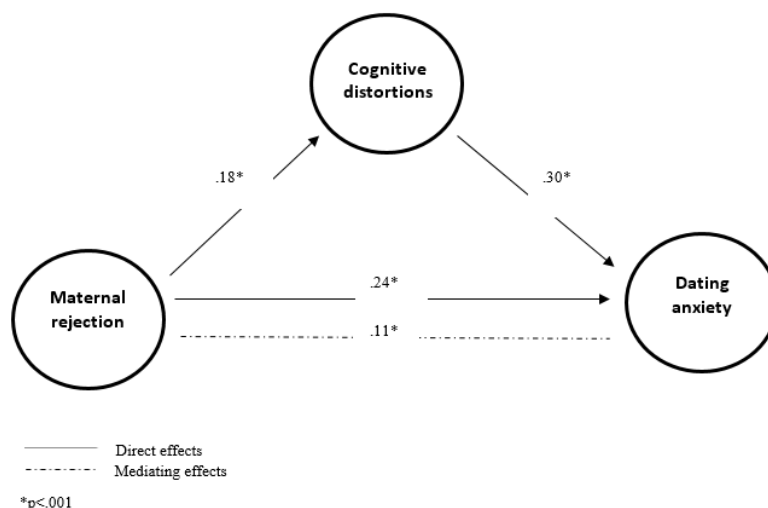
As can be seen Table 1, a positive high correlation was found between perceived maternal rejection and perceived paternal rejection ( $r = .68, p < .001$ ), while a positive low correlation was found between perceived maternal rejection and dating anxiety ( $r = .24, p < .001$ ), and perceived maternal rejection and interpersonal cognitive distortions ( $r = .18, p < .001$ ). In addition, a positive low correlation was found between perceived paternal rejection and dating anxiety ( $r = .23, p < .001$ ), and perceived paternal rejection and interpersonal cognitive distortions ( $r = .14, p < .001$ ). A positive moderate correlation was found between dating anxiety and interpersonal cognitive distortions ( $r = .34, p < .001$ ).

## ***2- Do interpersonal cognitive distortions have a mediating effect in the relationship between parental rejection perception and dating anxiety?***

Path analysis was used in this study which examined the mediating effects of cognitive distortions in the relationship between perceived parental (maternal and paternal) rejection. Before the mediating effect was tested, whether some prerequisites were met was checked. These prerequisites were whether there is significant relationship 1) between independent and dependent variable, 2) between mediating variable and independent variable, 3) between mediating variable and dependent variable while both mediating and independent variable predict the dependent variable together (Kalaycı, 2010). In the present study, independent variables are perceived parental rejection and paternal rejection, dependent variable is dating anxiety and the mediating variable is cognitive distortions.

According to the results obtained as a result of examining the prerequisites, there is a significant relationship (first prerequisite) between perceived maternal rejection and dating anxiety ( $\beta = .24, p < .001$ ) and perceived paternal rejection and dating anxiety ( $\beta = .23, p < .001$ ). There is a significant relationship (second prerequisite) between perceived maternal rejection and interpersonal cognitive distortions ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ) and perceived paternal rejection and interpersonal cognitive distortions ( $\beta = .14, p < .001$ ). Finally, there is a significant relationship (third prerequisite) between mediating variable cognitive distortions and dating anxiety while perceived maternal rejection and cognitive distortions are predicting dating anxiety together ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ). In addition, finally, there is a significant relationship (third prerequisite) between mediating variable cognitive distortions and dating anxiety while perceived paternal rejection and cognitive distortions are predicting dating anxiety together ( $\beta = .31, p < .001$ ). In this case, it was found that the prerequisites were met and the mediating effect of interpersonal cognitive distortions was tested with path analysis.

According to the path analysis results of the first model, it was found that the standardized direct effect of perceived paternal rejection on interpersonal cognitive distortions was .04 ( $p > .05$ ) and not significant; in other words, it was found that perceived paternal rejection was not a significant predictor of cognitive distortions. Therefore, the model which describes the mediating role of interpersonal cognitive distortions in the relationship between perceived paternal rejection and perceived maternal rejection and dating anxiety was not confirmed. For this reason, it was decided to exclude the perceived paternal rejection variable from the model. With the exclusion of perceived paternal rejection variable from the model, the mediating role of cognitive distortions in the relationship between perceived maternal rejection and dating anxiety was examined. The mediating effect of the last model created was tested with impact path analysis. The direct and mediating effects in the corrected model are given in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Mediating role of cognitive distortions**

In the first analysis between the independent variable (perceived maternal and paternal rejection) and dependent variable (dating anxiety), if the statistically significant relationship decreases with the inclusion of the mediating variable (cognitive distortions) in the analysis, it is possible to mention the presence of a mediating effect between the two variables. With the inclusion of the mediating variable in the analysis, if the relationship between dependent and independent variable becomes insignificant, there is full mediation; if the relationship between the variables is significant but there is an amount of decrease in the standardized value of this path, there is partial mediation (Holmbeck, 1997). When the standardized coefficients of the paths given in the model in Figure 2 are examined, it can be seen that while perceived maternal rejection was a significant predictor of dating anxiety ( $\beta=.24$ ,  $p<.001$ ), standardized coefficient was found to decrease ( $\beta= .11$ ,  $p<.001$ ) with the inclusion of cognitive distortions in the model as mediating variable. Thus, it was found that cognitive distortions had a “partial mediation” role in the relationship between perceived maternal rejection and dating anxiety. While perceived maternal rejection explains 3% of cognitive distortions, these two variables explain 15% of dating anxiety together. Perceived maternal rejection explains 15% of dating anxiety; however, cognitive distortions do not have a mediating role. Model fit indices of this model are  $\chi^2/df=1.023$ ,  $p=.359$ ,  $RMSEA=.006$ ;  $GFI=.99$ ,  $AGFI=.99$ ;  $NFI=.98$ .  $\chi^2/sd$  value being lower than 3 (Kline, 2005),  $p$  value being higher than .05 (Çokluk, Şekercioğlu, & Büyüköztürk, 2018),  $RMSEA$  value being lower than .05 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993),  $GFI$  and  $NFI$  values being higher than .95 (Hooper, Caughlan, & Mullen, 2008),  $CFI$  value being higher than .97 (Sümer, 2000) show that the model is within good fit limits. According to this, it can be said that the model created in the study shows a good fit.

### 3- Does dating anxiety differ significantly in terms of gender and grade level?

Table 2 shows the two-way ANOVA results conducted to test whether dating anxiety of university students differs significantly in terms of gender and grade level.

**Table 2. Two-way ANOVA results**

| Source                         | Sum of squares | Sd  | Mean of squares | F     | p     |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-----|-----------------|-------|-------|
| Gender                         | .003           | 1   | .003            | .000  | .999  |
| Grade level                    | 21393.45       | 3   | 7131.15         | 5.180 | .002* |
| Gender*Professional experience | 156.351        | 3   | 52.117          | .038  | .990  |
| Error                          | 779149.93      | 566 | 1376.59         |       |       |
| Total                          | 7078885.0      | 574 |                 |       |       |



Table 2 shows that dating anxiety score averages of men and women did not differ significantly ( $F_{(1-566)}=.000$ ,  $p>.05$ ), while the participants' dating anxiety scores differed significantly in terms of grade level ( $F_{(3-566)}=5.180$ ;  $p<.01$ ). Bonferroni test was conducted to find out between which groups this difference was. According to Bonferroni test result, dating anxiety of first grade (14.14,  $p<.05$ ) and second grade (15.69,  $p<.05$ ) students were found to be significantly higher when compared with third grade students. When the joint effect of gender and grade level was examined, it was found that the value obtained was not significant ( $F_{(3-566)}=.038$ ;  $p>.05$ ). This result shows that there is no significant difference between dating anxiety of women and men in terms of grade level.

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained in the study show a positive relationship between perceived maternal rejection and dating anxiety and interpersonal cognitive distortions. There is also a positive relationship between perceived paternal rejection and dating anxiety and interpersonal cognitive distortions. This result shows that perceived maternal rejection increases cognitive distortions and dating anxiety. Similarly, perceived paternal rejection can also be seen to increase cognitive distortions and dating anxiety. This finding is in parallel with the view that the relationships an individual build in early periods of life with other people, especially the parents, have the ability to affect the later periods of life (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002). Studies which support this finding show that individuals who remember a warm and positive relationship with their mothers in their early life have high current marital adjustment (Carnelley, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1994; Furukowa et al., 2002). Individuals can also use the parent-child relationship to gain interpersonal skills in their future romantic relationships. In other words, this finding can be accepted as an important indicator that individuals use their relationships with their parents as a template of how they will behave in their romantic relationships through modelling. Similar studies which show the significant relationship between perceived maternal and paternal rejection and cognitive distortions show that perceived parental rejection is associated with cognitive distortions (Cassidy, Kirsh, Scolton, & Parke, 1996; Dodge, 1993; Salama, 1990). Rejection causes cognitive automatic thought patterns that prepare a basis for the emergence of expectation of rejection in adulthood and this affects individuals' approaches in all their close relationships (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Levy, Ayduk, & Downey, 2001).

Another finding obtained from the study shows that interpersonal cognitive distortions have a mediating role between perceived maternal rejection and dating anxiety. According to this finding, students who have high perceived maternal rejection have more cognitive distortions and they experience higher dating anxiety. No studies were found in literature discussing the mediating role of cognitive distortions in the relationship between parental rejection and dating anxiety. However, the fact that the quality of the relationship established between the parent and the child in the early periods of life is accepted as the main point where the ability to create and maintain romantic relationships is learned (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) is in line with the results obtained from the study. During the process of gaining this skill, the individual first of all develops expectations and cognitive schemes for his/her relationship with parents; then from this point of view, the individual internalizes close relationships model. These internalized models have the ability to determine romantic relationships in adult life (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Hendrix, 1990; O'Neil & Parke, 2000; Shulman & Collins, 1995). Therefore, it can be said that the attitudes in adult life towards dating can be shaped through cognitive distortions that occur as a result of parental attitude.

As a result of the study, it was found that cognitive distortions do not have a significant mediating effect in the relationship between perceived paternal rejection and dating anxiety. In the first hypothesis of the study, a significant relationship is seen between perceived paternal rejection and cognitive distortions and dating anxiety. However, it can be seen that cognitive distortions do not have a significant mediating effect in the relationship between perceived paternal rejection and dating anxiety. The reason for this can be the fact that mothers are accepted as the parent primarily

responsible of raising the child, especially in traditional societies and that mothers spend more time with the child. It can be said that mothers' reflecting the cognitive distortion process they experience in their individual relationships in a way that will shape the child's behaviours is also effective. In their study Rosnay, Cooper, Tsigaras and Murray, (2006) stated that children observed the behaviours of family members, especially mothers, and reflected these behaviours in their lives in the future and accepted them as the primary determinants of their behaviours.

Another finding of the study is that dating anxiety experienced by university students does not differ significantly in terms of the gender of the participants. The results of other studies conducted on the topic show contradictory results. Some researchers report that men experience more dating anxiety than women (Glickman & La Greca 2004); while some others report that women experience more dating anxiety (Boyle & O' Sullivan, 2013; La Greca & Mackey, 2007). Similarly, Kan, McHale and Crouter (2008) reported that girls may experience more dating anxiety since parents are more restrictive to their daughters. However, they allow their sons to behave more autonomous. Researches on differences between genders related with dating anxiety show contradictory results. In traditional societies, men are expected to be social and women are expected to be shy. For this reason, it can be said that dating anxiety experienced by women or men results from the gender roles in the society they are in. The fact that the study was conducted on university students may have caused dating anxiety not to show difference in terms of gender.

Another finding of the study is that dating anxiety of university students differ according to their grade level and that first and second grade students have higher dating anxiety when compared with third grade students. In parallel with this finding of the study, it was found in a study conducted that tenth graders experienced more dating anxiety when compared with eleventh graders and twelfth graders (Glickman & La Greca, 2004). The fact that they have the chance to experience fewer number of dating in younger ages may be effective in this result. As the number of experiences increase, they will no longer feel anxiety about having a relationship with the opposite sex and they will no longer avoid this anxious state and they will have crossed an important milestone in developing healthy romantic relationships. Therefore, it is very important to resolve these concerns as soon as possible and to develop the skills required to create a romantic relationship.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study shows a positive relationship between perceived parental rejection and interpersonal cognitive distortions and dating anxiety. Path analysis results shows that cognitive distortions mediate the relationship between perceived maternal rejection and dating anxiety. However, it can be said that cognitive distortions do not have a mediating effect in the relationship between perceived paternal rejection and dating anxiety. It was found that dating anxiety did not show significant difference in terms of the gender of the participants, while it was found to differ in terms of the grade level and first and second grade students were found to have higher dating anxiety when compared with third grade students.

Dating anxiety has been researched less than other areas of anxiety. As a result of this, the factors that prepare the basis and sustain the development of this anxiety have not been clarified sufficiently. In this context, the results of the present study are very important in removing this deficiency because romantic relationships in adolescence are also accepted as the precursors of healthy romantic relationships created in adulthood. The results of the study can be used in developing skill education programs for dating anxiety and in individual and group counselling for those working in the field.

While the study reveals significant results, it also has some limitations. The sample of the study consists of university students. This does not provide data on how parental acceptance-rejection in earlier ages accepted as middle adolescence explains dating anxiety through cognitive distortions. The fact that the sample of the study consists of university students requires generalizations to be

made in this direction. In order to be able to test the reliability of the results of this study, studies to be conducted on individuals with different sample groups are needed. It is thought that in future studies it will be significant to discuss the variable of optimism which may have a mediating role in the relationship between perceived parental acceptance-rejection and dating anxiety in broken families and also in future studies to discuss variables such as perfectionism, optimism and self-esteem which may have a mediating role in the relationship between perceived parental acceptance-rejection and dating anxiety.

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