



# Perceived Parental Relationship Behaviors, Dyadic Perfectionism in Romantic Relationships and Relationship Quality Among College Students

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## ABSTRACT

Romantic relationship quality is affected by a number of individual and environmental factors. In evaluation process of romantic relationship, individual's criteria and the resources that create these criteria have great importance as well. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the correlations among perceived parental relationship behaviors, dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships, and relationship quality. The research sample comprised 246 students who studied in different departments at Trabzon University and had a romantic relationship at that time. As a result of the analysis, significant correlations were found between the perceived parental relationship behaviors and dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships, and relationship quality. In addition, it was determined that order and social support scores of females were significantly higher than males. In line with the results, the previous studies reveal that negative patterns between parents and perfectionistic tendencies in relationships negatively affect romantic relationships.

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### Keywords:

Romantic relationship, perceived parental relationship behavior, dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships, relationship quality.

## 1. Introduction

Romantic relationships have a significant effect on self-improvement and life satisfaction. This effect which involves romantic experiences of the individuals and their assessment towards partners can be observed positively or negatively based on the course and quality of relationships. It emphasizes subjective assessments instead of absolute truth and concrete criteria regarding relationships and makes the concept of relationship quality a subject of study. Assessing the quality, individuals compare the relationships they have experienced and those they expect to live. Social support, a variable affecting general mental health as well, is an important resource in private relationships for all (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1990). Perception of high social support improves the adaptation to a relationship and affects relationship quality between partners distinctively (Özabacı, 2011; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991). In addition to social support expected from the partner, conflict and depth perception have an impact on relationship quality. Conflict involves disagreements in the relationship and negative emotions that result from partners, and also depth perception includes the role of individual in the relationship, confidence in the relationship, and the course of the (Pierce et al., 1991; Pierce, Sarason, Sarason, Solky-Butzel, & Nagle 1997). Social learning processes and impact of parents have specific reflections on social support expected from partners, conflict and relationship depth.

Family as the first unit, in which socialization process begins, plays a crucial role in shaping expectations and behaviors about the relationships. Individuals who directly or indirectly observe the relationships between their parents are likely to use these experiences in shaping their behaviors by reflecting on their romantic relationships. It reveals that romantic relationship style is affected by parents' marital relationships (Cui,

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Fincham, & Pasley, 2008) and the structures in the family of origin (Benson, Larson, Wilson, & Demo, 1993; Cui & Fincham, 2010). With a more concrete and specific assessment, it is evident that there is a tendency for similar patterns to emerge between the quality of communicating, criticizing and problem-solving ways of the parents and how their children develop romantic relationships (Amato, 1996; Cui & Fincham, 2010). This effect can be observed in different ways from attachment in a romantic relationship (Rodrigues & Kitzmann, 2007) to being exposed to violence and using violence (Liu, Mumford, & Taylor, 2018; Temple, Shorey, Tortolore, Wolfe, & Stuart, 2013). In this context, the impact of the inter-parental conflicts has been mostly examined in the literature. Studies reveal that such conflicts affect children's romantic relationships and increase their potential of having conflicts in the future (Herzog & Cooney, 2002; Kim, Jackson, Hunter, & Conrad, 2009). Furthermore, the effects of inter-parental relationship quality (Einav, 2014; Liu et al., 2018) and divorce (Sprague & Kinney, 1997) have been frequently investigated.

Another variable known to have negative effects on relationships is perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Perfectionism is a multidimensional and complex personality trait characterized by an effort for perfection, high performance standards, and excessive criticism (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Stoeber, 2018). This common characteristic may affect the life in every respect (Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009). Perfectionism may arise positively or negatively. Sometimes, it makes a contribution to the individuals, on the other hand it may have negative effects (Enns & Cox, 2002; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Accordingly, the healthy form of perfectionism is defined as positive, whereas its pathologic form is defined as negative perfectionism (Slade & Owens, 1998).

Perfectionism consists of three dimensions: self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The dimensions of perfectionism which interpersonal components are dominant affect interpersonal functions of individuals. Other-oriented perfectionism defined as the tendency to have extreme standards for other people by Hewitt & Flett (1991) may cause problems in intimate relationships as well (Flett, Hewitt, Shapiro, & Rayman, 2001; Habke & Flynn, 2002; Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 1995).

According to the previous research, there are various factors that affect individual's behaviors and relationship assessment. As well as abovementioned variables, demographic attributes of the individuals have an effect on relationships. For instance, society attributes different roles to males and females within the context of relationships. When these roles are considered, gender has an impact upon the expectations of the individuals from their relationships and partners and consequently upon their assessment of relationship. There is a limited number of studies with different results in the literature that examine this impact on relationship assessment and perfectionistic behavior (Arcuri, 2013; Büyükşahin-Sunal, Ok, & Keskin, 2016).

Relationships in adolescence and early adolescence play a significant role in the development of individuals (Furman & Schaffer, 2003) and their romantic relationships in the future (Furman, 2002). In order to build a healthy relationship, it is significant to specify the factors which affect romantic relationships in this stage. In this regard, the study sample consisted of college students who had a romantic relationship. The main purpose of the study was to investigate the relations between perceived parental relationship behaviors, relationship quality and dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships. The secondary purpose was to determine the effect of gender on dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships and relationship quality.

## **2. Method**

Correlational research methods which investigate the relation between two or more variables and causal-comparative research methods that aim to determine whether groups differ in terms of a certain variable were used in this research based on a quantitative approach (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The research sample was selected by convenience sampling method. It is designed to select the sample from individuals who are easily accessible due to the limitations such as time, money, and workforce (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Using convenience sampling may create limitations in terms of reliability and generalization of the results. However, such limitations that may result from the sample can be statistically controlled while analyzing the data (Barker, Psitrang, & Elliott, 2002).

### **2. 1. Participants**

The research sample comprised 246 college students who studied at Trabzon University in the 2019-2020 academic year and had a romantic relationship (70.7% female, 24.8% male, 4.5% unspecified). The majority of

participants (43.3%) had middle income. The average of the participants' relationship periods was 31.47 months ( $\pm 32.13$ ) and the average age was 22.76 ( $\pm 3.52$ ). The participants who started a new relationship or sustained a long-term relationship in the research group caused a wider range of the relationship period and high standard deviation.

## 2. 2. Instruments

The research data were collected by Perceived Parental Relationship Behavior Scale (Çelik & Öziş, 2016), Dyadic Almost Perfect Scale (Taluy, 2018), Relationship Quantity Scale (Özabacı, 2011), and personal information form that involves information of gender, education level, income, age and relationship period of individuals.

### 2. 2. 1. Perceived Parental Relationship Behavior Scale

The Perceived Parental Relationship Behavior Scale was developed by Çelik and Öziş (2016) to evaluate the perceived relationship behavior between parents. In the scale with 37 four-point Likert-type items, each item was separately graded for both mother and father. The scale consists of five factors: authoritarian, neglectful, protective, democratic, and dependent. Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients of the scale ranged from .80 to .95 for mother form; while it ranged from .73 to .95 for father form.

### 2. 2. 2. Dyadic Almost Perfect Scale

The Dyadic Almost Perfect Scale was developed by Shea, Slaney and Rice (2006) to measure perfectionism in intimate relationships and adapted to Turkish culture by Taluy (2018). The 26-item scale has seven-point Likert-type rating. The scale consists of three factors: discrepancy, high standards, and order. Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients for the sub-dimensions were .93, .82 and .87, respectively.

### 2. 2. 3. Relationship Quality Scale

The Relationship Quality Scale was developed by Pierce et al. (1991) and was adapted by Özabacı (2011) to Turkish culture. The scale with 16 four-point Likert type items consists of three factors: social support, depth, and conflict. Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient for total is .85.

## 2. 4. Data Analysis

SPSS 23.00 packaged program was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC), and independent *t* test were used. The normality of variables was tested before the analysis. It was determined that coefficients of kurtosis and skewness for the variables were acceptable for normal distribution (Kalaycı, 2016).

## 3. Findings

In consequence of the analysis, it was found that discrepancy, one of the sub-dimensions of dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships was significantly correlated with authoritarian ( $r = -.18, p < .01$ ), neglectful ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ), democratic ( $r = -.15, p < .05$ ), and dependent ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ) relationship behaviors of mother. There were significant correlations of high standards with authoritarian ( $r = .16, p < .05$ ), protective ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ), and dependent behavior ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ); whereas no correlation existed between order and perceived relationship behaviors of mothers. Additionally, significant correlations were identified between social support and neglectful ( $r = -.31, p < .01$ ), and democratic ( $r = .31, p < .01$ ) behavior; depth and democratic behavior ( $r = .15, p < .05$ ); between conflict and authoritarian ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ), neglectful ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ) and dependent ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ) behaviors.

There were significant correlations of discrepancy with authoritarian ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ), neglectful ( $r = .17, p < .01$ ) and dependent ( $r = .17, p < .01$ ); and of high standards with authoritarian ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ), protective ( $r = .13, p < .05$ ) and dependent ( $r = .14, p < .05$ ) relationship behaviors of fathers were identified. Furthermore, significant correlations were observed between social support and neglectful ( $r = -.14, p < .05$ ), and democratic ( $r = .16, p < .05$ ) behavior; between depth and protective behavior ( $r = .13, p < .05$ ). There were significant correlations of conflict with authoritarian ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ), neglectful ( $r = .27, p < .01$ ), and dependent ( $r = .15, p < .05$ ) behavior. The correlations between variables were summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Correlations of perceived parental relationship behavior with relationship quality, and dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships

Variables	Dyadic Perfectionism in Romantic Relationships			Relationship Quality				M	SD
	Discrepancy	High Standards	Order	Social Support	Depth	Conflict			
<b>Perceived Parental Relationship Behavior</b> Mother	Authoritarian	.18**	.16*	.00	.01	.05	.19**	4.68	2.77
	Neglectful	.22**	.11	-.05	-.31**	-.11	.25**	3.25	4.19
	Protective	-.03	.18**	.10	.10	.12	.00	10.95	4.01
	Democratic	-.15*	.05	.11	.31**	.15*	-.08	27.31	7.95
	Dependent	.22**	.19**	.09	-.06	.05	.18**	6.01	4.80
Father	Authoritarian	.18**	.23**	.08	-.06	-.04	.23**	5.60	2.65
	Neglectful	.17**	.13	.07	-.14*	-.05	.27**	6.02	6.09
	Protective	-.02	.13*	.07	.09	.13*	-.03	10.21	4.21
	Democratic	-.11	-.08	-.01	.16*	.08	-.11	24.82	9.20
	Dependent	.17**	.14*	.01	-.06	-.03	.15*	5.08	4.28

The analysis demonstrated that, dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships was positively correlated with some sub-dimensions of the relationship quality. There were negative correlations of discrepancy with social support ( $r=-.36, p<.01$ ) and depth ( $r=-.37, p<.01$ ); whereas there was positive correlation between discrepancy and conflict ( $r=.45, p<.01$ ). In addition, positively significant correlations were found between high standards and conflict ( $r=.27, p<.01$ ) besides between order and social support ( $r=.13, p<.05$ ). The correlations between variables were summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Correlations between dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships and relationship quality

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	M	SD
1- Discrepancy <sup>a</sup>	1						44.74	16.83
2- High Standards <sup>a</sup>	.54**	1					23.37	6.21
3- Order <sup>a</sup>	.16*	.33**	1				21.84	5.03
4- Social Support <sup>b</sup>	-.36**	-.07	.13*	1			14.40	2.00
5- Depth <sup>b</sup>	-.37**	-.01	.07	.48**	1		14.75	1.66
6- Conflict <sup>b</sup>	.45**	.27**	.12	-.14*	-.05	1	21.66	3.80

<sup>a</sup>Sub-dimensions of Dyadic Perfectionism in Romantic Relationships, <sup>b</sup>Sub-dimensions of Relationship Quality, \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$

Independent *t* tests were conducted to determine gender differences in dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships and the relationship quality scores and results were summarized in Table 3. As a result of the analysis, the scores of order ( $t=2.23, p<.05, d=.33$ ) and the scores of social support ( $t=2.23, p<.05, d=.32$ ) varied by gender. Accordingly, it was identified that females perceived higher social support and had higher expectations related to order from their partners compared to males.

**Table 3.** Analyzing dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships and relationship quality scores according to gender

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	df	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Discrepancy <sup>a</sup>	Female	174	43.62	16.16	233	-1.55	.12
	Male	61	47.49	18.45			
High Standards <sup>a</sup>	Female	174	23.45	6.23	233	.45	.65
	Male	61	23.03	6.28			
Order <sup>a</sup>	Female	174	22.14	4.95	233	2.23	.03
	Male	61	20.47	5.26			
Social Support <sup>b</sup>	Female	174	14.56	1.91	233	2.23	.03
	Male	61	13.90	2.17			
Depth <sup>b</sup>	Female	174	14.82	1.58	233	.77	.44
	Male	61	14.63	1.78			
Conflict <sup>b</sup>	Female	174	21.39	3.83	233	-1.65	.10
	Male	61	22.32	3.69			

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The main purpose of this research was to examine the correlations among perceived parental relationship behaviors, relationship quality, and dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships of college students. One of the perceived parental relationship behaviors, being democratic was positive, whereas others were negative. The results showed that the negative parental relationship behaviors were significantly correlated with the quality of individuals' current relationships. In other words, a linear correlation was revealed between these behaviors and conflict, one sub-dimension of the relationship quality. This finding is consistent with the research results indicated that the individuals who witness or suffer from negative parental relationship behaviors such as conflict have problems in their current relationships (Altınok & Hamamcı, 2018; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Gabardi & Rosen, 1993; Liu et al., 2018). When considered more specifically, significant correlations of negative relationship behaviors classified as authoritarian, neglectful, and dependent with relationship behaviors such as conflict were in line with some of the similar research findings (Altınok & Hamamcı, 2018; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cui et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2018; Simon & Furman, 2010). On the other hand, it showed that individuals who perceived the relationship behavior of their parents as democratic had higher social support and depth perceptions in relationships. Accordingly, it was implied that relationship qualities of the individuals who had a healthy parental relationship behavior were higher. In a research by Masarik et al. (2013), it was also concluded that positive interaction between parents improved the relationship quality.

In this research, significant correlations were found between some of the perceived parental relationship behaviors and certain sub-dimensions of dyadic almost perfect scale. Individuals who had authoritarian, neglectful, and dependent parental relationship experiences had the opinion that their expectations were not met by their partners in the relationships. These results support the finding obtained by Herzog and Cooney (2002) that the conflicts between parents had an impact on people's interactions in current close relationships. At the same time, parental relationship-attachment patterns described by Rodrigues and Kitzmann (2007) and results of the research conducted by Dennison and Koerner (2006) on attitudes towards marriage show similarities with these results. On the other hand, Einav (2014) revealed that individuals' perceptions of relationship qualities of their parents did not affect their expectations of intimate relationships in the future.

One of the purposes in this study was to investigate the association between dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships and relationship quality. The relationships between the variables indicated that high expectations towards a partner and the opinion the partners were inadequate influence the relationships negatively. Social support and the perception of depth in relationships of these individuals were low, which increased the potential of conflict. The studies in the literature similarly reveal that high standards individuals set for their partners (Mee, Hazan, Baba, Talib, & Zakaria, 2015) and dissatisfaction at their partners' performance (Lopez, Fonz-Scheyd, Morúa, & Chaliman, 2006; Mee et al., 2015) affected relationships negatively. Furthermore, there are studies suggesting that the other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed high perfectionism had negative effects on relationships (Haring, Hewitt, & Flett, 2003; Hewitt et al., 1995; Mee et al., 2015; Şensoy, Asıcı, & İkiz, 2019).

Finally, the role of gender on perfectionism in relationships and relationship quality was examined. As a result of the analysis, expectations related to order and perceived social support in relationships for females were significantly higher than males. Our findings show similarities to the research by Büyüksahin-Sunal et al. (2016) revealing that gender did not affect individuals' assessments of relationships. The finding of Arcuri (2013) that having high standards in relationships did not vary by gender also supports the results of the present study. However, Arcuri (2013) indicated that females had lower satisfaction with their partners, unlike this study results.

In summary, significant correlations were determined among the sub-dimensions of perceived parental relationship behavior, dyadic perfectionism in romantic relationships, and relationship in this study. Based on these findings, it is evident that perceived parental relationship behaviors and the perfectionistic tendencies in relationships affect the relationship qualities. On the other hand, this study has some limitations. The first one is that the research data are based on personal statements. Other limitations are that the research group

consisted of college students and the perception of inter-parental relationships is discussed only within the context of behaviors.

In this context, the perceptions of inter-parental relationships should be examined with different variables and some skills such as conflict or problem solving that may affect parental relationship behaviors should be considered. Moreover, it is expected that conducting longitudinal studies to investigate the parallelism of parents' relationship behaviors and their children's behaviors will contribute to the field in terms of understanding this relationship. In conclusion, it is recommended to increase age range of the research group and including individuals who have different educational levels in the scope of research. It is important in practice to raise parents' awareness about the effects of the inter-parental relationships on their children in terms of the quality of intimate relationships that their children will experience in the future. Similarly, it is regarded as significant for healthy relationships to show the effects of negative perfectionistic behaviors of the adults in relationships and to minimize them. Accordingly, organizing various seminars and trainings is suggested to raise awareness and to gain certain skills for parents and adults.

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