

Running Head: COMPARISON OF ONLINE VS. OFFLINE DATING

COMPARISON OF ONLINE VS. OFFLINE DATING IN TERMS OF ROMANTIC BELIEFS,  
COMMITMENT, RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE and RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

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To my family...

## ABSTRACT

Recently, there is an increase in online dating engagement and individuals' opinions are evolving as online dating is a good way to initiate a romantic relationship (Pew Research Center, 2016). Further, a research study proposed that marriages that started online have a higher relationship satisfaction rather than marriages that started in face-to-face interaction (Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Gonzaga, Ogburn & Vanderweele, 2013). Nevertheless, more studies are needed to compare these relationships. Therefore, current study is aimed to investigate how online vs. offline dating differs in terms of romantic beliefs, commitment, relationship maintenance behaviors and relationship satisfaction. Besides relationship experiences, the current study also aims to investigate how possible perception-changing experiences such as exposure to online dating does make a difference or not. Therefore, the current study investigates how romantic beliefs, commitment, relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction differ among groups of participants who have experienced online dating before and participants who have not experienced online dating before.

The sample is composed of 546 participants (362 females, 183 males and 1 other) between the ages of 18 and 30 ( $M = 24.16$ ,  $SD = 3.5$ ). 276 participants assessed their relationships as relationships started offline (face-to-face and contexts) and 270 participants assessed their relationships as relationships started online (both via online dating apps and social media sites). An independent samples t-test was conducted in order to see the group differences between offline and online dating experiences. Results revealed that there were no statistically significant differences across groups of offline vs. online daters in terms of romantic beliefs, commitment, relationship maintenance behaviors and relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, there was a significant group difference between participants who have experienced online dating before and

who have not experienced before. In addition to this, regression analyses were conducted in order to determine unique contributions of romantic beliefs and commitment to relationship satisfaction. It was found that romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction was significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. Further, mediation analyses were done in order to see how relationship maintenance behaviors mediate the relationship between romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction among both groups. Results yield that relationship maintenance behaviors mediated the association between romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction both in online and offline relationships. In addition to this, relationship maintenance behaviors mediated the association between commitment and relationship satisfaction in both groups of online and offline relationships. A discussion was provided to understand these results referring to the literature. Also, a discussion was provided based on Turkey's context.

**Keywords:** Online dating, social media, commitment, romantic beliefs, relationship maintenance, relationship satisfaction

## ÖZET

Son yıllarda, online tanışma platformlarının kullanma sıklığının arttığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bununla birlikte, online platformların romantik bir ilişkiye başlamak için iyi bir yol olduğu yönünde değişen görüşler mevcuttur. Ek olarak, online başlayan evliliklerin ilişki memnuniyetinin yüz yüze başlayan evliliklere kıyasla daha yüksek olduğunu bulan bir çalışma mevcuttur (Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Gonzaga, Ogburn & Vanderweele, 2013). Ancak, online tanışma fenomenini daha iyi anlamak için daha çok çalışmaya ihtiyaç vardır. Bu sebeple mevcut çalışma, online ve yüz yüze başlayan ilişkileri ilişkisel değişkenlerle (romantik inançlar, bağlılık, ilişki sürdürme davranışları ve ilişki memnuniyeti) karşılaştırmayı amaçlamıştır. Buna ek olarak, bu çalışma, mevcut ilişki deneyimlerinin dışında, online tanışma platformlarını kullanan ve kullanmayan katılımcıların ilişki algılarını ölçmeyi de hedeflemiştir.

Örnekleme, 18-30 yaş arasındaki 546 katılımcıdan (362 kadın, 182 erkek and 1 diğer) oluşmuştur ( $M = 24.16$ ,  $SD = 3.5$ ). 276 katılımcı yüz yüze başlayan ilişkisini değerlendirirken; 270 katılımcı online ortamlardan (online tanışma platformları ve sosyal medya siteleri) başlayan ilişkisini değerlendirmiştir. Gruplararası farkı incelemek için bağımsız değişkenler testi uygulanmıştır. Sonuçlar, yalnızca romantik inançlarda gruplararası fark bulurken; bağlılık, ilişki sürdürme davranışları ve ilişki memnuniyeti arasında bir fark bulamamıştır. Yüz yüze tanışan kişilerin romantik inançlarının daha fazla olduğu bulunmuştur. Buna ek olarak, online tanışma platformu deneyimi bulunan katılımcılar ve bulunmayanlar arasında romantik inançlar, bağlılık ve ilişki memnuniyeti açısından fark bulunmuştur. Online tanışma platform deneyimi bulunan katılımcılarda daha düşük romantik inançlar, bağlılık ve ilişki memnuniyeti puanları görülmüştür.

Mevcut araştırma çoklu regresyon analizleri yaparak, her bir ilişkisel değişkenin, ilişki memnuniyetine nasıl yordadığını ortaya koymuştur. Çalışmanın değişkenlerinin, online ve yüz yüze başlayan ilişki gruplarında da ilişki memnuniyetini yordadığını ortaya koymuştur. Bununla birlikte, aracılık analizleri yapılarak, ilişki sürdürme davranışlarının romantik inançlar, bağlılık ve ilişki memnuniyeti arasındaki ilişkideki aracı rolü incelenmiştir. Her iki grupta da, ilişki sürdürme davranışlarının aracı rolü olduğu bulunmuştur. Tüm bu sonuçlar, şema teorisi, yatırım modeli ve Türkiye'nin kültürel özellikleri zemininde tartışılmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** online tanışma platformları, online başlayan ilişkiler, sosyal medya, romantik inançlar, bağlılık, ilişki sürdürme, ilişki memnuniyeti

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Due to the recent advancements and increasing availability of technology, internet usage has become more prevalent all around the world (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis & Sprecher, 2012). This increase leads to a change in the way how people communicate with each other, find a partner, and develop and maintain a relationship (Finkel et al., 2012). According to Pew Research Center's study (2016), 15% of adults in the United States engage in online dating in order to find a romantic partner. Also, Pew Research Center (2016) stated that attitudes towards online dating has changed in the past years. In the first study of Pew Research Center (2005), individuals thought that online dating is for desperate people, but the recent study of Pew Research Center (2016) revealed that individuals see online dating as a good way to find a romantic partner. Therefore, attitudes towards online dating have changed in a positive manner and individuals have started to use it more in the United States.

In Turkish context, 60% of individuals between the ages of 18 and 50 use online dating apps in Turkey (Ajans Press, 2018). Further, 30% of them reported that online dating apps are the best platforms to meet someone new. However, a recent study revealed that views and attitudes towards online dating are negative in Turkey (Eren & Gurmen, 2019). In addition to the no-consensus situation on views and attitudes toward online dating, there is no study to compare people's experiences in online relationships and in the relationships that have started face-to-face in Turkey. Therefore, the main goal of the current study is to fill this gap in the literature by examining relationships that have started in online platforms (online dating) and understand them in comparison to the relationships that have started in traditional ways of face-to-face interaction (offline dating) in Turkish context.

## Overview of Existing Literature

The literature has responded to changing face of dating and many studies were conducted to explore individual- (such as self-esteem, personality traits, attachment styles) and relationship-related variables (such as romantic beliefs, marital satisfaction and relationship intentions) that relate to online dating. For instance, Gatter and Hodkinson (2016) stated that online daters were labeled as having low self-esteem for many years and they attempted to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and online dating behavior. Their study aimed to understand the differences between tinder users, online dating users and non-users in terms of self-esteem. They conducted the study with 75 participants who were at least 18 years of age. Results have revealed that there is no significant difference between all these three groups. They explained this result by stating that self-esteem may not be a variable in order to understand online dating anymore, because recently many types of individuals have started to engage in online dating. Therefore, it can be speculated that in order to understand online dating behavior, there may be another variable to consider.

Blackhart, Fitzpatrick, and Williamson (2014) studied the relationship between online dating and attachment styles. Their study included 725 participants between the ages of 18 and 71. Their results have shown that preoccupied and fearful attached people engage in online dating more. In addition to this, their analysis revealed that individuals who score high in rejection sensitivity are more likely to use online dating web-sites to find a romantic partner. They explained these results as people with high rejection sensitivity may use online platforms due to easiness of avoiding or minimizing the unpleasant feelings of being rejected comparing to the face-to-face environments. Further, Hance, Blackharti Dew (2017) proposed an explanation

as individuals with high rejection sensitivity tend to express their true selves easily in online dating context comparing to the face-to-face environments.

In addition to the studies that examine individual-related variables, there are also some studies conducted with relationship-related variables. For instance, Anderson (2005) examined the relationship between romantic beliefs and online dating context. The study was conducted with 177 individuals between the ages of 17 and 37. Results have shown that individuals with higher romantic beliefs tend to meet romantic partners less in online dating context. Rather, they prefer offline dating contexts such as face-to-face meeting. Anderson (2005) explained these results by stating that people having higher romantic beliefs are more likely to think about love or romance in traditional ways. For this reason, online dating environment may seem out of standard and unconventional for them. Therefore, it is possible to say that there might be individual differences in terms of approaching online dating and offline dating contexts.

There are few studies that explore the comparison of offline dating and online dating, yet there is no clear picture about what is going on. Therefore, there is a need for more research in order to understand online dating, particularly for comparison studies to investigate what differs in online dating from offline dating. For this reason, the current study aims to fulfil this gap and expand the literature by investigating online dating within relationship-related variables and also investigating the differences between online daters and offline daters. Further, understanding potential differences can be helpful for clinicians working with couples who met online. Therefore, the current study can be considered as guide for clinicians.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Schema Theory & The Investment Model**

**The Schema Theory.** Schemas are known as cognitive structures which enable individuals to explain and make sense of an experience (Beck, 1967). Each individual has

schemas for themselves (self-schemas) and also about others (relational schemas) (Padesky, 1994). Planalp (1987) stated the relational schemata and the idea of interpreting the relationships within mental representations became an issue for the first time. After that, Baldwin (1992) defined relational schemas as cognitive structures developing in order to regulate interpersonal relatedness (Baldwin, 1992). In addition to this, Baldwin (1992) proposed a theory depending on three components of relational schemas: 1) self-schemas as the experience of self while connecting with others, 2) schemas depending on partners' attributes, and 3) individual mindsets which were shaped based on past experiences. To set an example, people may have a belief like "if I trust my partners' support, I will be let down". Baldwin (1992) stated that relational schemas are shaped by recurrent experiences of similar interactions. Besides, Baldwin (1992) also proposed that these schemas can be learned from significant others. Therefore, it is possible to say that both experience and learning are important contributors of recurring relational schemas.

According to the schema theory, individuals have beliefs that are considered as a guide in their relationships. In case of romantic relationships, a person who was disappointed by romantic partners may develop a relational schema which makes trusting others difficult (Baldwin, 1992). In addition to this, Sullivan and Schwebel (1995) argued that relationship-related beliefs can be realistic, e.g. "relationships are not always perfect", or they can be unrealistic, e.g. "our future will be bright more than most people's". Therefore, as seen in these examples, relational schemas can be shaped by experiences and they can be either *realistic* or *unrealistic*. Further, Lemay and Venaglia (2016) explained that individuals have some possible future images and their behavior may be guided by the help of these future images. They also believe that interpersonal relationships may be guided according to these future images; and these are called

as **relationship expectations** and they can also be *realistic* or *unrealistic*. Sullivan and Schwebel (1995) proposed that realistic relationship expectations contribute to the maintenance of a relationship. For instance, “conflict is inevitable in relationships” can be a kind of realistic expectation. In addition to this, unrealistic expectations about relationships may lead to disappointment. For example, individuals may believe that their marriages shall evolve in time and it will get better. In fact, a research study proposed that marriages can have ups and downs (Lavner, Karney& Bradburry, 2013). Further, schemas can be constructed as if-then conditions such as “If I do X, the other person needs to do Y” and these schemas are repeated over time and they may become automatic in order to determine the interpersonal interactions (Smith, 1994). A person who has an expectation like “If I trust others, they will hurt me” might be more sensitive in case of violation of trust and this may influence the outcomes of relationship.

Relational schemas are rooted from early childhood experiences and they have a role in comprising of some sort of beliefs on how our relationship with others should be (Khatamsaz, Forouzandehi& Ghaderi, 2017). As mentioned earlier, schemas can be considered as guidelines to regulate our relationships and these guidelines can be misleading time to time. Moreover, as Young, Kolosko and Weishaar (2003) noted, schemas are the products of toxic early childhood experiences and they can be defined as maladaptive schemas. Over and above, Young, Kolosko and Weishaar (2003) stated that these maladaptive schemas can outspread for a life-time and they play an important role for adults while they engage in relationships. Also, behaviors are the products of these maladaptive patterns. Therefore, comprehending these patterns has a capital importance to understand the relational behaviors.

In case of romantic relationships, even before starting a relationship, there might be *romantic beliefs* about how an ideal relationship should be experienced (Sprecher& Metts, 1999).

Therefore, romantic beliefs of individuals were considered as an important schema for the current study. Further, as Clark, Mills and Powell (1986) stated, *commitment* can be considered as a cognitive structure which represents beliefs, thoughts and opinions about staying in a relationship in general. For this reason, commitment is another relational schema for the present study. In addition to this, Chatav and Wishman (2009) stated that relational schemas can be considered as an important contributor of relationship satisfaction. Also, according to Epstein and Eidelson (1981), unrealistic beliefs and expectations lower the marital satisfaction. Therefore, the current study aims to understand how relational schemas, in this case romantic beliefs and commitment, contribute to *relationship satisfaction* as an outcome.

**The Investment Model.** In addition to the schema theory, the current study also aims to look at relationships with the lenses of the investment model. This model can be considered as a good source to investigate why some relationships end and why some relationships remain. The investment model was originated from interdependence theory (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). According to interdependence theory, individuals become dependent on their relationships as long as they obtain desired outcomes such as high relationship satisfaction (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998). Further, interdependence theory also stated that satisfaction is not the only predictor to detect dependence, the quality of other alternatives is also important (Rusbult, et al., 1998). Based on this theory, Rusbult et al. (1998) developed the investment model. According to this model, commitment is major key factor to remain a romantic relationship. Further, the investment model proposed that commitment (dependence) has three components: satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and as a distinction from interdependence theory it also includes investment size. These components come together and compound commitment. Further, sustainability of commitment leads to high probability of relationship persistence (Rusbult, et al.,

1998). In this case, it is important to understand how investment size influences relationships. Investment size refers to the resources of the relationship that are provided by partners for the continuum and improvement of that relationship (Rusbult, et al.,1998). For instance, one can start to be more open in terms of sharing special feeling to a partner in order to improve the relationship. In addition to this, there can be other investments such as spending time with mutual friends or doing chores together (Rusbult et al., 1998).

According to Davis and Oathaut (1987), rather than behaviors, individuals' perceptions towards relationships might influence relationship satisfaction. Therefore, as the current study proposes, it is important to understand individuals' perceptions on relationships within relational schemas. The current study considers relational schemas as romantic beliefs, commitment and it aims to understand how these variables associate with relationship satisfaction as an outcome and compare them in terms of how they differ in online dating and offline dating contexts. In addition to this, the current study aims to investigate how individuals invest for the improvement of their relationship. As we know from the literature, individuals attempt some behaviors for continuum of a romantic relationship (Dindia & Canary, 1993). These behaviors can be considered as their investment to relationships. Therefore, the current study conceptualizes these investments as *relationship maintenance behaviors*. In other words, the present study proposes that relationship maintenance behaviors can be a means of investing for a relationship in order to achieve desired outcomes such as *relationship satisfaction*.

### **Major Study Variables**

The current study aims to understand relationships based on four variables as following romantic beliefs, commitment, relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction. By doing

so, as congruent with our theory, romantic beliefs and commitment are considered as relational schemas and relationship satisfaction is considered as a relational outcome.

### **Relational Schemas**

**Romantic beliefs.** According to Sprecher and Metts (1999), people have some beliefs for an ideal relationship, and satisfactory components and set of rules to guide and maintain the relationship. Also, these overall expectations are known as relational schemas (Baldwin, 1992). Further, Franiuk, Cohen and Pomerantz (2002) argued that there can be lots of cultural message about romanticized beliefs such as finding the “one” and people may internalize these messages. Also, they may believe that they can only be happy with the person whom meant to be. Based on these ideas, Franiuk, Cohen and Pomerantz (2002) explained a soulmate theory proposing that only one person or a very limited number of persons can provide a satisfactory relationship as these people are meant to be together. On the other hand, Franiuk, Cohen and Pomerantz (2002) stated that some people may refuse idealization and they may centralize a more realistic approach to a relationship such as a work-it-out theory. According to this theory, there can be a large number of candidates who can provide a satisfactory relationship as relationships can be handled by working on it and making efforts (Franiuk, Cohen & Pomerantz, 2002). Further, they stated that these two different perceptions held by individuals may influence how a relationship is experienced.

The romantic beliefs held by individuals have both individual and cultural aspects. For instance, as an individual-related factor, Smith and Massey (2013) were concerned with attachment and romantic beliefs. They conducted a study with 92 undergraduate students. Their results indicated that insecure attached people tend to have less romantic beliefs. Besides, lots of studies proposed cultural components of romantic beliefs (More & Leung, 2002; Simons, Simons,



Lei & Landor, 2012). Further, there is also an influence from media in terms of endorsement of romantic beliefs. For example, Hefner and Wilson (2013) conducted a research study on movies and their study revealed that individuals who watch more romantic movies are more likely to favor romantic beliefs. Over and above, a study conducted with 88 adolescent girls between the ages of 11 and 14 found that higher levels of romantic media involvement lead to higher level of holding romantic beliefs (Driesmans, Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2016). Besides culture and media, literature proposes that the family of origin plays an important role in shaping of romantic beliefs (Weigel, 2007). For instance, parental divorce may lead to perceptions as “relationships are not forever” as opposed to romantic beliefs of a higher level (Weigel, 2007). Therefore, romantic beliefs can be considered as a complex issue in terms of individuals, family and cultural aspects.

These romantic ideal schemas can be more noticeable when a relationship has a potential to become a romantic one. As Sprecher and Metts (1999) stated these pre-existing romantic beliefs may bring about some consequences in a relationship such as greater love or satisfaction. There can be various descriptions of the romantic beliefs. However, romantic beliefs in general include the centrality of love for a marriage, the belief of the possibility of love at the first sight, beliefs of only one true love, believing that true love never ends and believing that love can defeat all the obstacles (Sprecher & Metts, 1999). Sprecher and Metts (1999) found that romantic beliefs influence love, satisfaction and commitment in romantic relationships. Higher scores in romantic beliefs (within all subscales of love finds a way, one and only love, idealization and love at first sight) lead to higher scores in love, satisfaction and commitment. In addition to this, Vannier and O’Sullivan (2018) emphasized the associations between romantic expectations and commitment. Their up-to-date research was conducted with 296 individuals between the ages of 18 and 28. The study revealed that higher level of unmet romantic expectations lead to a lower

relationship satisfaction and a lower commitment. Further, it brings about increasing positive perception on current alternatives. Besides, Cann, Mangum and Wells (2001) touch upon the similar issue by stating that there is a significant association between idealized relationship beliefs and emotional attachment. In other words, people who hold higher romantic beliefs need more emotional attachment in their relationships. Further, when this need is failed to fulfil, infidelity can occur and commitment can decrease. For these reasons, in defiance of interaction with romantic beliefs, commitment can be another variable considered as a relational schema for the current study.

**Commitment.** Commitment refers to feelings of attachment to a romantic partner and willingness to sustain a relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Also, commitment has a cognitive component which refers to picturing oneself in a relationship and picturing oneself committing to one partner in general (Clark, Mills & Powell, 1986). In the literature, there are studies to investigate the components of commitment. For instance, Duemmler and Kobak (2001) conducted a study with 61 undergraduate participants and their study revealed that individuals who have secure attachment with their parents tend to sustain a relationship more. Besides this study, Wiegel (2007) also proposed that people may have different commitment-related cognitive constructions based on their family origins. He conducted a study with 121 undergraduate students and the research revealed that individuals with divorced parents gained different commitment messages such as relationships are not permanent. Considering this study, it is possible to say that individuals' opinion on commitment can influence the relationship outcomes.

Beyond personal components, relationship-related components are also important to understand commitment. Rusbult (1983) saw relationship commitment as an important factor for

a successful relationship and explained commitment based on the investment model. According to the investment model, people choose to commit a relationship if they are satisfied. Further, people tend to be committed if they have less attractive choices than their current partner (Rusbult, 1983). Nevertheless, Miller (1997) stated that committed individuals are less interested in other partners' attractiveness. Therefore, there is a reciprocal causality: does the attractiveness of other alternatives determine the commitment, or does commitment determine the evaluation of other alternatives' attractiveness? Maner, Gailliot and Miller (2009) stated that cognition processes can be helpful to understand this mechanism. They explained that committed individuals may construct their cognitions based on the positive aspects of their current partner only rather than other attractive alternative partners. Also, they may construct their cognitions for alternative attractive partners as in an opposite manner from their current partner. Namely, as the current study proposes, commitment can be considered as a relational schema.

In order to understand commitment, social exchange theory can be helpful. Social exchange theory proposes that individuals tend to enhance their rewards or profits and they also tend to reduce their costs (Sabatelli & Anderson, 2003). Also, the balance of these rewards and costs are important and they are called as outcomes such as relationship satisfaction (Sabatelli & Anderson, 2003). In addition to this, social exchange theory proposes that knowing the existence of other alternatives can be a threat for the current relationship's commitment (Sabatelli & Anderson, 2003). Besides, Sabatelli and Anderson (2003) argued that individuals are less concerned with the attractiveness of other alternatives when they are committed to their relationship and when possible rewards can be obtained from a relationship.

As mentioned before, Rusbult (1983) stated that there is an association between commitment and relationship satisfaction. He explained that increased commitment leads to

increased satisfaction in romantic relationships. In addition to this, Mikkelson and Pauley (2013) proposed that maximization of relationship choices bring about a decrease in relationship satisfaction. To put it in a different way, screening alternatives leads to a decrease in commitment and this decrease results in lower relationship satisfaction. To date, Baker, McNulty and VanderDrift (2017) proposed that expected satisfaction from a relationship is a powerful indicator of commitment. In addition to this, Maner, Gailliot and Miller (2009) found that committed individuals tend to maintain their relationships. Therefore, commitment is also related to relationship maintenance. Further, as mentioned before, increased romantic beliefs lead to more commitment (Sprecher & Metts, 1999).

**Relationship Maintenance.** According to Duck (1988), individuals make more efforts in order to sustain a relationship rather than to develop it. Many scholars defined relationship maintenance in different ways. However, four different definitions can be considered in total (Dindia & Canary, 1993). Firstly, individuals exhibit a relationship maintenance behavior in order to reverse a stability in their relationships. Secondly, relationship maintenance means status quo sustaining the current situations in a relationship. Thirdly, relationship maintenance is performed in order to conserve the satisfactory components of a relationship such as commitment, loving the partner and general satisfaction in relationship. Lastly, relationship maintenance can be considered as an ability to overcome difficulties that occur in a relationship. (Dindia & Canary, 1993).

Canary and Stafford (1992) underlined 5 components of relationship maintenance strategies as positivity, openness, assurance, social network and sharing tasks. Positivity means attempting to being cheerful, willingness to attend joyful events, avoiding constant criticism etc. Openness represents being able to talk about present and future course of the relationship.

Assurance refers to exhibiting behaviors highlighting commitment to the partner such as providing support. Social-network emphasizes having mutual friends and spending time together in order to maintain the stability of the relationship. Sharing tasks represents collaboration in doing housework. However, Stafford (2011) conducted another research and components of the relationship maintenance behaviors were updated as positivity, assurance, understanding, relationship talk, self-disclosure, social networks and sharing tasks.

Interestingly, rather than positive relationship maintenance behavior, literature proposes that some negative behaviors can be performed in order to sustain a relationship. For instance, Dainton and Gross (2008) suggested that there are six types of negative relationship maintenance behavior as following: allowing control, destructive conflict, spying, induction of jealousy, avoidance, and infidelity. They conducted a study with 188 undergraduate and graduate students and they found that people in fair relationships are less likely to use negative relationship maintenance strategies while people in under-valued relationships are more likely to use negative relationship maintenance behavior strategies. In other words, individuals who are satisfied with their relationships tend to use more positive relationship maintenance behavior.

Ogolsky and Bowers (2013) conducted a meta-analysis and they suggested the associated factors of relationship maintenance. They reviewed 35 studies (N = 12.273) and their results revealed that satisfaction and commitment are associated with relationship maintenance. Also, they explained that relationship maintenance can be a rewarding function in order to preserve a relationship and it can promote relationship satisfaction. In addition to this, they proposed that the more individuals use relationship maintenance behavior, the more they are satisfied with their relationship. In other words, it is important for partners to see their partners are making efforts to maintain their relationship and this is an expectancy fulfilment. In addition to this, they also

agreed that relational maintenance strategies are associated with relationship satisfaction (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton, 2000). Further, Canary and Stafford (1992) stressed that maintenance strategies are linked to commitment in romantic relationships and committed individuals are willing to maintain their relationship and regulate their behavior. Furthermore, Canary and Stafford (2006) stated that relationship maintenance is associated with positive relationship outcomes such as commitment. Also, Rusbult, Olsen, Davis and Hannon (2004) stated that commitment is a promoting factor for relationship maintenance behavior. Further they explained relationship maintenance in terms of cognitive (such as cognitive structure of being interdependent, perceiving other alternatives' qualities in a minimal way) and behavioral components (such as adaptable behaviors or volunteering to sacrifice).

Weigel, Weiser and Lalasz (2017) conducted a study with 184 individuals who are in a romantic relationship. They proposed that relationship maintenance behavior can be a means of achieving relationship satisfaction. Therefore, the current study also considers that relationship maintenance behaviors have indirect effect on association between relational schemas and relationship satisfaction as an outcome based on this.

**Relationship Satisfaction.** Hendrick, Dicke and Hendrick (1998) stated that relationship satisfaction refers to one's subjective assessment of a relationship. According to Meeks, Hendrick and Hendrick (1998) relationship satisfaction is a complex and multi-determined variable. Firstly, there can be individual-related factors to determine relationship satisfaction. For instance, Randall and Bodenmann (2017) proposed that external stresses (work stress, illness etc.) are negatively associated to relationship satisfaction. In addition to this, Egeci& Gençöz (2006) conducted a study with 142 undergraduate students and they proposed that individuals' confidence in problem solving skills and secure attachment style is positively associated with

relationship satisfaction. Besides, Vater and Schröder-Abe (2015) collected data from 137 couples and they investigated the association between regulation of emotions and relationship satisfaction. Their results revealed that individuals who use suppression as an emotional regulation strategy tend to show more disruptive behavior in couple communication. Therefore, it is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. Besides, Schaffhuser, Allemann and Martin (2014) carried out a study with 216 couples and their study contributed that neuroticism was negatively linked to relationship satisfaction while agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively linked to relationship satisfaction. In addition to this, results reported that extraversion and openness to experience were positively associated to individuals' and partners' perception of relationship satisfaction.

Besides individual-related variables, relationship satisfaction can also be understood by relationship-related variables. For example, Randall and Bodenmann (2017) stated that internal stresses (higher conflict in the relationship or parental stressors etc.) are negatively associated to relationship satisfaction. Moreover, it is found that dyadic coping is an important component of relationship satisfaction. More clearly, couples can be resource for each other to deal with stressors or they can find ways together to deal with stress. A meta-analysis study found that this kind of dyadic coping was positively associated with relationship satisfaction (Falconier, Jackson, Hilpert & Bodenmann, 2016). Over and above, there are also other relational factors influencing relationship satisfaction such as emotional and sexual satisfaction. A study conducting with 335 married couple proposed that emotional and sexual satisfaction mediated the relationship between partners' communication and their relationship satisfaction (Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day & Gangamma, 2013).

Besides these studies, it is possible to say that relationship satisfaction can be understood by social exchange theory. Rusbult and Buunk (1983) stated that relationship satisfaction can be determined by individuals' assessments towards rewards and costs in a relationship. Rewards refer to satisfaction, pleasures which a participant gain from a relationship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). In addition to this, all perceived positive benefits can be considered as a reward, such as positive verbal communications, giving gifts, spending time together, listening to each other, and these rewards can contribute to relationship satisfaction (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). On the other hand, there can be some costs which are paid in order to continue a relationship, such as lack of partner's sensitivity or sense of humor. However, relationship satisfaction comes from the balance of rewards and costs (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003).

Sprecher and Metts (1999) stated that idealization of romantic relationships and partners can lead to relationship satisfaction. Also, Franiuk, Cohen and Pomerantz (2002) agreed that romantic attitudes towards relationship can influence relationship satisfaction. As mentioned before, they explained two kinds of beliefs as soulmate vs. work-it-out beliefs. According to Franiuk, Cohen and Pomerantz (2002), soulmate beliefs can strengthen the individuals' relationship satisfaction, because they tend to idealize and exaggerate the positive aspects of the relationship, such as similarity, that make their relationship more satisfactory. On the other hand, Franiuk, Cohen and Pomerantz (2002) proposed that work-it-out believers have lower relationship satisfaction comparing to soulmate believers, because they idealize less and tend to work it on relational issues. Therefore, it is possible to say that individuals' romantic beliefs influence their relationship satisfaction. Further, as the current study proposed, commitment can be a variable influencing relationship satisfaction. Rusbult and Buunk (1983) found that there is a correlation between commitment and relationship satisfaction. Also, according to Weigel,



Brown and O’Riordan (2011), committed individuals are more satisfied with their relationship. In addition to all of these, Canary and Yum (2016) stated that relationship maintenance behaviors can help individuals in order to preserve relationship satisfaction in their relationships.

### **Examination of Relational Variables of Interest in Online Dating**

As mentioned earlier, current literature is mostly focused on relationships started offline. There are some studies conducted to examine the associations of the relational variables discussed above. However, it is possible to say that there were few studies especially in order to understand the association between romantic beliefs and online dating behavior. For example, Anderson (2005) proposed that romantic beliefs influence the attitudes towards using online dating apps. The study revealed that individuals who have higher romantic beliefs tend to use online dating apps less than individuals who have lesser romantic beliefs. Anderson (2005) explained that higher romantic beliefs may strengthen the attitudes towards offline dating and online dating may sound like out of the standard. Even though the romantic belief of “upon meeting one’s true love, she or he will know it immediately” is consistent with online dating, lack of face-to-face contact may be out of standard for people with higher romantic beliefs.

When we look at an another relational schema for the current study, commitment was not investigated directly in online dating context. However, a study conducting with 128 late adolescents and adults found that individuals in online dating context showed more searching behavior for a better alternative of romantic partner and this leads to worse choices (Yang & Chiou, 2010). Over and above, it is stated that there can be a lot of alternatives in the context of online dating, and online dating context differ from offline one with this aspect (Finkel et al., 2012). Further, they proposed that a lot of choices may overwhelm online dating app users and they may avoid taking decisions in order to commit a relationship and maintain it. Also, Finkel et

al. (2012) added that searching and evaluating profiles based on their qualities may have a consequence in assessment-oriented mindset which leads to embodying of partners. Besides, it may bring about underestimation of the possibility of a committed relationship and experience of intimacy in a relationship. In addition to this, Paul (2014) stated that online relationships are more likely to be ended compared to offline relationships. He explained that online dating may offer a lot of alternatives to users. Therefore, it can lower the level of commitment and can be an obstacle in starting a relationship. Paul (2014) also stated that due to social stigma of online dating, it can take more time to build trust in romantic relationships. Therefore, in the light of this studies, the current study aims to understand how online daters and offline daters differ in committing in and maintaining a relationship.

As mentioned earlier, the current study aims to understand relationship satisfaction as an outcome in online dating context and compare it with offline dating context. As a comparable study, Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Gonzaga, Ogburn, and Vanderweele, (2013) conducted a study within a very large sample of 20,047 individuals. The results of the study have revealed that couples who met online have higher marital satisfaction than couples who met offline. Also, Cacioppo, and colleagues (2013) proposed that married couples who met online tend to maintain their marriage more than the couples met offline. According to them, these results may depend on several reasons. For instance, they pinpointed that individuals preferring online dating are more educated and they have a full-time job. For these reasons, they may have a different understanding for maintaining a relationship. Besides these, they explain the marital satisfaction success by the help of another study. According to that study, when stranger people meet in an online context, they tend to do self-disclosure more than traditional meetings (McKenna, Green & Gleason,2002). Therefore, it can hype the marital satisfaction. They also added that these

results may be valid for American marriages and a research that will be conducted in a traditional society would have different results.

However, Paul (2014) conducted a study with 1806 participants. The study proposed that online daters tend to keep their relationship as a dating relationship, and they are less likely to marry. In addition to this, Paul (2014) proposed that break-up rates in online daters are higher than offline daters. As mentioned earlier, they explained these break-up rates based on too many alternatives and on the fact that developing relationships started online need more time to build trust. Therefore, looking at these two opposite results, it is possible to say that relationship satisfaction in online dating context still needs to be investigated within more studies. On the other hand, Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) conducted a study among 114 participants. They found that intimacy, trust and communication satisfaction are the important determinants of relationship satisfaction in online dating context. However, their study included participants engaged in computer mediated communication only, and who have not met face-to-face. Therefore, this sample was different than the sample of current study.

Relationship maintenance behaviors are also another variable for the current study. Current literature has shown that computer mediated communication can be a tool in order to empower intimacy and maintain connection in couple relationships (Henline, 2006; Pettigrew, 2009). However, it has not investigated how individuals establishing their relationship online use these relationship maintenance behaviors as a tool to sustain a relationship. Therefore, the current study aims to contribute literature by also investigating how online daters use these relationship maintenance behaviors. Moreover, how these behaviors mediate the associations between relational schemas (romantic beliefs and commitment) and relationship satisfaction shall also be investigated.

## **Role of Demographic Variables**

Besides all of the associations, the current study aims to investigate age- and gender-related descriptive statistics in the context of Turkey. Existing literature stated that there is a gender difference in online dating use (Anderson, 2005; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Abramova, Baumann, Krosnova & Buxmann, 2016). According to these studies, men have more positive attitudes towards online dating while women tend to favor it less. Abramova et al. (2016) explained that due to more positive attitudes towards internet use, men tend to have more positive attitudes towards online dating. In addition to this, Pew Research Center (2016) proposed that online dating is common among 18-24 age groups. However, it is starting to become more common in 50-64 age groups. Yet, there is no data investigating this information in Turkey. For this reason, the current study aims to test these age- and gender-related results within Turkey context.

## **Turkey as a Social Context**

Dion and Dion (1993) proposed that culture is an important determinant of the way of experiencing relationships in general. Further, it is proposed that romantic relationships are mostly influenced by cultural factors (Bejanyan, Marshall & Ferenczi, 2015). Individualistic cultures may promote self-sufficiency in relationships while collectivistic cultures centralize the idea of well-being of the groups rather than personal needs. Further, it is proposed that individualistic cultures tend to centralize the necessity of romantic love in order to get married rather than a collectivistic culture. For collectivistic cultures, it can be more important to get married for the sake of maintaining family structure (Dion & Dion, 1993). In addition to this, a cross-cultural study conducted with 641 participants from United States, Turkey and India proposed that the countries that idea of romantic love was promoted the most were United States,

Turkey and India respectively (Medora, Larson, Hortacsu & Dave, 2002). As mentioned earlier, romantic love is favored more in industrialized and technologically-developed countries. The results of this study can be congruent with the literature. On the other hand, when we think about online dating context, as Anderson (2005) argued, an increase in romantic beliefs leads to a decrease in engaging online dating behavior.

Göregenli (1995) stated that Turkish culture has collectivistic characteristics. However, she also added that there are changes towards collectivistic culture to individualistic culture after 1980s. Also, Imamoğlu (1987) stated that Turkish culture has been going under rapid transformation due to urbanization, changes in the family, and the increase in education levels for the last twenty years. Besides relationship-related changes, internet attitudes have also changed in Turkey over time. According to Büyükşener (2009), Turkey became the top country in Europe in terms of internet usage. Further, Turkey Statistical Institute (2016) proposed that 84% of individuals using internet engage in social media. Besides this prevalence of internet usage, a current study found that 60% of individuals between the ages of 18-54 started to engage in online dating. Yet, 30% of them saw this experience as a good way to meet new people easily (Ajans Press, 2018). However, Eren and Gurmen (2019) stated that negative attitudes towards online dating exist in Turkey, especially in terms of long-term relationship possibilities. Therefore, there is still no clear picture in Turkey depicting how these online relationships are experienced.

### **The Current Study**

In the existing literature, offline relationships have been investigated much more comparing to online dating relationships. Also, online dating literature mainly focused on individual variables such as personality traits, self-esteem, self-presentation or motivations for

online dating. There are also studies proposing association within relationship-related variables in online dating context, but more studies are needed in this context. In addition to this, comparison of online vs. offline date is new for the literature. There are two studies that investigate the differences between online vs. offline dating in terms of relational variables such as marital satisfaction and dating intentions, but their results are contradictory. Therefore, comparison of online vs. offline dating needs to be investigated more within the scope of relational variables. Besides this, there is no empirical study in Turkey to understand online dating.

The current study aims to explore the differences between online daters and offline daters in terms of romantic beliefs, commitment, and their influence to relationship satisfaction as an outcome. In addition to this, the current study aims to investigate how relational maintenance behaviors as a means mediate the relationship between romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction. Besides current relationship experiences, the present study also aims to understand how exposure to online dating experiences make a difference in terms of individuals' relationship perceptions. Therefore, a comparison of individuals experiencing online dating and not experiencing online dating was performed in the current study. Furthermore, the present study intends to explain overall result based on the schema theory and the investment model.

Therefore, research questions were as following:

R1: Are there any differences between online vs. offline relationships?

Specifically, are there any differences between online vs. offline relationships in terms of romantic beliefs, commitment, relationship maintenance behaviors and relationship satisfaction?

H1: There are differences between groups of online vs. offline relationships in terms of romantic beliefs, commitment, relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction. As literature

proposed, romantic beliefs and commitment are expected to be lower in online dating groups. Therefore, relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction are low, too.

R2: Are there any differences between individuals experiencing online dating vs. not experiencing online dating?

To be more clear, are there any differences between individuals experiencing online dating vs. not experiencing in terms of romantic beliefs, commitment, relationship maintenance behaviors and relationship satisfaction?

H2: There are differences between groups of individuals experiencing online dating vs. not experiencing in terms of romantic beliefs, commitment, relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction. As literature proposed, romantic beliefs and commitment are expected to be lower in online dating groups. Therefore, this also effects relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction negatively.

R3: Are there any differences between current vs. former relationship in terms of relational schemas (romantic beliefs and commitment) and relationship outcomes in online vs. offline relationships?

H3: There are difference in relational schemas (romantic beliefs and commitment), relationship maintenance behaviors and relationship outcome (relationship satisfaction) in terms of current vs. former relationships. As literature proposed, major study variables are expected to be lower in the former relationships.

R4: How romantic beliefs and commitment as relational schemas predict relationship satisfaction as an outcome?

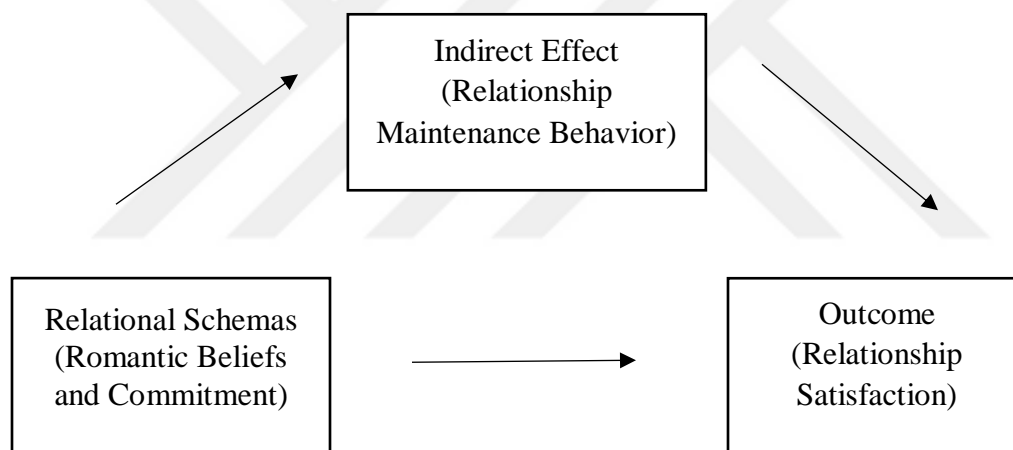
H4: Romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship maintenance behaviors predict relationship satisfaction positively.

R5: Do relationship maintenance behaviors have an indirect effect in the relationship between commitment, (as relational schema) and relationship satisfaction (as outcome) for both online and offline relationships?

H5: Relationship maintenance behaviors have positive indirect effect in the association between relational schemas (romantic beliefs and commitment) and outcomes (relationship satisfaction).

A model stated as below was composed in the light of offline (traditional) relationship studies.

Current study aimed to test this model in general and also in online relationships.



## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

#### Participants

Sample is composed of 546 participants (362 females, 183 males and 1 other) between the ages of 18 and 30 ( $M = 24.16$ ,  $SD = 3.5$ ). 467 participants reported their sexual orientations as heterosexual, 35 participants as homosexual and 29 of them as other. Participants were mostly at least their university graduates ( $M = 16$  years). Almost half of their parents were university



graduates (203 mothers and 223 fathers). 276 participants assessed their relationships starting in offline (face-to-face and contexts) and 270 participants assessed their relationships starting in online (both online dating apps and social media sites). Individuals meeting in offline contexts reported that 144 participants met on their own, 104 participants met via their friends, 8 participants met via their families, and 21 participants met via other ways. On the other hand, 165 participants reported that they met via social media sites (mainly twitter and Instagram) and 95 participants reported that they met via online dating apps (mostly tinder). In addition to this, 288 participants reported that they used online dating apps (mostly tinder) before. Further, 293 participants specified that they used social media sites in order to find romantic partners (mostly twitter and Instagram). 325 participants assessed their current relationship and 213 participants assessed their former relationship ( $M = 113.15$  weeks).

## Measures

**Demographics.** In order to obtain demographic information of participants, participants were asked about their age, gender, sexual orientation, education level, parental education level, occupation, the region where they spend life mostly, socioeconomic status, living arrangement (such as alone, with family or friends), relationship history, and online dating history.

**Romantic Beliefs Scale.** Sprecher and Metts (1999) created a 15-item scale in order to assess romantic beliefs based on four dimensions: a) love finds a way (overcome obstacles) b) one and only (there is only one true love) b) idealization (the partner and the relationship are perfect) c) love at first sight (love is possible soon after meeting for the first time). Each of the items contain 7-point Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Total score represents the degree of an individual's orientation in romantic beliefs.

The four subscales of the scale were also analyzed. Love Finds a Way contains six items (e.g. If I love someone, I know I can make the relationship work despite any obstacles). Cronbach alpha of this subscale was .80 for men and .79 for women. Second subscale was One and Only (e.g. I believe that to be truly in love is to be in love forever). The Cronbach alpha for this subscale was .79 for men and .82 for women. Third subscale was Idealization (e.g. The relationship I will have with “my true love” will be nearly perfect). The Cronbach alpha for this subscale was .81 for men and .81 for women. The last subscale was Love at First Sight (e.g. I am likely to fall in love almost immediately if I meet the right person). The Cronbach alpha for this subscale was .60 for men and .56 for women. Eventually, Cronbach alpha for total score was .87 for men and .88 for women.

The adaptation of romantic beliefs scale was conducted by Küçükarslan and Gizir (2013). The Cronbach alphas are as following: .79 for love finds a way as a subscale, .69 for one and only, .50 for idealization, .67 for love at first sight. The Cronbach alpha for idealization is lower compared to other subscales. They explained that the items of the subscale were less compared to others. Overall Cronbach alpha was found as .84.

In the current study, overall Cronbach alpha was .85. The subscales were as following: .80 for love finds a way, .73 for one and only, .68 for idealization, and .43 for love at first sight.

**Commitment Inventory.** Commitment Inventory was created by Johnson (1978). The scale includes 12 subscales and 101 items. These subscales are as following: morality of divorce (such as divorce is wrong, except when a spouse dies, marriage should be a once-in-a-lifetime commitment), availability of partners (such as it “would be very difficult to find a new partner”, “I believe there are many people who would be happy with me as their spouse or partner”), social pressure (“my friends/ family would not mind it if my partner and I broke up”, “my

friends/ family want/s to see my relationship works”), structural investment (such as “this relationship costs me very little in terms of physical, tangible resources”, “I would lose valuable possessions if I left my partner”), relationship agenda (such as “I may decide that I want to end this relationship at some point in the future”, “I want to grow old with my partner”), meta commitment (such as “I do not make commitments unless I believe I will keep them”, “I have trouble making commitments because I do not want to close off alternatives”), couple identity (such as “I want to keep the plans for my life somewhat separate from my partner’s plans for life”, “I am more comfortable thinking in terms of “my” things than “our” things”), primacy of relationship (such as “my relationship with my partner comes before my relationships with my friends”, “my career is more important to me than my relationship with my partner”), satisfaction with sacrifice (such as “it can be personally fulfilling to give up something for my partner”, “giving something up for my partner is frequently not worth the trouble”), and alternative monitoring (such as “I know people of the opposite sex whom I desire more than my partner”, “I am not seriously attached to anyone other than my partner”). The Cronbach alphas of the subscales are as following: morality of divorce .82, availability of partners .80, social pressure .88, structural investment .70, unattractiveness of alternatives .91, termination procedures .89, relationship agenda .88, meta-commitment .75, couple identity .81, primacy of relationship .80, satisfaction with sacrifice .74, and alternative monitoring .86 (Stanley& Markman, 1992).

The present study aims to use two subscales of this scale, which are the availability of partners and meta-commitment. As mentioned earlier, the current study is concerned with relational schemas. Therefore, it is important to understand how people think about commitment and how they perceive it. For this reason, meta-commitment subscale is appropriate for the current study to measure individuals’ cognitions about commitment. In addition to this, as

mentioned earlier, availability of other attractive alternatives can decrease commitment. Also, it can be possible to encounter a lot of alternatives in online dating context. Therefore, this subscale can be helpful for the current study. Also, there was no Turkish translation of this scale. Therefore, the translation was handled within the present study. Translation-backtranslation method was used and a pilot study were conducted in order to set the psychometric measures.

**Relationship Maintenance Scale.** First version of this scale was developed by Canary and Stafford (1992). This first version had 27 items, and after the study Dainton and Stafford (1993) four additional items were included. Finally, the scale has been revised as a 31-item scale and as a 7-Likert type (ranging from 1= strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) scale. This scale has seven subscales as following: assurances (such as “I say I love you”, “I imply that our relationship has a future”, “I stress my commitment to my partner”), openness (e.g. “I encourage my partner to share his/her feelings with me”, “I simply tell my partner how I feel about the relationship”, “I talk about my feelings”), conflict management (“I apologize when I am wrong”, “I listen to my partner and try to not to judge”, “I am understanding”, “I am cooperated in how I handle disagreements”), shared tasks (such as “I offer to do things that are not my responsibility”, “I do my fair share of the work we have to do”, “I do not shirk my responsibilities”), positivity (such as “I act cheerful and positive around him/her”, “I try to upbeat when we are together”), advice (such as “I tell my partner what I think s/he should do about his/her problems”, “I give him/her my opinion on things going on his/her life”) and social networks (such as “I like to spend time with our same friends”, “I focus on common friends and affiliations”). In the original study, the Cronbach alphas of the subscales are as following: assurances ranging from .74 to .85, openness ranging from .65 to .83, conflict management ranging from .67 to .77, shared tasks ranging from .71 to .88, positivity ranging from .74 to .81,

advice is .86, and social networks ranging from .81 and .86. However, there was no Turkish translation of this scale. Translation-backtranslation method was used and a pilot study was conducted in order to set the psychometric measures. In addition to this, overall Cronbach alpha was .87 in the current study.

**Relationship Stability Scale.** Rusbult, Martz and Agnew (1998) created a 30-item scale which was intended to measure relationship satisfaction, assessment of the quality of other alternatives and relationship investment. Therefore, the subscales are relationship satisfaction (10 items), relationship investment (10 items), assessment of the quality of other alternatives (10 items). Also, for five items of every subscale a 4-Likert type scale ranging from 1 to 4 (1= totally wrong, 2= quite wrong, 3= quite true, 4= totally true) was considered and for the other items of every subscale a 9-Likert type scale (1 = totally wrong, 9= totally true) was considered.

The subscales of the scale were also analyzed. Relationship satisfaction subscale has 10 items (such as the person in my life satisfies my intimacy needs such as sharing secrets or opinions, the person in my life satisfies my needs in terms of spending time together and doing favorable activities, my relationship is close to an ideal one, the person in my life satisfies my sexual needs in term of holding hands and kissing, my relationship makes me happy). Other subscale has 10 items which were intended to assess other alternatives' quality ("sharing secrets and opinions can be satisfied with another partner, too", "flirting with someone else seems to very attractive for me"). Another subscale relationship investment has 10 items (such as "I invest a lot in our relationship", "I feel like I committed to this relationship a lot".)

The validity and reliability study for Turkish version was studied by Büyükşahin, Hasta and Hovardaoğlu (2005). They found that Cronbach alpha is .90 for relationship satisfaction

subscale, .84 for assessment the other alternatives' quality and .84 for relationship investment. In the current study, overall Cronbach alpha was .86.

### **Translation-Back Translation Processes**

In the current study, two scales –Commitment Inventory and Relationship Maintenance Scale- were translated. These processes handled by two psychologists doing masters in Couple and Family Therapy Program in Ozyegin University and one assistant professor who holds a philosophical degree in Couple and Family Therapy. They were compatible in both English and Turkish. Firstly, one postgraduate student translated the scales from English to Turkish. After that, the other postgraduate student translated these versions to English. When these processes were complete, assistant professor revised the translations. There were only minor inconveniences and they were corrected.

### **Findings of Pilot Study**

Before starting the present research, a pilot study was conducted. Convenience sample method was used via Qualtrics software to gather data. The sample of the pilot study was composed of 30 participants (21 females and 9 males) between the ages of 18 and 30 ( $M = 24.83$ ,  $SD = 2.23$ ). 16 of them assessed their relationships started in face-to-face interactions, while 14 of them assessed their relationships started in online contexts (8 of them met in social media, 6 of them met via online dating apps). 15 of them assessed their current relationships and 15 of them assessed their former relationships.

The main aim of the pilot study was to test reliability of scales, and particularly of the translated ones (commitment inventory and relationship maintenance behaviors scale). After obtaining Cronbach alphas, commitment inventory was revised as using all the subscales rather than choosing two subscales.

Pilot study results have shown that overall Cronbach alpha was .93 for Romantic Beliefs Scale. Further, the Cronbach alphas of the subscales were as following: .91 for love finds a way, .88 for one and only, .81 for idealization and .58 for love at first sight. Also, a pilot study was conducted in order to see the Cronbach alphas of two translated subscales. Overall Cronbach alpha was .78. In addition to this, .68 for meta-commitment and .63 for alternative monitoring was found. In addition to this, pilot study was helpful to the measure translated relationship maintenance scale. Overall Cronbach alpha was .98. The Cronbach alphas of the subscales are as following: assurance .97, openness .97, conflict management .94, shared tasks .96, positivity .98, advice .96 and social networks .94. Lastly, some procedures were applied on the Relationship Stability Scale. Overall Cronbach alpha for this scale was .90 in the pilot study. Cronbach alphas were as following: relationship satisfaction .82, assessment of alternatives .79, and investments .82.

Results of the pilot study showed that reliability of Commitment Inventory scale was low. Therefore, rather than using two subscales, it was decided that using all subscales can increase reliability. Hence, the pilot study was a guide to improve the current study. By using all subscales, the actual data was gathered.

### **Procedures**

The study was conducted via Qualtrics, a platform to create and distribute online surveys. Informed consent was obtained in the beginning of the survey. In order to announce these online surveys, snowballing technique was implemented, online platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook were the main places for recruitment. While gathering data, checkpoints were arranged and targeted announcements were made based on needs of the data. For instance, relationships that started face-to-face were higher at the beginning of the study. Therefore,

announcements were made by targeting relationships that started online. Also, female participants were higher. From this point, announcements were made by targeting male participants having online relationship experience. Totally, 1852 participants were reached for the study. However, participants who did not complete all the scales and participants who did not have a relationship experience were excluded from the study. Besides online surveys, 50 participants also attended to the study by paper-pen style. However, participants who did not complete all the scales and did not have a relationship experience were excluded from the present study.

### **Data Analysis Strategies**

Firstly, the study aimed to investigate descriptive statistics in terms of numbers of online vs. offline daters, their ages, lengths of their relationships and their educational level. Also, in order to investigate gender associations, t-tests were conducted. Overall correlations were inspected in order to understand associations between romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction for both groups, online and offline. As the study hypothesized differences between groups, independent sample t-tests were performed for both groups (online vs. offline relationships and individuals experiencing online dating vs. not experiencing). In addition, multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to determine unique contributions of IVs (romantic beliefs and commitment) as well as relationship maintenance to DV (relationship satisfaction) for both groups. Finally, mediation analyses were conducted by the help of SPSS Macro by Hayes to see if relationship maintenance plays a mediating role in the associations among major study variables.



## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

#### 3.1. Correlations

##### 3.1.1. Intercorrelations between Demographic Variables and Measures of the Study

The study was intended to investigate the demographic variables and the major study variables of the study (see table 2).

**Age.** Age was not significantly correlated to the relevant variables of the study as romantic beliefs ( $r = -.03, p = .49$ ), commitment ( $r = -.01, p = .82$ ), relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = .04, p = .32$ ) and relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.05, p = .21$ ).

**Level of Education.** Level of education was significantly and negatively associated to romantic beliefs ( $r = -.20, p = .00$ ) and commitment ( $r = -.08, p = .04$ ). In addition to this, level of education was not significantly associated to relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = .02, p = .50$ ) and relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.06, p = .16$ ).

**Parental Level of Education.** Participants were asked about their mothers' and fathers' level of education separately. Mothers' level of education was significantly and negatively associated to commitment ( $r = -.11, p = .01$ ). However, mothers' level of education was not significantly correlated to romantic beliefs ( $r = -.00, p = .85$ ), relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = -.04, p = .31$ ) and relationship satisfaction ( $r = .02, p = .65$ ). On the other hand, fathers' level of education was significantly and positively correlated to relationship satisfaction ( $r = .10, p = .02$ ). Besides, there were no significant correlations between fathers' level of education and romantic beliefs ( $r = .05, p = .35$ ), commitment ( $r = -.03, p = .43$ ), relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = .02, p = .58$ ).

**Family Income.** Participants were asked about their family income. Results yielded that family income was only significantly and negatively associated to commitment ( $r = -.10, p = .01$ ).

On the other hand, family income was not significantly correlated to romantic beliefs ( $r = -.05, p = .18$ ), relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = -.06, p = .12$ ) and relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.02, p = .50$ ).

**Relationship History.** Relationship history (how many relationships participants had before) was significantly and negatively correlated to romantic beliefs ( $r = -.16, p = .00$ ) and commitment ( $r = -.19, p = .00$ ). On other hand, relationship history was not significantly associated to relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = -.03, p = .37$ ) and relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.02, p = .56$ ).

Table 1. Intercorrelations between Demographic Variables and Measures of the Study

	Romantic Beliefs	Commitment	Relationship Maintenance	Relationship Satisfaction
Age	.49	.82	.32	.21
Education	-.00**	-.04*	.04*	-.06
Mother's Education	.85	-.01*	.31	.65
Father's Education	.35	.43	.58	.02*
Family Income	.18	-.01*	.12	.50
Relationship History	-.00**	-.00**	.37	.56

\*\*  $p < .001$

### 3.1.2. Intercorrelations among Major Study Variables

One of the aim of the current study was to investigate the correlations among the relevant variables (see table 3).

**Romantic beliefs.** Romantic beliefs were correlated to all of the other variables in the study. Results yielded that romantic beliefs were significantly and positively correlated to commitment ( $r = .48, p = .00$ ). In addition to this, all of the subscales of romantic beliefs were significantly correlated to commitment. Love finds a way ( $r = .44, p = .00$ ), one and only ( $r = .43, p = .00$ ), idealization ( $r = .32, p = .00$ ) and love at first sight ( $r = .23, p = .00$ ) as subscales

were significantly and positively associated to commitment. Further, romantic beliefs were significantly and positively associated to relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = .32, p = .00$ ). Love finds a way ( $r = .33, p = .00$ ), one and only ( $r = .18, p = .00$ ), idealization ( $r = .23, p = .00$ ) and love at first sight ( $r = .20, p = .00$ ) as subscales were significantly and positively associated to relationship maintenance behaviors. Moreover, romantic beliefs were significantly and positively associated to relationship satisfaction ( $r = .30, p = .00$ ). Love finds a way ( $r = .28, p = .00$ ), one and only ( $r = .19, p = .00$ ), idealization ( $r = .29, p = .00$ ) and love at first sight ( $r = .14, p = .00$ ) as subscales were significantly and positively associated to relationship satisfaction.

**Commitment.** Commitment was also associated to other variables of the study. Results have shown that there was a significant association between commitment and romantic beliefs ( $r = .48, p = .00$ ). Also, the subscales of commitment were investigated in relations to romantic beliefs. Divorce of ethics ( $r = .39, p = .00$ ), availability of partners ( $r = .18, p = .00$ ), social pressure ( $r = .16, p = .00$ ), relationship agenda ( $r = .43, p = .00$ ), meta-commitment ( $r = .20, p = .00$ ), couple identity ( $r = .34, p = .00$ ), priority of relationship ( $r = .40, p = .00$ ), satisfaction of sacrifice ( $r = .38, p = .00$ ) and alternative monitoring ( $r = .22, p = .00$ ) as subscales were significantly and positively associated to romantic beliefs. Only one subscale named as “structural investment” was not significantly linked to romantic beliefs ( $r = -.04, p = .35$ ). Further, commitment was significantly and positively correlated to relationship maintenance behaviors as one of the other study variables ( $r = .49, p = .00$ ). When subscales are also investigated, results yielded that ethics of divorce ( $r = .01, p = .69$ ) and availability of other partners ( $r = .00, p = .86$ ) was not significantly associated to relationship maintenance behaviors. However, other subscales such as social pressure ( $r = .28, p = .00$ ), relationship agenda ( $r = .54, p = .00$ ), meta-commitment ( $r = .44, p = .00$ ), couple identity ( $r = .48, p = .00$ ), priority of

relationship ( $r = .36, p = .00$ ), satisfaction of sacrifice ( $r = .27, p = .00$ ), alternative monitoring ( $r = .38, p = .00$ ) was significantly and positively associated to relationship maintenance behaviors. On the other hand, structural investments as a subscale was significantly and negatively associated to relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = -.09, p = .02$ ). Moreover, commitment was significantly and positively associated to relationship satisfaction ( $r = .44, p = .00$ ). Divorce of ethics ( $r = .08, p = .04$ ), social pressure ( $r = .35, p = .00$ ), relationship agenda ( $r = .60, p = .00$ ), meta-commitment ( $r = .32, p = .00$ ), couple identity ( $r = .37, p = .00$ ), priority of relationship ( $r = .28, p = .00$ ), satisfaction of sacrifice ( $r = .25, p = .00$ ), alternative monitoring ( $r = .33, p = .00$ ) as subscales were significantly associated to relationship satisfaction. On other hand, availability of partners was not significantly associated to relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = .02, p = .62$ ) and structural investment was significantly and negatively associated to relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.15, p = .00$ ).

**Relationship Maintenance Behaviors.** Relationship maintenance behaviors were correlated to other variables of the study. Results have proposed that there was a significant association between relationship maintenance and romantic beliefs ( $r = .32, p = .00$ ). Assurance ( $r = .34, p = .00$ ), openness ( $r = .25, p = .00$ ), conflict management ( $r = .22, p = .00$ ), shared duties ( $r = .15, p = .00$ ), positivity ( $r = .23, p = .00$ ), advice ( $r = .18, p = .00$ ) and social networks ( $r = .18, p = .00$ ) as subscales was significantly and positively associated to romantic beliefs. Further, commitment was significantly and positively associated to relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = .49, p = .00$ ). Trust ( $r = .56, p = .00$ ), openness ( $r = .38, p = .00$ ), conflict management ( $r = .34, p = .00$ ), shared duties ( $r = .21, p = .00$ ), positivity ( $r = .25, p = .00$ ), advice ( $r = .25, p = .00$ ) and social networks ( $r = .25, p = .00$ ) as subscales were significantly and positively correlated to commitment. In addition to this, relationship maintenance behaviors were

significantly and positively associated to relationship satisfaction ( $r = .53, p = .00$ ). Trust ( $r = .49, p = .00$ ), openness ( $r = .43, p = .00$ ), conflict management ( $r = .36, p = .00$ ), shared duties ( $r = .30, p = .00$ ), positivity ( $r = .34, p = .00$ ), advice ( $r = .35, p = .00$ ) and social networks ( $r = .35, p = .00$ ) as subscales were significantly and positively associated to relationship satisfaction.

**Relationship Satisfaction and Subscales of the Relationship Stability Scale.** In the study, relationship satisfaction was measured as a subscale of Relationship Stability Scale. Results yielded that relationship satisfaction was linked to other variables of the current study. According to analysis, relationship satisfaction was correlated to romantic beliefs ( $r = .30, p = .00$ ), commitment ( $r = .44, p = .00$ ), relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = .53, p = .00$ ). Also, other subscales of the relationship stability scales were investigated in terms of other variables of the study. Results yielded that romantic beliefs were significantly and negatively associated to alternative assessment ( $r = -.19, p = .00$ ). Also, commitment was significantly and negatively correlated to alternative assessment ( $r = -.58, p = .00$ ). Further, alternative assessment was also significantly and negatively correlated to relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = -.26, p = .00$ ). Besides, there were correlations in terms of the variables of the study and relationship investment as the other subscale of the relationship stability scale. Relationship investment was negatively and significantly associated to romantic beliefs ( $r = -.19, p = .00$ ), commitment ( $r = -.58, p = .00$ ) and relationship maintenance behaviors ( $r = -.26, p = .00$ ). Also, relationship investment was significantly and negatively associated to relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.39, p = .00$ ).

By the light of these results, the current study rejects the null hypothesis. Therefore,  $H_1$  was supported.

Table 2. Intercorrelations among Major Study Variables

	Romantic Beliefs	Commitment	Relationship Maintenance	Relationship Satisfaction
Romantic Beliefs		.48**	.20**	.30**
Commitment	.48**		.49**	.44**
Relationship Maintenance	.20**	.49**		.53**
Relationship Satisfaction	.30**	.44**	.53**	

\*\*  $p < .001$

### 3.2.2. Comparisons for Online vs. Offline Dating

#### 3.2.2.1. Independent Sample T-tests between Online vs. Offline Relationships

The current study aims to compare the present variables among two different groups as online vs. offline relationships in order to see their differences (see table 3).

**Romantic Beliefs.** An independent sample t-test was conducted in order to see how romantic beliefs differ between online vs. offline relationships. Results have revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the groups of online ( $M = 32.81$ ,  $SD = 9.05$ ) vs. offline relationships ( $M = 34.72$ ,  $SD = 10.21$ ) in terms of romantic beliefs ( $t(528) = 2.20$ ,  $p = .02$ ). According to results, romantic beliefs were higher in the relationships that started in face-to-face context.

**Commitment.** Independent sample t-tests were conducted to see how commitment differs among online vs. offline relationships. Results have shown that there was no statistically significant difference in the groups of online ( $M = 243.31$ ,  $SD = 40.26$ ) vs. offline relationships ( $M = 247.57$ ,  $SD = 39.28$ ) in terms of commitment ( $t(520) = 1.22$ ,  $p = .22$ ).

**Relationship Maintenance Behaviors.** Relationship maintenance behaviors were analyzed in order to see differences of online vs. offline relationships. It was found that there was

no statistically significant difference in the groups of online ( $M = 178.93$ ,  $SD = 24.89$ ) vs. offline ( $M = 180.12$ ,  $SD = 24.94$ ) relationships in terms of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $t(530) = 0.53$ ,  $p = .58$ ).

#### **Relationship Satisfaction and Other Subscales of Relationship Stability Scale.**

Relationship satisfaction is the last examined variable in the current study. Results have shown that there was no statistically significant group difference of online ( $M = 49.56$ ,  $SD = 11.32$ ) vs. offline ( $M = 50.50$ ,  $SD = 11.94$ ) relationships in terms of relationship satisfaction ( $t(526) = 0.92$ ,  $p = .35$ ). Further, relationship stability was analyzed based on the overall scale. Results have revealed that there was a statistically significant group difference of online ( $M = 117.78$ ,  $SD = 17.46$ ) vs. offline ( $M = 120.99$ ,  $SD = 17.46$ ) relationships in terms of relationship stability in general ( $t(524) = 0.18$ ,  $p = .04$ ). This result means that relationship stability was higher in the relationships that started in face-to-face context.

By considering these results, the current study rejects null hypothesis in terms of romantic beliefs. On the other hand, the current study failed to reject null hypothesis in terms of commitment, relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction. Therefore,  $H_2$  was partially supported.

Table 3.

*Results of the t-test and Descriptive Statistics for Comparison of Online vs. Offline Dating*

	Type of Relationship						95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Online Relationships			Offline Relationships					
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N			
Romantic Beliefs	32.81	9.05	270	34.72	10.21	276	1.90	2.20*	528
Commitment	243.31	40.26	270	247.57	39.28	276	4.25	1.22	520
Relationship Maintenance	178.93	24.89	270	180.12	24.94	276	1.19	0.53	530
Relationship Satisfaction	49.56	11.32	270	50.50	11.94	276	0.94	0.92	526

\*  $p < .05$ .

### **3.2.2.2. Independent Sample T-tests between Participants Who Have Experienced Online Dating Before and Not Experienced Before**

The current study also compared the groups as participants who have experienced online dating before and not experienced before in order to determine how their online dating experiences influence relational schemas and outcomes in general rather than current relationship (see table 4).

**Romantic Beliefs.** Results yielded that there was a statistically significant group difference between the participants who have experienced online dating ( $M = 32.90$ ,  $SD = 9.38$ ) vs. who have not experienced online dating ( $M = 34.77$ ,  $SD = 10.83$ ), which was found as ( $t(524) = -2.16$ ,  $p = .03$ ). According to this result, romantic beliefs were higher in the participants who have not experience online dating before comparing to participants who have experienced before.



**Commitment.** Independent sample t-tests were conducted to see how commitment differs among the participants who have experienced online dating vs. who have not experienced before. Results yielded that there was a significant group difference of between the participants who have experienced online dating ( $M = 237.91, SD = 38.60$ ) and who have not experienced ( $M = 254.83, SD = 39.46$ ) in terms of commitment ( $t(518) = -4.92, p = .00$ ). Based on these results, it is possible to say that commitment was higher in the participants who did not experience online dating before.

**Relationship Maintenance Behaviors.** Independent sample t-tests were conducted to see how relationship maintenance behaviors differ among the participants who have experienced online dating vs. who have not experienced before. Results have shown that there was no statistically significant group difference among those participants who have experienced online dating ( $M = 178.25, SD = 25.83$ ) vs. who have not experienced online dating ( $M = 181.12, SD = 23.79$ ) in terms of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $t(526) = -1.32, p = .18$ ).

**Relationship Satisfaction and Other Subscales.** The current study aims to investigate relationship satisfaction based on groups of participants who have experienced online dating before vs. groups who have not experienced. Results yielded that there was a significant difference in the groups of participants who have experienced online dating ( $M = 48.98, SD = 11.15$ ) vs. who have not experienced ( $M = 51.37, SD = 11.69$ ) in terms of relationship satisfaction ( $t(522) = -2.34, p = .02$ ). This results proposed that relationship satisfaction was higher in the participants who did not experience online dating before.

Also, there was a significant difference in the groups of participants who have experienced online dating ( $M = 17.68, SD = 11.48$ ) vs. who have not experienced ( $M = 34.36, SD$

= 11.87) in terms of alternative assessment ( $t(526) = 5.59, p = .00$ ). This result presented that alternative assessment was higher in the participants experienced online dating before.

Besides, there was no significant difference in the groups of participants who have experienced online dating ( $M = 40.06, SD = 11.44$ ) vs. who have not experienced ( $M = 37.28, SD = 11.51$ ) in terms of relationship investments ( $t(526) = -1.07, p = .28$ ). Overall, there was no significant difference in the groups of participants who have experienced online dating ( $M = 120.02, SD = 18.12$ ) vs. who have not experienced ( $M = 118.78, SD = 18.00$ ) in terms of relationship stability ( $t(521) = 0.78, p = .43$ ).

In the light of these comparisons, the current study rejects to null hypothesis in terms of romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction.  $H_3$  was mainly supported.

Table 4.

*Results of the t-test and Descriptive Statistics for Comparison of Exposure vs. No Exposure to Online Dating*

	Exposure of Online Dating						95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Exposure			Not Exposure					
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N			
Romantic Beliefs	32.90	9.30	288	34.77	10.83	243	-1.86	-2.16*	524
Commitment	237.91	38.60	288	254.83	39.46	243	-16.91	-4.92*	516
Relationship Maintenance	178.25	25.83	288	181.12	23.79	243	-2.87	-1.32	526
Relationship Satisfaction	48.98	11.15	288	51.37	11.69	243	-2.38	5.59*	526

\*  $p < .05$ .

### 3.2.2.3. ANOVA tests for Comparing Online Dating App Meetings, Social Media and Face-to-Face Meetings

ANOVA analyses were conducted in order to see how three groups of online dating app meetings, social media meetings and face-to-face meetings differ from each other in terms of study variables. There was a statistically significant group difference in terms of romantic beliefs of groups of online dating app meetings ( $M = 31.65$ ,  $SD = 8.46$ ), social media meetings ( $M = 34.70$ ,  $SD = 16.02$ ) and face-to-face meetings ( $M = 36.17$ ,  $SD = 15.16$ ) [ $(F(2, 546) = 3,556, p = .02)$ ]. These results mean that face-to-face relationship owners have the highest level of romantic beliefs while online dating app relationship owners have the lowest level of romantic beliefs.

In addition to this, relationship stability was significantly different from each other in the groups of online dating app meetings ( $M = 123.58$ ,  $SD = 15.86$ ), social media meetings ( $M = 122,43$ ,  $SD = 21,26$ ) and face-to-face meetings ( $M = 131, 35$ ,  $SD = 41,15$ ) [ $(F(2,546) = 1,656, p = 4,041)$ ]. This result has shown that relationship stability was highest in the face-to-face relationships while it was lowest in the social media relationships.

Besides these, there was no statistically significant group difference in terms of commitment of groups of online dating app meetings ( $M = 243,56$ ,  $SD = 17,62$ ), social media meetings ( $M = 247,38$ ,  $SD = 23,40$ ) and face-to-face meetings ( $M = 250,26$ ,  $SD = 39,63$ ) [ $(F(2, 546) = 1,656, p = .19)$ ].

Also, there was no statistically significant group difference in terms of relationship maintenance behaviors of groups of online dating app meetings ( $M = 176,60$ ,  $SD = 26,69$ ), social media meetings ( $M = 180,51$ ,  $SD = 23,41$ ) and face-to-face meetings ( $M = 183,38$ ,  $SD = 37,88$ ), [ $(F(2, 546) = 1.683, p = .18)$ ]. Further, there was no statistically group difference between online dating app meetings ( $M = 49,96$ ,  $SD = 10,68$ ), social media meetings ( $M = 49,66$ ,  $SD = 14,70$ )

and face-to-face meetings ( $M = 53,16$ ,  $SD = 20,40$ ) in terms of relationship satisfaction [ $(F(2, 546) = 2.623, p = .07)$ ].

#### **3.2.2.4. Comparisons for Gender Differences**

**Gender Comparisons for All Relationships.** Data was also analyzed in order to see gender differences between groups (362 females, 173 males). Results have shown that there was a statistically significant differences in the groups of females ( $M = 32.98$ ,  $SD = 9.46$ ) and males ( $M = 35.53$ ,  $SD = 10.74$ ) in terms of romantic beliefs within all kinds of relationships ( $t(528) = -2.78, p = .00$ ). According to this result, it is possible to say that males have higher scores compared to females in terms romantic beliefs.

In addition to this, relationship maintenance behaviors were statistically significant in the groups of females ( $M = 181.83$ ,  $SD = 23.22$ ) and males ( $M = 174.93$ ,  $SD = 27.50$ ) within all kinds of relationships ( $t(530) = 3.01, p = .00$ ). This result highlighted that females scored higher in showing relationship maintenance behaviors comparing to males.

Besides these results, there was no statistically significant differences among groups of females ( $M = 245.15$ ,  $SD = 39.34$ ) and males ( $M = 246.37$ ,  $SD = 40.91$ ) in terms of commitment in all kinds of relationships ( $t(520) = -0.32, p = .74$ ). Also, there was no statistically significant differences among groups of females ( $M = 50.60$ ,  $SD = 11.98$ ) and males ( $M = 49.10$ ,  $SD = 10.64$ ) in terms of relationship satisfaction ( $t(526) = 1.40, p = .16$ ) for relationships in general.

**Gender Comparisons for Online Relationships.** Data was also analyzed in order to see gender differences in the context of online relationships (see table 5). Results have proposed that there was a statistically significant differences between females ( $M = 31.89$ ,  $SD = 9.21$ ) and males ( $M = 34.86$ ,  $SD = 10.19$ ) in terms of romantic beliefs ( $t(255) = -2.30, p = .02$ ). According

to this result, males scored higher in the romantic beliefs compared to females in terms of online relationships.

However, there was no statistically significant difference among groups of females ( $M = 243.07$ ,  $SD = 39.95$ ) and males ( $M = 243.82$ ,  $SD = 41.48$ ) in terms of commitment in online relationships ( $t(254) = -0.13$ ,  $p = .89$ ). Further, there was no statistically significant difference among groups of females ( $M = 183.07$ ,  $SD = 23.63$ ) and males ( $M = 180.63$ ,  $SD = 22.89$ ) in terms of relationship maintenance behaviors in online relationships ( $t(257) = 1.55$ ,  $p = .12$ ). In addition to this, there was no statistically significant difference among groups of females ( $M = 50.40$ ,  $SD = 11.47$ ) and males ( $M = 48.02$ ,  $SD = 10.40$ ) in the context of relationship satisfaction ( $t(256) = 1.58$ ,  $p = .11$ ).

Table 5.

*Results of the t-test and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Comparison of Online Relationships*

	Gender						95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Females			Males					
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N			
Romantic Beliefs	31.89	9.21	178	34.86	10.19	79	-2.96	-2.30*	255
Commitment	243.07	39.95	178	243.8	41.48	79	-0.7	-0.13	255
Relationship Maintenance	183.07	23.63	178	180.63	22.89	79	5.21	1.55	257
Relationship Satisfaction	50.40	11.47	178	48.02	10.40	79	2.38	1.58	256

\*  $p < .05$ .

**Gender Comparisons for Offline Relationships.** Analyses were also computed to examine gender differences in the context of offline relationships (see table 6). Results have shown that there was a statistically significant difference among groups of females ( $M = 183.03$ ,  $SD = 23.63$ ) and males ( $M = 174.52$ ,  $SD = 26.54$ ) in terms of relationship maintenance behaviors

in offline relationships ( $t(270) = 2.70, p = .00$ ). Based on this result, it is possible to say that females scored higher in presenting relationship maintenance behaviors in terms of offline relationships.

On the other hand, results have proposed that there were no statistically significant differences between females ( $M = 33.99, SD = 9.60$ ) and males ( $M = 36.09, SD = 11.21$ ) in terms of romantic beliefs ( $t(270) = -1.61, p = .10$ ). Also, there was no statistically significant difference among groups of females ( $M = 247.06, SD = 38.72$ ) and males ( $M = 248.54, SD = 40.51$ ) in terms of commitment in offline relationships ( $t(263) = -0.29, p = .77$ ). In addition to this, there was no statistically significant difference among groups of females ( $M = 50.40, SD = 11.47$ ) and males ( $M = 48.02, SD = 10.40$ ) in the context of relationship satisfaction ( $t(256) = 1.58, p = .11$ ).

Table 6.

*Results of the t-test and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Comparison of Offline Relationships*

	Gender						95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Females			Males					
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N			
Romantic Beliefs	33.99	9.60	178	36.09	11.21	94	-2.01	-1.61	270
Commitment	247.06	38.72	178	248.54	40.51	94	1.47	-0.29	263
Relationship Maintenance	183.03	23.63	178	174.52	26.54	94	8.51	2.70*	270
Relationship Satisfaction	50.76	12.51	178	50.02	10.81	94	0.73	1.58	256

\*  $p < .05$ .

### 3.2.2.5. Comparisons for Current vs. Former Relationships in General

Participants contributed to study by assessing their current or former relationships. The analyses were also computed in order to investigate how relational schemas and relationship

outcomes differ in terms of current vs. former relationships. Results have yielded statistically significant differences between groups of current vs. former relationships within all major study variables.

It was investigated that there was a significant difference in the groups of current ( $M = 34.71$ ,  $SD = 10.09$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 32.46$ ,  $SD = 9.61$ ) in terms of romantic beliefs ( $t(529) = 2.56$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Participants assessing their current relationships scored higher in romantic beliefs compared to other participants assessing their former relationships.

In addition to this, there was a significant difference in the groups of current ( $M = 253.03$ ,  $SD = 39.31$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 234.13$ ,  $SD = 37.82$ ) in terms of commitment ( $t(521) = 5.45$ ,  $p = .00$ ). Participants assessing their current relationships scored higher in commitment scores compared to the participants assessing their former relationships.

Also, there was a significant difference in the groups of current ( $M = 183.76$ ,  $SD = 23.12$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 173.13$ ,  $SD = 26.11$ ) in terms of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $t(531) = 4.89$ ,  $p = .00$ ). This result explained that the participants assessing their current relationships scored higher in showing relationship maintenance behaviors compared to the participants assessing their former relationships.

Further, there was a significant difference in the groups of current ( $M = 54.74$ ,  $SD = 8.91$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 43.00$ ,  $SD = 11.72$ ) in terms of relationship satisfaction ( $t(527) = 12.35$ ,  $p = .00$ ). Participants in current relationships scored higher in terms of relationship satisfaction.

Overall, these results have shown that individuals' romantic beliefs, commitment, relationship maintenance behaviors scores were higher in their current romantic relationships.

Also, as expected, their relationship satisfaction was higher in the current relationships based on their assessment.

### **3.2.2.6. Comparisons for Current vs. Former Relationships in Online Relationships**

The analyses were also conducted in order to see how current vs. former relationship assessments differ in the context of online relationships (see table 7). Results have shown a statistically significant group difference of current ( $M = 256.10, SD = 38.11$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 233.95, SD = 37.40.21$ ) in terms of commitment in online relationships ( $t(255) = 3.05, p = .00$ ). This means that participants who assess their current relationships scored higher in the commitment in the context of online dating.

Also, it was found that there was a statistically significant group difference of current ( $M = 182.40, SD = 22.25$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 173.89, SD = 27.64$ ) in terms of relationship maintenance behaviors in online relationships ( $t(258) = 2.63, p = .00$ ). This result indicates that relationship maintenance behaviors were higher in the ongoing relationships that were assessed.

In addition to this, the results yielded a significant difference between the groups of current ( $M = 53.55, SD = 8.84$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 43.80, SD = 12.04$ ) in terms of relationship satisfaction ( $t(257) = 7.11, p = .00$ ). This result shows that relationship satisfaction was higher in the current relationships that are assessed.

However, there was no statistically significant difference between the groups of current ( $M = 33.29, SD = 9.12$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 32.13, SD = 10.21$ ) in terms of romantic beliefs in online relationships ( $t(256) = 0.94, p = .33$ ).



Table 7.

*Results of the t-test and Descriptive Statistics for Comparison of Former vs. Current Relationship in Online*

	Online Relationships						95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Current Relationship			Former Relationship					
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N			
Romantic Beliefs	33.29	9.12	106	32.13	10.21	166	3.14	0.94	256
Commitment	256.10	38.11	106	233.95	37.40	166	22.15	3.05*	255
Relationship Maintenance	182.40	22.25	106	173.89	27.64	166	12.65	2.63*	258
Relationship Satisfaction	53.55	8.84	106	43.80	12.04	166	13.60	7.11*	257

\*  $p < .05$ .

### 3.2.2.7. Comparisons of Current vs. Former Relationships in Offline Relationships

The analyses were also run to examine the assessment difference between current vs. former relationships in the context of offline relationships (see table 8). There was a statistically significant difference between the groups of current ( $M = 35.94$ ,  $SD = 10.76$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 32.80$ ,  $SD = 9.01$ ) in terms of romantic beliefs in offline relationships ( $t(270) = 2.59$ ,  $p = .01$ ). According to this result, it can be said that romantic beliefs scored higher in offline relationships that were assessed as current.

In addition to this, results have shown a statistically significant difference between the groups of current ( $M = 256.10$ ,  $SD = 38.11$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 233.95$ ,  $SD = 37.40$ ) in terms of commitment in offline relationships ( $t(263) = 4.65$ ,  $p = .00$ ). This result means that commitment scores were higher in the current relationships that were assessed.

Also, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the groups of current ( $M = 185.01$ ,  $SD = 23.97$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 171.36$ ,  $SD = 24.59$ ) in terms of relationship maintenance behaviors in offline relationships ( $t(270) = 4.17$ ,  $p = .00$ ). Based on

this result, it is possible to say that relationship maintenance behaviors scored higher in the offline relationships that are assessed as current.

In addition to this, result yielded a significant difference between the groups of current ( $M = 55.81, SD = 8.88$ ) vs. former relationships ( $M = 42.20, SD = 11.40$ ) in terms of relationship satisfaction ( $t(267) = 10.37, p = .00$ ). This result presented that relationship satisfaction was higher in the offline relationships that are assessed as current.

*Table 8.*

*Results of the t-test and Descriptive Statistics for Comparison of Former vs. Current Relationship in Offline*

	Offline Relationships						95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Former Relationship			Current Relationship					
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N			
Romantic Beliefs	32.80	9.05	106	35.94	10.76	152	1.21	2.59*	270
Commitment	233.95	37.40	106	256.10	38.11	152	4.98	4.65*	263
Relationship Maintenance	171.36	24.59	106	185.01	23.97	152	3.22	4.17*	270
Relationship Satisfaction	42.20	11.40	106	55.81	8.81	152	1.37	4.17*	267

\*  $p < .05$ .

### 3.3.3. Multiple Regression for the Major Study Variables

A multiple regression was calculated in order to predict relationship satisfaction based on romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship maintenance. Multiple linear regression results yielded that there was a significant effect of commitment ( $\beta = .22, p = .00$ ) and relationship maintenance behaviors ( $\beta = .37, p = .00$ ) on relationship satisfaction ( $F(3,515) = 84,654, p = .00$ ,

$R^2 = .33$ ). On the other hand, there was no significant effect of romantic beliefs on relationship satisfaction ( $t = 1.95, \beta = .08, p = .05$ ).

By considering these results, the current study rejects the null hypothesis in terms of commitment and relationship maintenance behaviors. On the other hand, the current study failed to reject the null hypothesis in terms of romantic beliefs. Hence,  $H_4$  was partially supported.

### **3.3.3.1 Multiple Regression for the Major Study Variables in terms of Online Relationships**

In order to conduct multiple linear regression analyses for online vs. offline relationships, the method of application was coded as dummy variable (face-to-face meetings = 1, internet meetings = 0).

The analyses were also run to investigate the predictors of relationship satisfaction based on major study variables in the context of online relationships. Multiple linear regression analyses have shown that there was a significant effect of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $\beta = .42, p = .00$ ) on relationship satisfaction ( $F(3,256) = 34.253,654, p = .00, R^2 = .28$ ). On the other hand, romantic beliefs ( $\beta = .10, p = .08$ ) and commitment ( $\beta = .10, p = .14$ ) had no statistically significant effect on relationship satisfaction in terms of online relationships.

### **3.3.3.2. Multiple Regression for the Major Study Variables in terms of Offline Relationships**

Multiple regression analyses were also done to understand the effects of major study variables on relationship satisfaction. Results have shown that there were statistically significant effects of commitment ( $\beta = .32, p = .00$ ) and relationship maintenance behaviors ( $\beta = .32, p = .00$ ) on relationship satisfaction in the context of online relationships ( $F(3,256) = 47.483, p = .00, R^2 = .35$ ). On the other hand, romantic beliefs were not significant predictors of relationship satisfaction in terms of offline relationships ( $\beta = .06, p = .26$ ).

Table 9. Multiple Regression Results for Online and Offline Relationships

Note: Dependent variable of Relationship Satisfaction

\*\*P < .001

Variable	Online			Offline		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Romantic Beliefs	.12	.07	.10	.07	.06	.06
Commitment	.02	.01	.10	.10	.01	.32*
Relationship Maintenance	.19	.02	.42*	.16	.02	.32*
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.28			.35	
<i>F</i>		34.35**			47.48**	

### 3.3.3.3. Multiple Regression Analysis for Online Dating Exposure

The current study also aimed to investigate the relationship predictors of participants who had an online dating experience before. Results yielded that there were statistically significant effects of commitment ( $\beta = .23, p = .00$ ) and relationship maintenance behaviors ( $\beta = .40, p = .00$ ) on relationship satisfaction in the context of online relationships ( $F(3,256) = 47.483, p = .00, R^2 = .35$ ). On the other hand, romantic beliefs were not a significant predictor for participants who had an online dating experience before ( $\beta = -.02, p = .67$ ). Besides this, it was also investigated the relationship predictors of participants who did not have an online dating experience. Results yielded that there were statistically significant effects of romantic beliefs ( $\beta = .18, p = .00$ ), commitment ( $\beta = .18, p = .00$ ) and relationship maintenance behaviors ( $\beta = .37, p = .00$ ) on relationship satisfaction in terms of participants who did not have online dating experience before ( $F(3,231) = 38.010, p = .00, R^2 = .33$ ).

Table 11. Multiple Regression Results for Online Dating Exposure and Not Exposure

Note: Dependent variable of Relationship Satisfaction

\*\*P < .001

Variable	Exposure			Not Exposure		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Romantic Beliefs	-.03	.07	-.02	.21	.07	.18**
Commitment	.07	.01	.23**	.05	.02	.18**
Relationship Maintenance	.18	.02	.40**	.19	.03	.37**
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.35			.33		
<i>F</i>	47.48**			38.01**		

### 3.4. Indirect Effect Analyses

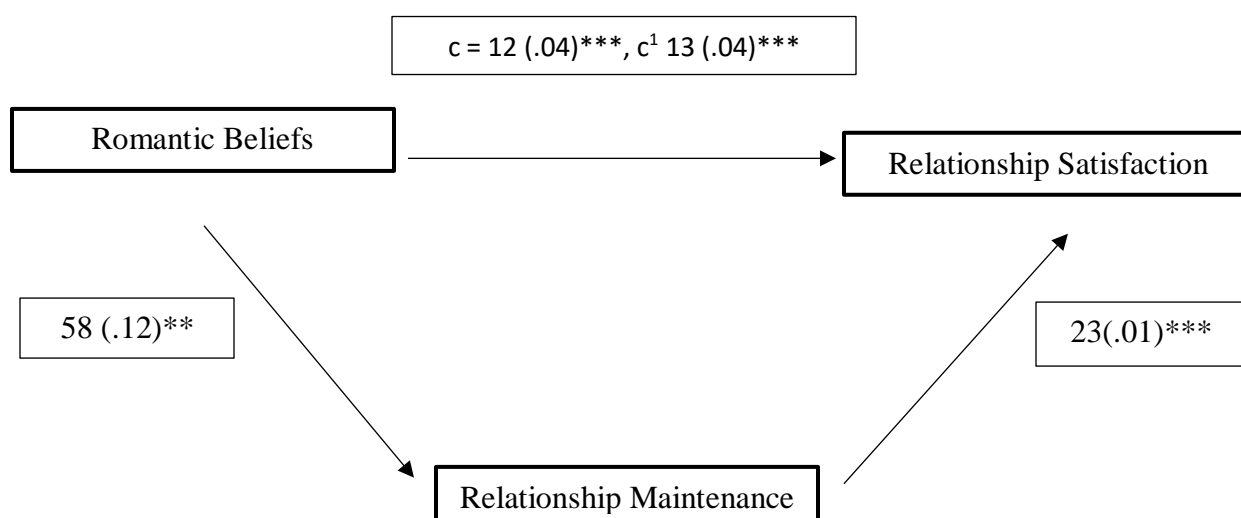
As mentioned earlier, the current study hypothesizes that relationship maintenance behaviors mediate the relationship between relational schemas (romantic beliefs and commitment) and relationships outcomes (relationship satisfaction) in the all kind of romantic relationships and for both online and offline relationships separately. Further, the current study also aims to investigate how these model works with individuals who have experienced online dating vs. who have not. In order to test these hypotheses, SPSS Process Macro developed by Hayes (2018) was used. Specifically, bootstrapping method was used. Also, this process was applied for both IVs (as romantic beliefs and commitment). Furthermore, it is important to note that length of relationship was added as covariates in order to prevent the possible influence of it.

#### 3.4.1. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors in the Association of

#### Romantic Beliefs and Relationship Satisfaction in General

To investigate the indirect effect of romantic beliefs within all type of relationships, a mediation model was tested. Results indicated that romantic beliefs were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction in all kinds of relationships ( $B = .12$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [152.28 – 170.26]). Also, romantic beliefs were significant predictors of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $B = .58$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [0.338 – 0.827]). In addition to this, relationship maintenance behaviors were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction ( $B = .23$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [0.194 – 0.266]). Therefore, the direct effect of relationship maintenance behaviors in the association of romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was significant in all kinds of relationships ( $B = .12$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.0,40 – .202]). Further, the indirect effect of relationship maintenance behaviors in the relationship between romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was significant in all relationships ( $B = .13$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.0,69 – .209] (see figure 1).

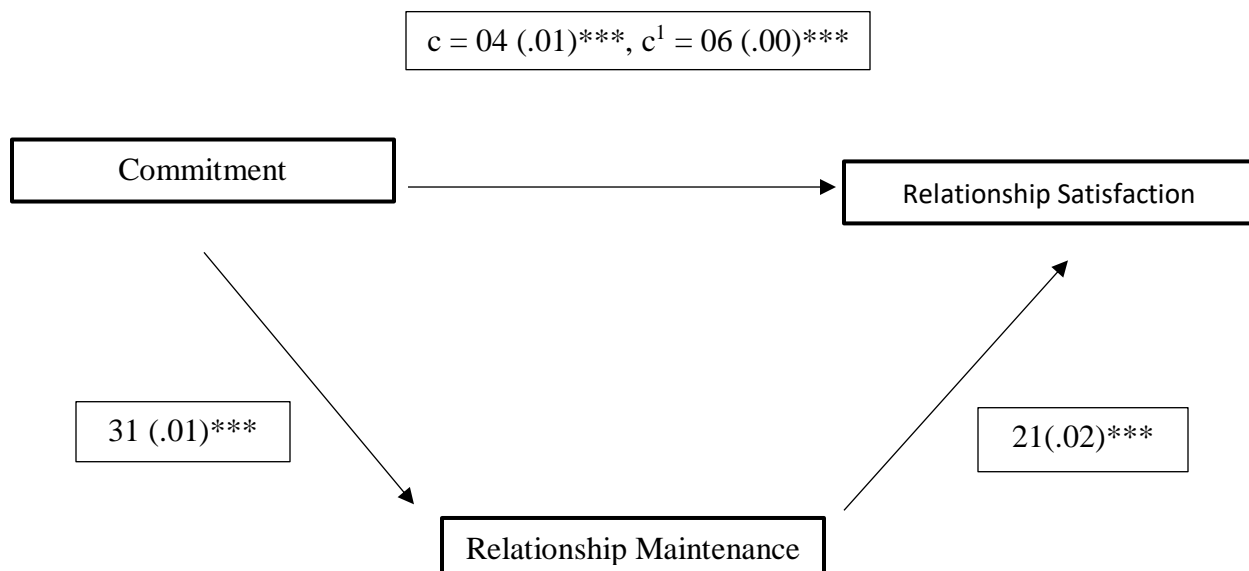
*Figure 1. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors in the Association of Romantic Beliefs and Relationship Satisfaction in General*



### **3.4.2. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction in General**

To examine the indirect effect of commitment within all type of relationships, a mediation model was tested. Analyses have revealed that commitment was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction in all kinds of relationships ( $B = .04$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.017 – .064]). Additionally, commitment was a significant predictor of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $B = .31$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.257 – .368]). Moreover, relationship maintenance behaviors were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction ( $B = .21$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.0171 – .0253]). Therefore, the direct effect of relationship maintenance behaviors in the association of commitment and relationship satisfaction was significant in all kinds of relationships ( $B = .04$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.017 – .064]). Further, the indirect effect of relationship maintenance behaviors in the relationship between commitment and relationship satisfaction was significant in all relationships ( $B = .06$ ,  $SE = .00$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.05 – .08]) (see figure 2).

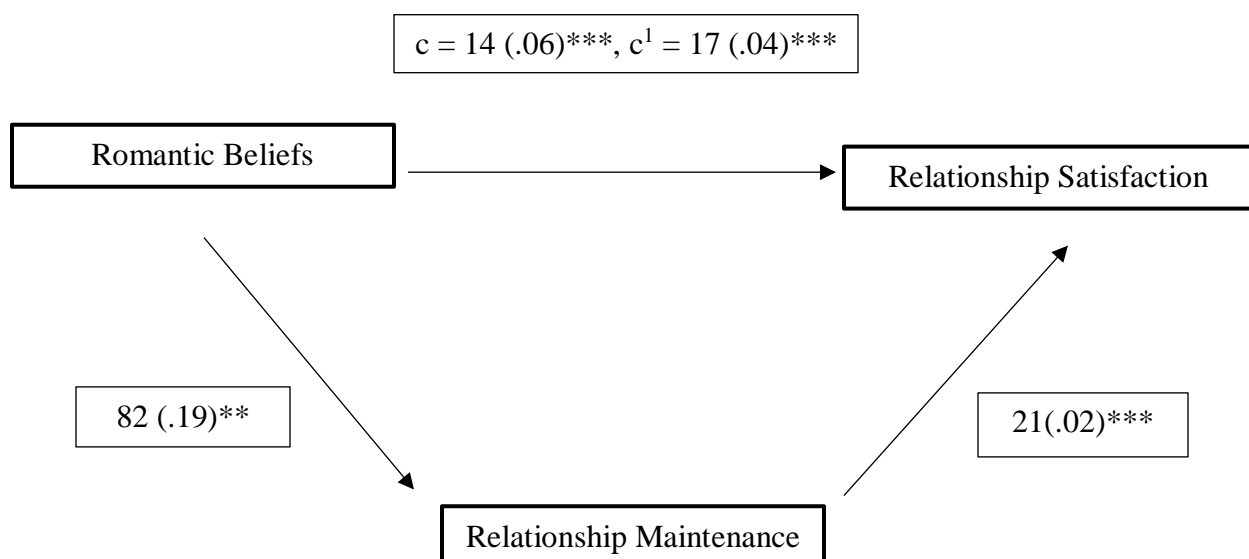
*Figure 2. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors in the Association of Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction in General*



### 3.4.3. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Romantic Beliefs and Relationship Satisfaction in Online Relationships

The current study tested the mediation model with all participants. As a goal of the study, it was also tested how this model works in the relationships that started online. Results have revealed that romantic beliefs were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction in online relationships ( $B = .14$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.013 – .281]). Also, romantic beliefs were significant predictors of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $B = .82$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.442 – 1.208]). Further, relationship maintenance behaviors were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction ( $B = .21$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.162 – .269]). Therefore, the direct effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the association of romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was significant in online relationships ( $B = .14$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.013 – .281]). Further, the indirect effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the relationship between romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was significant in online relationships ( $B = .17$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.09 – .27]) (see figure 3).

*Figure 3. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors in the Association of Romantic Beliefs and Relationship Satisfaction in Online Relationships*

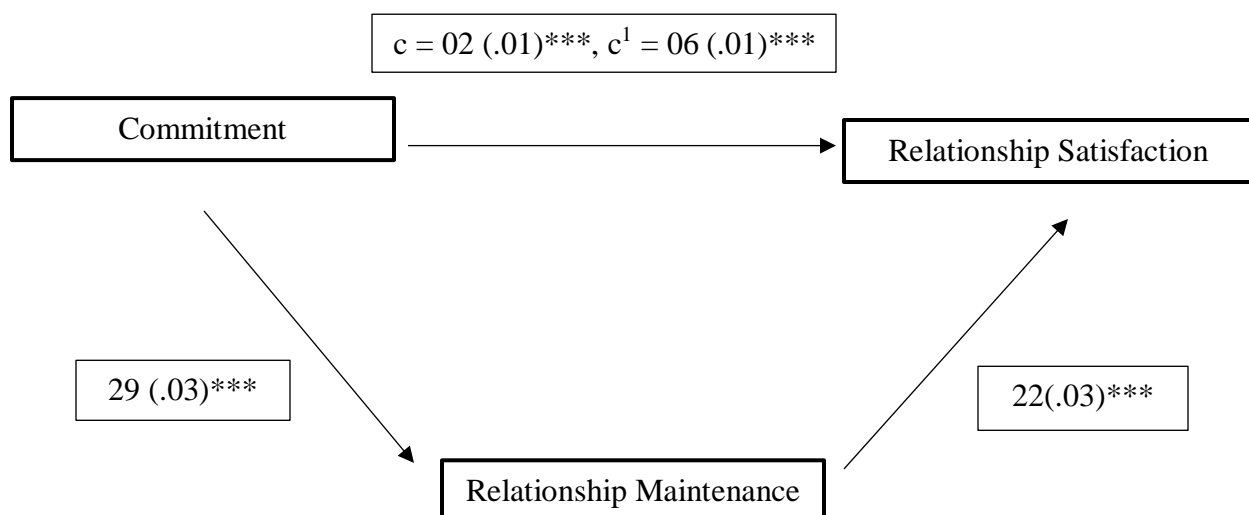




### 3.4.4. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction in Online Relationships

In order to investigate the indirect effect of commitment on online relationships, another analysis was run. According to results, commitment was significant predictor of relationship satisfaction in online relationships ( $B = .02$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[-.010 - .055]$ ). Further, commitment was a significant predictor of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $B = .29$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[.213 - .367]$ ). Also, relationship maintenance behaviors were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction ( $B = .22$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[.162 - .282]$ ). Therefore, the direct effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the association of romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was non-significant in online relationships ( $B = .22$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[-.010 - .055]$ ). However, the indirect effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the relationship between commitment and relationship satisfaction was significant in online relationships ( $B = .06$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[.04 - .08]$ ) (see figure 4).

*Figure 4. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction in Online Relationships*

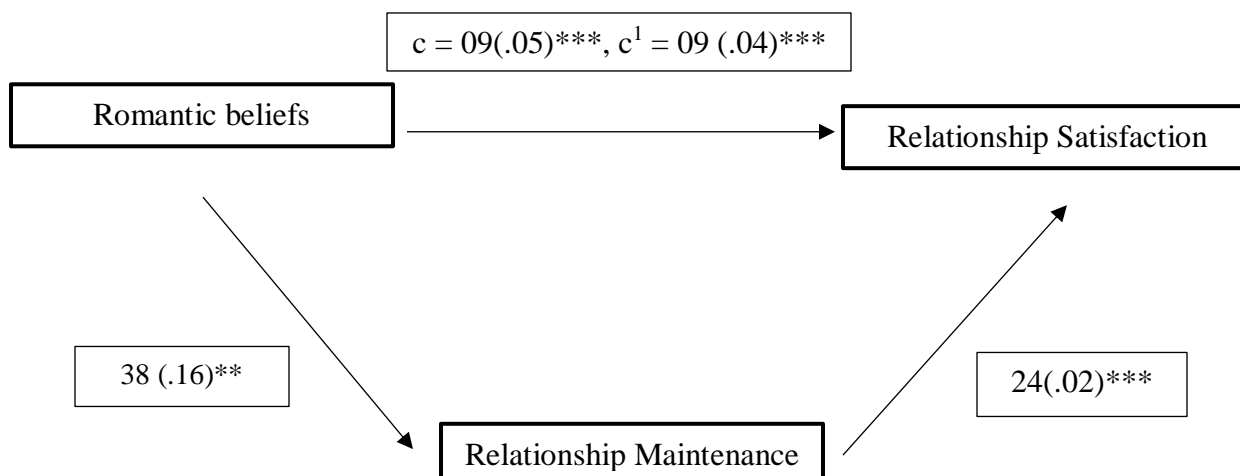


In the light of these results, it is possible to say that the current study rejects the null hypothesis in terms of this mediation. Therefore, H<sub>5</sub> was supported.

### 3.4.5. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Romantic Beliefs and Relationship Satisfaction in Offline Relationships

The current study also investigated these indirect analyses in the scope of offline relationships. Results have revealed that romantic beliefs were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction in offline relationships ( $B = .09$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[-.006 - .203]$ ). Further, romantic beliefs were significant predictors of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $B = .38$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $p = .02$ , 95% CI  $[.059 - .719]$ ). In addition to this, relationship maintenance behaviors were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction ( $B = .24$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[.193 - .291]$ ). Therefore, the direct effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the association of romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was non-significant in offline relationships ( $B = .09$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .06$ , 95% CI  $[-.006 - .203]$ ). However, the indirect effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the relationship between romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was significant in offline relationships ( $B = .09$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[.00 - .193]$ ) (see figure 5).

*Figure 5. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Romantic Beliefs and Relationship Satisfaction in Offline Relationships*

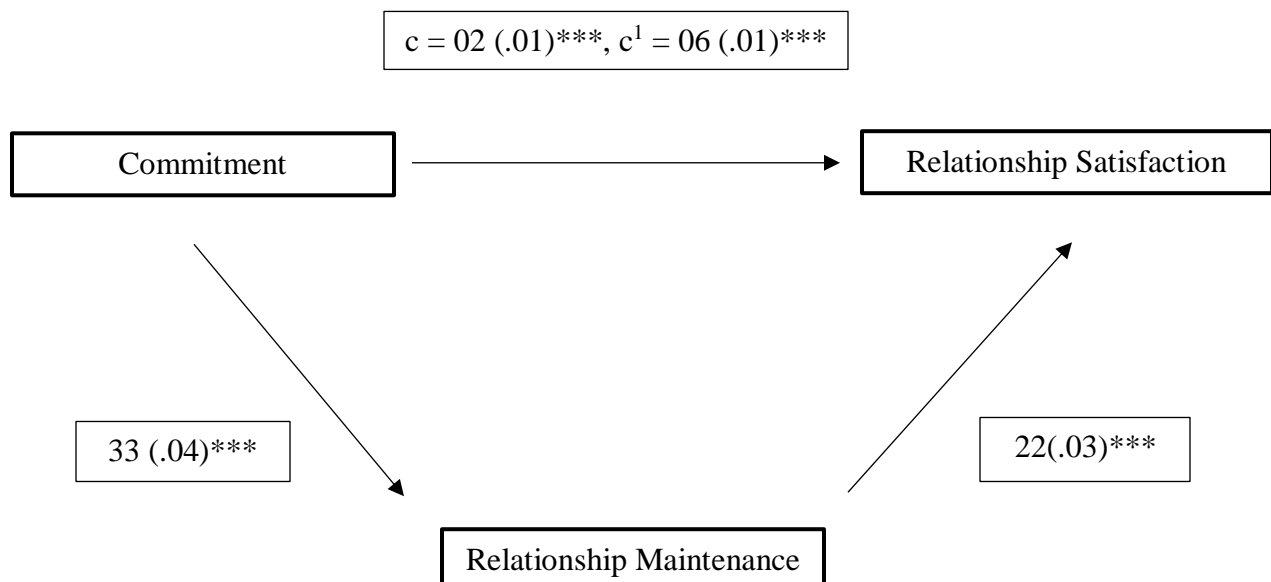


In the light of these results, it is possible to say that the current study rejects the null hypothesis in terms of this mediation. Therefore, H<sub>5</sub> was supported.

### 3.4.6. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction in Offline Relationships

In order to examine the indirect effect of commitment on online relationships, another analysis was run. Results yielded that commitment was significant predictor of relationship satisfaction in offline relationships ( $B = .06$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[-.010 - .055]$ ). Further, commitment was a significant predictor of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $B = .33$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[.213 - .367]$ ). Also, relationship maintenance behaviors were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction ( $B = .22$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[.162 - .282]$ ). Therefore, the direct effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the association of romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was non-significant in offline relationships ( $B = .22$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[.026 - .096]$ ). On the other hand, the indirect effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the relationship between commitment and relationship satisfaction was significant in offline relationships ( $B = .06$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI  $[.03 - .09]$ ) (see figure 6).

*Figure 6. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction in Offline Relationships*



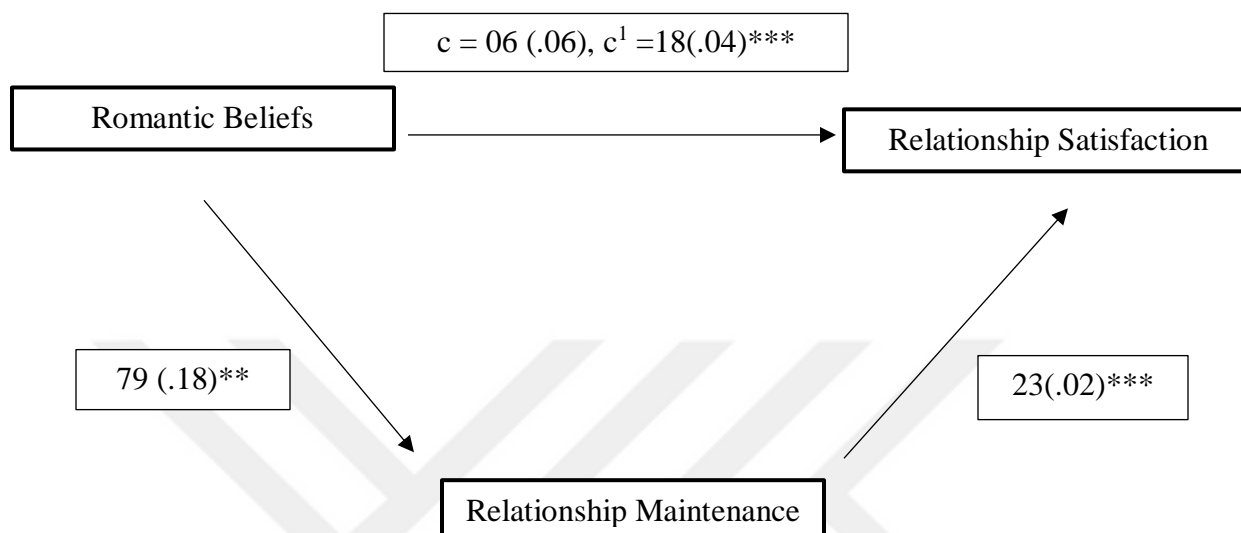
To sum up, the model that was proposed by the current study was tested for relationships in general and also relationships both started online and offline. Proposed model was confirmed for all kinds of relationships. There was an indirect effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the associations of romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction.

In the light of these results, it is possible to say that the current study rejects the null hypothesis in terms of this mediation. Therefore, H<sub>5</sub> was supported.

### **3.4.7 Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Romantic Beliefs and Relationship Satisfaction in Participants Having Online Dating Experience**

The current study tested the mediation model with online relationship. Further, as another goal of the study, it was also tested how this model works on participants who have experienced online dating. Results have revealed that romantic beliefs were not significant predictors of relationship satisfaction in participants who had an online dating experience (B= .06, SE =.06, p =.34, %95 CI [-.066-.191]). On the other hand, romantic beliefs were significant predictors of relationship maintenance behaviors (B= .79, SE =.18, p =.00, %95 CI [0.423 –1.169]). Further, relationship maintenance behaviors were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction (B= .23, SE =.02, p =.00, %95 CI [0.181 –.0.284]). However, the direct effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the association of romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was not significant in participants who have experienced online dating (B= .06, SE =.06, p =.34, %95 CI [-0.06 – 0.191]). Further, the indirect effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the relationship between romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was significant in participants who have experienced online dating before (B= .18, SE =.04, p =.00, %95 CI [.10 –.27]) (see figure 7)

Figure 7. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Romantic Beliefs and Relationship Satisfaction in Participants Who Had an Online Dating Experience

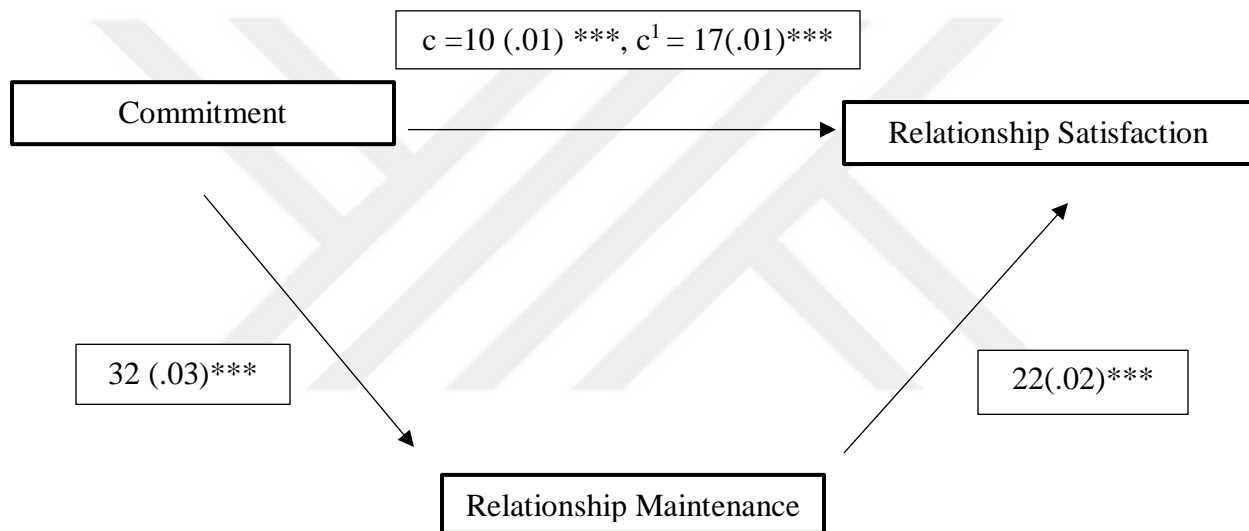


### 3.4.8. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction in Participants Who Had an Online Dating Experience

In order to investigate the indirect effect of commitment on participants who have experienced online dating, analyses were run. Results yielded that commitment was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction in participants who have experienced online dating ( $B = .10$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [0.06 – 0.13]). Also, commitment was a significant predictor of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $B = .32$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.024 – .040]). Also, relationship maintenance behaviors were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction ( $B = .22$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [0.171 – 0.285]). Therefore, the direct effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the association of romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was non-significant in participants who have experienced online dating before ( $B = .02$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [-.00 – .05]). On the other hand, the indirect effect of relationship maintenance

behaviors on the relationship between commitment and relationship satisfaction was significant in participants who have experienced online dating before ( $B = .07$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.05 –.09]) (see figure 8).

*Figure 8. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction in Participants Who Had an Online Dating Experience*



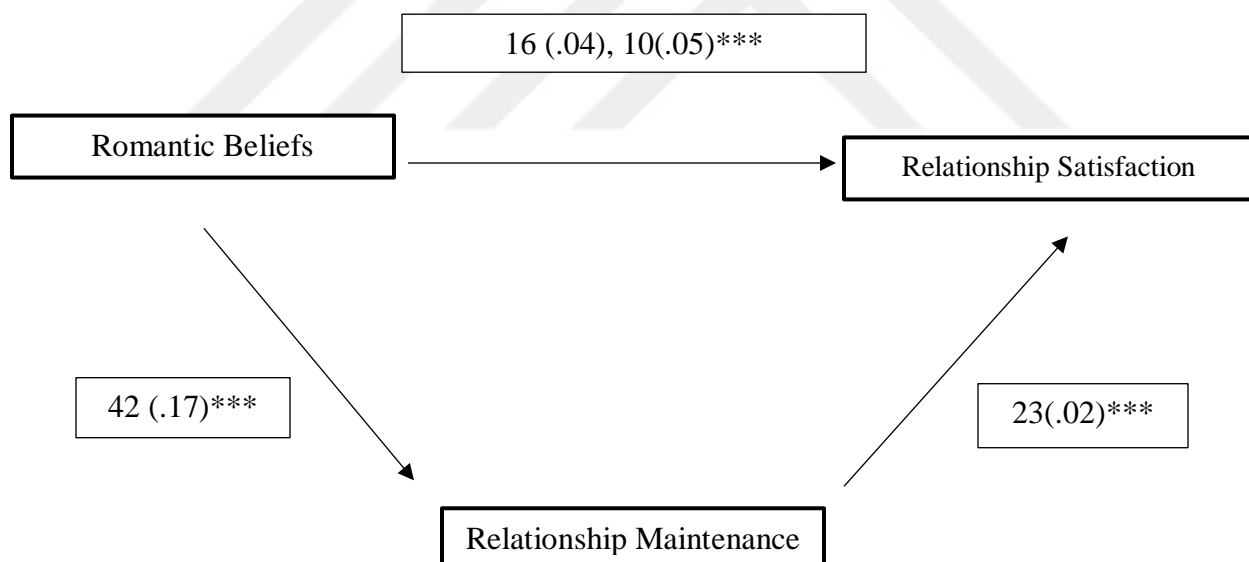
### **3.4.9. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Romantic Beliefs and Relationship Satisfaction in Participants Who Had No Online Dating Experience**

As another goal of the study, it was investigated that how relationship maintenance behaviors mediated the association between relational schemas and relational outcome in the context of participants who had no online dating experience before.

Results have revealed that romantic beliefs were not significant predictors of relationship satisfaction in participants who did not have an online dating experience ( $B = .16$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.05-.27]). On the other hand, romantic beliefs were significant predictors of

relationship maintenance behaviors ( $B = .42$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p = .01$ , 95% CI [.08 –.77]). Further, relationship maintenance behaviors were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction ( $B = .23$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.184 –.285]). Hence, the direct effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the association of romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was significant in participants who have not experienced online dating ( $B = .16$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [-05 –.27]). Further, the indirect effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the relationship between romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was significant in participants who have not experienced online dating before ( $B = .10$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.00 –.20]) (see figure 9).

*Figure 9. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Romantic Beliefs and Relationship Satisfaction in Participants Who Had No Online Dating Experience*

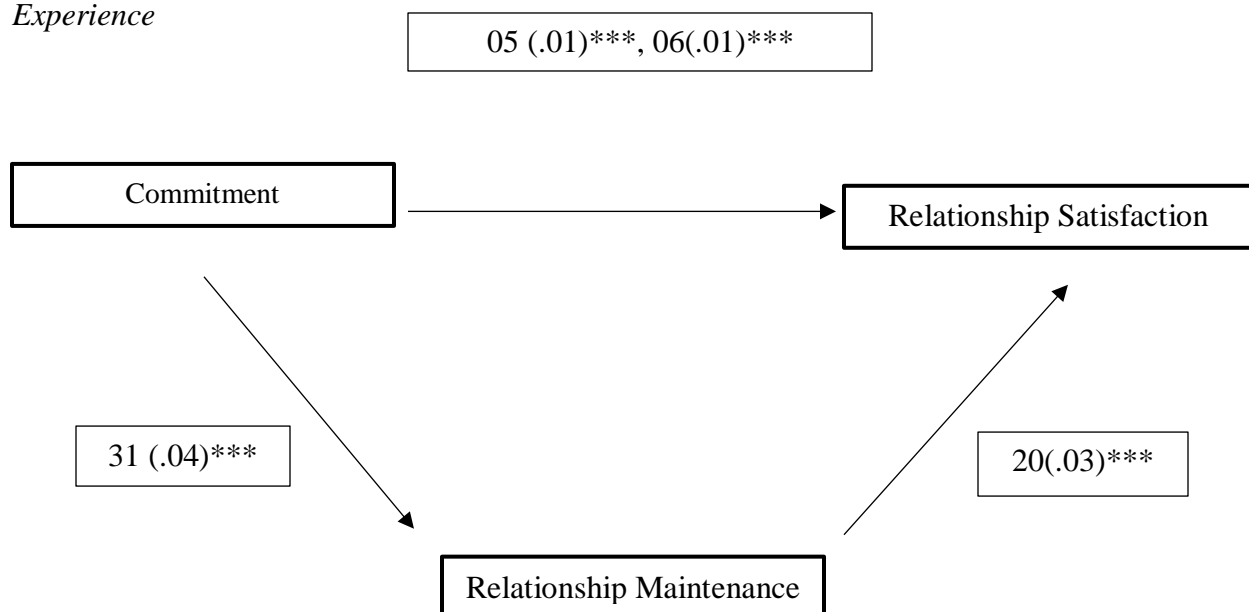


### **3.4.10. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction in Participants Who Had No Online Dating Experience**

In order to examine the indirect effect of commitment on participants who have not experienced online dating, another analysis was conducted. Results have shown that commitment

was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction in participants who have not experienced online dating ( $B = .05$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.01-.08]). Also, commitment was a significant predictor of relationship maintenance behaviors ( $B = .31$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.23 –.40]). Also, relationship maintenance behaviors were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction ( $B = .20$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.14 –.26]). Therefore, the direct effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the association of romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction was significant in participants who have not experienced online dating before ( $B = .05$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.01 –.08]). On the other hand, the indirect effect of relationship maintenance behaviors on the relationship between commitment and relationship satisfaction was significant in participants who have not experienced online dating before ( $B = .06$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .00$ , 95% CI [.03 –.09]) (see figure 10).

*Figure 10. Indirect Effect of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors on the Association of Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction in Participants Who Had No Online Dating Experience*



To sum up, the model that was proposed in the current study was also tested in terms of participants who had an online dating experience and who had no experience. It is possible to say



that the model worked in both groups. There were indirect effects of relationship maintenance behaviors in terms of the association of romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DISCUSSION**

The present study aimed to compare online dating vs. offline dating in terms of romantic beliefs, commitment (relational schemas) and relationship satisfaction (outcome). In addition to this, the current study investigated how relationship maintenance behaviors mediate this relationship between relational schemas (romantic beliefs and commitment) and outcome (relationship satisfaction) in both online vs. offline relationships. The results of the current study were similar with the existing literature. On the other hand, some results were different from previous studies.

Results have shown that romantic beliefs were significantly and positively correlated to commitment, relationship maintenance behaviors and relationship satisfaction. Also, commitment was significantly and positively correlated to romantic beliefs, relationship maintenance behaviors and relationship satisfaction. In addition to this, relationship maintenance behaviors were significantly and positively correlated to romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction. Also, relationship satisfaction was significantly and positively correlated to romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship maintenance behaviors. To sum up, it was found that all major study variables was significantly and positively correlated to each other.

Consistent with the literature, there was a statistically significant relationship between romantic beliefs, commitment, relationship maintenance behavior and relationship satisfaction.

As Sprecher and Metts (1999) stated, a higher level of romantic beliefs leads to higher commitment and relationship satisfaction. In addition to this, Sprecher and Metts (1989) found that romantic beliefs were positively correlated to relationship maintenance behaviors. Therefore, it is possible to say that relational schemas (romantic beliefs and commitment) of the current study were significantly and positively associated to relational outcome (relationship satisfaction). Further, these findings were consistent with the literature.

#### **4.1. Online vs. Offline Relationships: Are They Different?**

The current study was concerned about comparisons between relationships that started online or face-to-face. A little is known in the literature in terms of influences of romantic beliefs on online vs. offline dating engagement. As a pioneer researcher on this topic, Anderson (2005) stated that a higher level of romantic beliefs leads to a lower usage of online dating. Therefore, the current study hypothesized that romantic beliefs differ in the groups. The finding of the current study in terms of romantic beliefs was consistent with Anderson's study. Romantic beliefs' scores were higher in the relationships that started to face-to-face. Anderson (2005) stated that people who prefer offline dating relationships may have more traditional relationship beliefs on how a relationship should start. Hence, online meetings can be ruled out for traditional or even marginal for people who higher in romantic beliefs.

In addition to this, Finkel et al. (2012) proposed that romantic features of a relationship initiation may vanish in online dating context due to lack of the experiential parts of social interaction. Further, online dating context may produce an assessment-oriented mindset in the people. Rather than searching for romanticism and intimacy, people may tend to objectify their potential candidates (Finkel et al., 2012). For these reasons, online dating context may seem

different for people who score higher in terms of romantic beliefs and they may believe that relationships starting via face-to-face interactions are more experiential.

As many studies concern, commitment can be an important issue in online dating context due to lots of alternatives (Finkel et al., 2012). Abbasi (2018) proposed that internet creates opportunities to find romantic or sexual partner alternatives. Besides its greater opportunity, it can be also distracting and may minimize the possibility of willingness to present one's self to his/her partner. In addition to this, however, the current study found that there is no difference in terms of commitment between online vs. offline relationships. In the recent years, increasing number of alternatives may not be caused by online dating context only due to the emergence of different meeting styles such as meet-up groups and speed-dating opportunities. The number of meet-up groups have increased since 2004 and they provide an opportunity to meet a lot of people in face-to-face interaction, particularly the individuals sharing similar interests (Conners, 2005). Therefore, as online dating context fits into initial stages of mate selection, meet-up groups provide almost the same function, too. In addition to this, the number of speed dating opportunities have increased since 1990 based on the idea of brief face-to-face dating and to continue the date if both individuals agree upon the candidates (Finkel & Eastwick, 2008). These two kinds of face-to-face interactions may also promote potential candidates. Moreover, based on the age population of the current study, Bogle (2015) suggested that a lot of alternatives may be served by the university campus. Therefore, separated from online vs. offline contexts, people may be surrounded by lots of alternatives. To sum up, the concern about commitment based on lots of alternatives may not belong to online dating context anymore due to the emergence of several meeting opportunities.

Existing literature is little concerned about how relationship maintenance differ in online relationships. Mainly, it was studied that how technology helps couple to maintain their relationships (Sidelinger, Ayash, Godorhazy & Tibbles, 2008). On the other hand, there was no study to understand how relationship maintenance behaviors are different in terms of online vs. offline dating. The current study found no difference between these two groups. It means that people tend to perform relationship maintenance behaviors as they do in their face-to-face relationships. Therefore, contributing this knowledge to literature is one of the strong aspects of the current study.

As mentioned earlier, the current study did not find any significant group difference in online vs. offline relationships in terms of satisfaction. This finding seems contradictory with the literature. Atkins (2019) found that relationship success is higher in the relationships that started in face-to-face interaction. Besides this study, it was known that marital satisfaction is higher in the couples met online (Cappaccio et al., 2013). Cappaccio et al. (2013) explained these results as the similarity caught in online dating context promotes relationship satisfaction. Besides these studies, a research study conducted with 302 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 found a higher relationship satisfaction in offline relationships compared to the relationships started online. They explained this result in accordance with the expectations from online partners (such as desire for a sexual partner) (Blunt-Vinti, Wheldon, McFarlane, Brogan & Walsh-Buhi, 2016). These studies can be helpful to understand relationship satisfaction in online relationships. However, their results are contradictory and they do not draw a clear picture on what is really going on in terms of online relationships. Therefore, more studies and more explanations are needed.

Overall, the current study found no difference in online vs. offline relationship in terms of relationship experiences between the ages of 18 and 30. For these results, there could be some possible explanations. Firstly, younger adults use online dating with an ever-increasing rate and they may perceive online dating as usual rather than unconventional or unacceptable (Smith, 2016). In addition to this, McMillian and Morrison (2006) highlighted that internet became a very important and inseparable part of young adults' life and it even became a tool in developing relationships and communities. Further, Anderson (2005) proposed that higher internet usage leads to the development of positive attitudes towards online dating. For these reasons, young people may not perceive online dating context different than offline dating context.

Secondly, social information processing theory can be helpful to understand these results. Social information processing theory explains the process of communication in close relationships in the context of computer mediated communication (Walther, 2015). Walther proposed that individuals can establish a good communication in online contexts as good as offline contexts (Walther, 2015). Also, this theory suggested that individuals attempt to establish social relationships like they do in offline contexts if they are motivated to maintain their relationships. Therefore, this theory minimizes the differences between these two context. Further, Walter (2015) stated that individuals use social networks to gather information about other people and they may have some cues about the potential partner even before they meet face-face-to-face. This side of online dating may also be related to the stage theories of mate selection. According to the stage theories of mate selection, development of a relationship takes shape in a sequence such as initial stages, intermediate stages and later stages; and these stages have different components. For instance, Lewis (1972) proposed that similarities and rapport are the two important components of initial stages (as cited in Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003).

Therefore, as Walther (2015) proposed, online contexts may provide a data in order to understand similarities easier and establish a rapport based on them. A research study found that people tend to gather and present information about themselves and it serves the same function as offline dating contexts do (Farrer & Gavin, 2009).

Thirdly, as discussed in many studies, commitment can be an important issue in online dating context due to the great number of alternatives (Finkel et al., 2012). However, in the recent years, increasing number of alternatives may not be caused by online dating context only due to emergence of different meeting styles such as meet-up groups and speed dating opportunities. The number of meet-up have increased since 2004 and they provide an opportunity to meet a lot of people in face-to-face interaction, particularly individuals sharing similar interests (Connors, 2005). Therefore, as online dating context fits into initial stages of mate selection, meet-up groups provide almost the same function, too. In addition to this, the number of speed dating opportunities have increased since 1990 based on the idea of brief face-to-face dating and to continue the date if both individuals agree upon the candidates (Finkel & Eastwick, 2008). These two kinds of face-to-face interactions may also promote potential candidates. The concern about commitment based on lots of alternatives may not belong to online dating context anymore due to the emergence of several meeting opportunities. Further, Bogle (2015) stated that university student may encounter lots of romantic partner alternatives due to enriched social networks in the campus life. Thus, when these perspectives are taken into account, commitment concerns may not be specific for online dating context.

Fourthly, Bogle (2015) stated that relationship experiences of young adults started to change since 1960's to modern days. She emphasized that young adults started to experience relationships as apart from conventional form of these relationships, e.g. as in the hooking-up

culture. In other words, relationships and the way of experiencing them were redefined. Therefore, as current study asked participants about their relationships, people could be in a relationship that they did not commit as in conventional relationships. They may define their experiences as relationship, but it may not be a committed one as a result of the altered perceptions about relationships. Thus, changing perceptions towards relationships may exist regardless the type, i.e.both online and offline. To understand these changing relational attitudes, more studies are needed.

In terms of the schema theory and the investment model, the fact that we have not observed any difference in results can be interesting. Expectedly, romantic beliefs were one of the determinants for people for choosing online dating (Anderson, 2005). Also, as Finkel et al. (2012) proposed, the level of commitment can decrease in online dating context due to the great number of possible candidates. However, when these schemas are tested in online relationships, the differences in romantic beliefs only were significant. Therefore, it can be said that schemas can be more than a current relationship experience. All experiences, such as history of online dating, can be investigated to understand these schemas. In addition to this, according to the investment model, a difference in commitment could be expected based on the great number of alternatives (Rusbult, 1983). However, we could not find such a difference. Therefore, relationship maintenance as an investment style also did not differ in relationships both online vs. offline. As mentioned earlier, the perception of the investment style also can be understood more by looking at all experiences.

#### **4.2. Exposure to Online Dating: Does It Create a Difference?**

The current study also aimed to understand group differences in terms of their online dating history. Their meeting context may not influence their relationship experiences, but online dating

experiences may influence how they perceive romantic relationships. Therefore, independent sample t-tests analyses conducted based on two groups of participants who have experienced online dating before and who have not experienced. According to results, there was significant differences among the groups in terms of romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction. Participants who have not experienced online dating before reported a higher level of romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, it was seen that participants who have experienced online dating before reported less romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship satisfaction. Based on two different analyses, it was thought that meeting context may not influence the *current* relationship experiences. Rather than, it is about people's perceptions on relationships in *general*.

As existing literature proposed, individuals hold general beliefs about how a relationship should be experienced and these beliefs are called as relational schemas (Baldwin, 1992). Based on this knowledge, the current study considered relational schemas as an important component of romantic relationship experiences. Further, based on the suggestions of Anderson (2005) and Finkel et al. (2012), it was thought that romantic beliefs and commitment perceptions could be different in online daters vs. non-daters.

Heino, Ellison and Gibbs (2010) conceptualized online dating behaviors as *relationshopping* due to the ongoing efforts to find a perfect partner. This behavior may produce a negative perception in commitment and relationship satisfaction. Therefore, relational schemas and relational outcomes in both contexts may differ. On the other hand, there are differences in people who approach online dating vs. who do not. As mentioned earlier, it may be rooted in the fact that people engaging in online dating may be different from traditional daters. Based on the findings of the current study, these differences may not be specific for current relationship.



The differences in the results which indicate that schemas do not belong to current relationship has raised questions about the changeability of relational schemas. The current study did not measure whether they are changeable or not. However, the current study speculated the changeability of them. It was proposed that relational schemas can be slow to change (Waldinger, Diguier, Guastella, Lefebvre, Allen, Luborsky & Hauser, 2002). However, Waldinger et al. (2002) suggested that relational schemas may change over life cycle stages such as adolescence to young adulthood. People may have more positive schemas both for themselves and others after some life stages and as a result of some experiences. Also, they may broaden their relationship repertoire. On the other hand, Baldwin and Dandeneau (2005) suggested that people may have general relational schemas about relationship patterns, but these schemas may be specific for a relationship, too. Hence, relational schemas may evolve over time depending on the nature of a relationship. The current study contributed to literature by speculating the changes in relational schemas and their influence on the approach to the alternative ways of finding a romantic partner such as in an online dating context. Also, the current study found that people's romantic beliefs and commitment scored higher in their current relationships rather than former relationships. These results have shown that relational schemas can be specific for a relationship and they can change. In addition to this, Swami and Allum (2011) proposed that perceptions about former partners and perceptions on relationships may be different from current ones. Individuals may tend to underestimate their former partner and the relational perceptions specific to the previous relationships. However, this underestimation of the former partner can serve to commit and maintain the current relationship (Swami & Allum, 2011). Moreover, another research study found that people tend to assess their current relationship as more satisfying (Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999). Moreover, Blunt-Vinti et al. (2016) proposed that people may have a

negative assessment for their past relationships in terms of relationship satisfaction. Therefore, the comparison between current vs. former relationships may create a difference in terms of relational schemas.

### **4.3. Gender Differences: How Gender Create a Difference for Online vs. Offline Relationships?**

In the literature, there are findings that male individuals use online dating apps more (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Further, males are more motivated to use online dating apps in terms of one night stands (Eren & Gurmen, 2019). However, the current study found no gender differences in terms of online vs. offline relationship groups.

Redlick (2019) proposed that traditional gender roles influence relationship experiences. In addition to this, Redlick (2019) highlighted that there are different results in the literature in terms of the impact of traditional gender roles on romantic relationships. Some studies highlighted that traditional gender roles promote relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, a research study proposed that individuals who do not follow traditional gender roles have higher relationship satisfaction (Redlick, 2019). Besides these known impacts and the contradictory results, a research study found that traditional gender roles are less likely to be followed in the new generations comparing to past generations (Galinsky, Aumann & Bond, 2011). Yet, there is no study to conceptualize this decreased effect of traditional gender roles on relationships. However, it can be interpreted that this decrease in the attitudes to follow traditional gender roles may influence research results. In addition to this, online dating context as an untraditional way of initiating a romantic relationship may include people who did not follow traditional gender roles. Hence, the current study may not find any difference in terms of how different genders experience relationships differently.

#### **4.4. Understanding Relationship Maintenance from The Investment Model**

As mentioned earlier, the current study aimed to understand maintenance of a relationship based on the investment model. According to the investment model, commitment is a key factor for maintaining a relationship. In addition, investment styles are also important to sustain a relationship. When people feel committed and they invest for their relationship, relationships are more likely to be maintained (Rusbult & Buunk, 1983). In the current study, relationship maintenance behaviors were considered as per the investment style and it was thought that relationship maintenance behaviors can be indirect effector in the association of relational schemas (romantic beliefs, commitment) and relationship outcome (relationship satisfaction). Also, it was important to test these models in terms of both online vs. offline context. Eventually, the current study found that these models were applicable for both dating context.

In the existing literature, there was no study to test this mediation, especially within both contexts. However, there are associations for romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship maintenance, and their influence to relationship satisfaction. Hence, drawing these mediation models can be expected to be based on the suggestions of the literature. The current study contributed to literature by testing it statistically.

#### **4.5. What Predicts Relationship Satisfaction in Online vs. Offline Relationships?**

In the literature, associations and correlations of relationship satisfaction was discussed. For instance, sexual satisfaction (Sprecher, Cate, Harvey & Wenzel, 2004), attachment (Butzer & Campbel, 2008), emotion regulation (Vater & Schröder-Abe, 2015) and emotional satisfaction (Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day & Gangamma, 2013). On the other hand, a research study conducted with 114 online daters (computer mediated communication only) found that intimacy, trust and

communication satisfaction were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006).

In the existing literature, there was no study to investigate predictors of relationship satisfaction for relationships that were initiated both as online vs. offline . On the other hand, it was known that romantic beliefs and commitment were significantly and positively associated to relationship satisfaction (Sprecher & Metts, 1998). In addition, Dainton (2000) proposed that relationship maintenance behaviors were predictors of relationship satisfaction. However, romantic beliefs did not predict relationship satisfaction in general and also both for online vs. offline groups.

On the other hand, relationship maintenance behaviors predict relationship satisfaction in terms of online relationships. In terms of offline relationships, commitment and relationship maintenance behaviors were predictors. In addition to this, according to the participants who had an online dating experience, commitment and relationship maintenance were significant predictors. Further, romantic beliefs, commitment and relationship maintenance were significant predictors for participants who did not have an online dating experience. From these results, it can be said that there are different predictors of relationship satisfaction within different contexts.

#### **4.6. Turkey as a Social Context: Understanding Online vs. Offline Dating Contextually**

Turkey can be considered as a traditional country (Ertit, 2015). It is a non-Western country, but also it has modernized aspects that are similar to Western countries (Rankin, Ergin & Gökşen, 2013). Also, it was proposed that a secularized and modern culture is arising in Turkey by the acceleration of globalization. Moreover, cultural diversity is increasing in Turkey and it is not possible to mention about prototypical cultural features. Furthermore, rapid social

and cultural transformations are going on and this leads to overall changes in life styles(Rankin, Ergin & Gökşen, 2013). Yet, there are no studies that have investigated how these cultural changes lead to a change in relationship experiences; and neither the current study did that. However, it can be said that these transformations may bring about other changes in terms of relationship experiences.

Besides cultural changes, internet usage and the attitudes towards it are also changing. According to Turkish Statistical Institute (2016), internet usage is highly common in Turkey. It was found that 614% of individuals use internet and 82.4% of internet users experienced social media in order to create profiles, sharing photos or contents and instant messages. Besides, Koseoglu (2012) stated that one of the important reasons to use social media in Turkey is the developing social networks. Therefore, this tendency may lead to emerge relationships that started online. A research study showed that 3% of people met their spouse online (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2011). In the recent years, this percentage may have increased. However, there is no current data in order to understand the changing panorama. In addition to this, there is no data to investigate what is going on in terms of dating relationship experiences.

One of the important factors contributing to the growing number of online dating is high internet usage (Kang& Hoffman, 2011). Konda Research and Counselling Center (2018) proposed that 100% of young adults have a smartphone and 93% of young adults are using social media. Despite this high percentage, Eren and Gurmen (2019) stated that views and attitudes towards online dating can be considered as negative in Turkey. They conducted a research study with 246 participants between the ages of 18 and 25. In the study, 80% of participants agreed that people use online dating in order to find one-night stand relationships. In addition to this, participants gave chance of 26% only for online marriages. Therefore, people held perceptions

that long term relationships cannot be found online. On the other hand, while participants thought that the possibility for a long-term relationship is low, relationship satisfaction has the second highest score after the meetings that occurred on their own. Therefore, online dating concern is mainly about commitment in Turkey rather than relationship satisfaction. Overall, it can be understood that there is a concern about online dating in Turkey and high internet usage did not contribute to develop positive attitudes towards online dating.

Besides these views and attitudes, the current study contributed that there are no negative relationship experiences of online daters. The current study demonstrated even though existing negative views and attitudes, it can be different what people experience in their current relationships. There can be several reasons to understand this difference between perception and relationships as per the context of Turkey. In addition to this, changing tendencies in Turkish culture can be helpful to understand the results of the current study.

Turkey was considered as traditional and conservative country in the past. However, it is discussed that Turkey has started to change and more secular views started to become common (Ertit, 2015). Konda Research and Counselling Center (2018) proposed that living styles of young adults started to change in the past 10 years with a tendency from conservative to modern. Besides, according to their data, the marriage percentage of young adults between the ages of 15 and 29 has decreased to 22% from 39%. Yet, Eksi, Özgen and Kardas (2017) found that openness to experience rather than conservatism was one important factor in choosing a partner in the sample of Turkey. Further, Bogle (2015) stated that liberalism of sexual experiences leads to alter relationships in terms of engaging in flirting rather than a committed relationship. In the context of Turkey, a research study conducted with 1,065 university student showed that 33.8% of the participants had a sexual experience before (Golbasi & Kelleci, 2011). For this

reason, it can be stated that there is a change in Turkey in terms of relationship experience in general regardless of the online vs. offline context. Therefore, the present study may fail to find a difference between those groups.

#### **4.7. Limitations and Significance**

There were some limitations of the study. Firstly, in the literature, it was stated that male participants visit online dating apps more than females (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Therefore, even reaching enough participants, the gap between genders can be considered as a limitation in the current study. In order to suggest more concrete gender difference results, data shall be collected by targeting male participants. Another limitation can be the inclusion of former relationship assessments due to the assessment of the relationships prospectively. However, the current study applied analyses for comparison of current vs. former relationships and made another contribution on that.

Despite these limitations, the current study has strengths. For instance, there were studies in the literature to compare online vs. offline relationships in terms of these relationship-related variables. Yet, there were no studies in Turkey to understand the relationship experiences of online daters. Also, even though there are barriers to collect data from online daters, sample of the study was statistically powerful. Furthermore, the study was first to explain different kind of relationships in terms of the schema theory and the investment model. Hence, considering these aspects, the present study contributed to literature.

#### **4.8. Clinical Implications**

As online dating is relatively a recent phenomenon, there is a need for empirical studies to investigate online dating further, especially in relation to relationship-related variables. In addition to this, attitudes and beliefs that individuals hold may change their perceptions in

approaching a relationship. For this reason, the current study may be helpful to understand how beliefs of individuals differ from each other for couples who met online and offline. In addition to this, there were no studies in Turkey aimed at understanding online dating. This study aims to contribute the literature by also interpreting the results based on Turkey's social context.

For clinicians, it can be important to understand nature of online dating within its similarities and differences from traditional dating (Ali & Bloom, 2019). Ali and Bloom (2019) also proposed that online dating web-sites may create an opportunity to heal some concerns such as depression, loneliness and self-esteem. Therefore, they highlighted that online dating can create positive experiences for clients (Ali & Bloom, 2019). As the current study found mainly no difference between online vs. offline dating, clinicians can be aware of this opportunity to create positive narratives. On the other hand, clients preferring mainly online dating may have had negative experiences with offline dating in the past (Ali & Bloom, 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand their negative experiences in the past and creating a safe environment for clients to process them. Also, there might be some risks in online dating such as deception and misinterpretations (Ali & Bloom, 2019). Therefore, clinicians may be aware of these risks, too.

As online dating gets more and more common, couples who met online may come to therapy more. Existing clinical literature is mainly focused on the clinical needs of couples who met in offline context. Therefore, there is limited guide to help clinicians working with couples who met in an online context. In addition to this, Paul (2014) proposed that there can be a social stigma about online dating and it may influence relationships. In therapy room, it can be beneficial for clinicians to investigate these social stigmas if there is any; and creating a safe environment would be important. Also, it can be comforting for clients to hear the current



research study results in order to accept their relationships might not be very different or “marginalized” than traditional ones.

Finkel and his colleagues(2012) stated that online dating may influence how individuals approach romantic relationships. Therefore, as different from couples who met offline, online daters may have different perceptions on relationships and these perceptions may influence their relationship. In addition to this, these potential differences in perceptions can lead to different expectations in terms of relationship satisfaction. The results of the current study can be helpful to clinicians when working for relationship satisfaction in the relationships within an online dating context. As clinicians, understanding relational attitude differences is crucial both in assessment and intervention phases. Gathering information about relationship perception can contribute a lot to the assessment phase and this comprehension assessment can be a guide for congruent interventions. Therefore, findings obtained from the current study can be helpful for clinicians as a reference guide.

#### **4.9. Future Directions**

The current study considered relational schemas as important in terms of relationship outcomes. As mentioned earlier, these schemas occur depending on our childhood experiences, peer relationships and family-of-origin. However, the current study did not have opportunity to investigate the roots of these schemas in familial and also peer contexts. As a future direction, this can be included. Also, it can be investigated that how these familial contexts and childhood experiences make differences in terms of online vs. offline relationships. Also, it would be an important contribution to understand how family of origin affect for approaching online dating engagement.

As the nature of master thesis study, there was a limited time. For this reason, individual data was collected. As a future direction, dyadic data can be gathered in order to understand the experiences of couples met online within a closer look. Furthermore, a longitudinal study can be done in order to understand how relational schemas are changing over time for both online vs. offline groups. Moreover, a qualitative study with in-depth interviews can be conducted in order to understand online daters experiences profoundly.

Lastly, as mentioned before, the current study was first to examine the relationship experiences of online daters. It was important to compare these relationship experiences with traditional daters. On the other hand, it would be an important contribution to compare these types of relationships in cross-cultural contexts. In addition to this, in order to understand the different types of online daters, different types of online dating apps comparisons (such as muslim dating apps) can be done for future studies.

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