




## Attachment, Growth Fear and Conflict Resolution in Close Relationships

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### ABSTRACT

Effectively addressing and resolving conflicts in close relationships plays an important role in maintaining healthy relationships. Therefore, in this study, it is aimed to examine the predictive role of attachment styles (anxiety and avoidance) and the growth fear in close relationships on constructive and destructive conflict resolution strategies in close relationships. A total of 492 individuals, 299 women (60.8%), and 193 men (39.2%) between the ages of 18 and 38 who were romantically involved and married, participated in the study. The outcomes of the multiple regression analysis show that anxiety, avoidance, and growth fear have a predictive role on the effective-destructive 'exit' sub-dimension, which includes abandonment behaviors in conflict resolution. The passive-destructive 'neglect' sub-dimension, which includes conflict-ignoring behaviors, is predicted by anxiety and growth fear. The avoidance and the growth fear negatively predicted the active-constructive 'voice' sub-dimension, which includes the behaviors in which the factors causing conflict are discussed through dialogue. Finally, the passive-constructive 'loyalty' sub-dimension, which includes behaviors such as waiting in hopes that the factors causing conflict will disappear, is predicted positively by the anxiety and negatively by the avoidance. Gender also has a predictive effect on the loyalty sub-dimension. The results obtained from the research were discussed according to the relevant literature, and recommendations were made to mental health experts and researchers. It is hoped that the findings of this study will guide the treatment of conflict resolution processes among partners in relationship counseling processes.

Keywords:

Attachment, anxiety, avoidance, growth fear, conflict resolution, close relationships.

### 1. Introduction

Factors such as feelings experienced between spouses in close relationships, empathy, and communication about information exchange are essential for relationship harmony and integrity (Mandal, 2008). However, some misunderstandings, incompatibilities and conflicts in the relationship are also natural communication elements (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). The conflict between couples is a social interaction in which partners have different goals, but these need not be conscious or articulated (Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2016). Conflicts in close relationships can occur in any interaction area, such as temperament differences, economic activities, decision-making processes, leisure activities, religious issues, social activities, and approach to sexuality. The consequences of such conflicts impact not only spouses but also society in general (Igbo, Grace, & Christiana, 2015).

Whether conflict weakens or strengthens the relationship depends on the way the partners manage the conflict. Conflicts, when effectively managed, can be productive and foster understanding, intimacy, and respect for one another. It can reveal issues, offer collective solutions, and boost intimacy and relationship pleasure. Conflicts can be disastrous, though resulting in resentment, animosity, separation, or divorce when they are handled in a hostile or competitive manner, when the couples do not compromise and do not strive to understand and adhere to some of their spouse's wishes (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Igbo

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et al., 2015). To maintain a healthy romantic connection and to reduce or eliminate compelling problems, suitable conflict resolution skills should be learned and applied. Resolving conflicts is the decisive element in good partnerships (Ben-Naim, Einav, Laslo-Roth, & Margalit, 2017). What is meant by conflict resolution is finding a solution to a problem that all parties are mutually satisfied with, and this is how a conflict is resolved (Burton, 1990).

According to the EVLN model developed by Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983), the response to the conflict in a close relationship has two dimensions: constructiveness-destructiveness and activity-passivity. According to these dimensions, four different conflict resolution strategies are defined: (a) Voice (a constructive and active strategy) is defined as resolving conflict by discussing the problem while preserving a tight bond that is satisfying to both spouses. Partners that use voice as a strategy of conflict resolution keep open lines of communication and place a high priority on mutual candor and the examination of all options for defusing conflict in their relationships. b) Loyalty (defined as passively but optimistically waiting for things to get better and being a passive and constructive strategy) is about waiting for the problem to resolve itself and the lack of action to resolve the conflict. Partners want to wait for the issue to be fixed because they believe that once it is, they will forget about it, and everything will go back to normal. (c) Exit, which means an escalation of the conflict (an active and destructive strategy defined by threatening to leave or end the relationship), is manifested in negative behavior toward the partner. Blaming, criticizing, or using verbal violence are some examples of this type of behavior. Additionally, a strong negative influence is present, and unrestrained negative feelings are displayed. d) Neglect (a passive and destructive strategy described as passively allowing the relationship to deteriorate) manifests in a lack of dedication to the romantic partnership. They do this by neglecting and spending less time with their relationships. This partner is frigid in a close relationship and frequently refuses to participate in a conversation or discussion.

Understanding conflict resolution behaviors in close relationships is based on attachment theory. The attachment theory states that early connections with main caregivers result in internal working models of oneself and other people. Different attachment styles stemming from two underpinning factors (abandonment anxiety and avoidance of close relationships) are governed by these internal working models, which also influence cognition, emotions, and behavior (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Securely attached individuals can maintain a balance of intimacy and autonomy. However, insecurely attached individuals either display a great desire for closeness and fear of rejection by attachment figures (highly anxious attachment) or tend to be emotionally disconnected and self-sufficient (highly avoidant attachment). Individuals with anxious attachment also exhibit high levels of distress and hypersensitive proximity-seeking behaviors as emotion regulation strategies. Individuals with a high avoidance attachment style are characterized by using strategies that will neutralize their negative emotions (Maas, Laan, & Vingerhoets, 2011).

Some features of relationship dynamics, such as conflict resolution strategies, are explained well by attachment theory. Insecure attachment and other underlying processes for avoidant and anxious attachment styles relate to the adoption of destructive conflict resolution strategies in the adult sample (Fowler & Dillow, 2011; Mikulincer et al., 2012). Those who score high in anxious attachment report that they experience conflict based on their desire to provide support, care, and attention. It is also seen that they use a withdrawal strategy due to the fear of rejection by their partners (Bonache, Gonzalez-Mendez, & Krahé, 2017). People who have a strongly avoidant attachment style have a propensity for sloppily communicating, avoiding, and withdrawing from conflicts (Bonache, Gonzalez-Mendez, & Krahé, 2019; Fowler et al., 2011). However, when arguments increase, individuals with an avoidant attachment style report that they participate in conflict to distance themselves from their partners (Mikulincer et al., 2012). Individuals who tend to escalate (and therefore overly anxious) during conflicts tend to tell and show their partners how much they have hurt them. They also evoke feelings of guilt (Feeney & Fitzgerald, 2019). Moreover, attachment avoidance is associated with a lower frequency of conflict, at the expense of not analyzing the causes of conflict, not being open to negotiation, and not being open in a conversation.

Previous research results on adult attachment styles (Bonache et al., 2019; Collins & Read, 1994; Feeney et al., 2019; Feeney & Karantzas, 2017; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Mikulincer, 1995) refer to the relationships between attachment styles and more integrated and flexible schemas in self, world, and marital relationships. Accordingly, anxious-ambivalent persons are prone to emotional extremes. They try to cope with their

insecurities by seeking warm relationships. They also harbor a great deal of resentment, which undermines the need for a warm connection and causes emotional attachments to dissolve (Bowlby, 1988; Feeney et al., 2019; Shaver & Hazan, 1994). Anxious-ambivalent individuals seem to be moving toward attachment figures in a seemingly endless cycle of love and anger. Therefore, they are more likely to react quickly by displaying highly defensive exit responses in conflicts (Gaines et al., 1997; Johnson, 2005; Crowley, 2010). In addition, as mentioned above, it is seen that they use a withdrawal strategy (Crowley, 2010; Gaines et al., 1997; Johnson, 2005) because of their fear of rejection by their partners (Bonache et al., 2017). In contrast, avoidant individuals try to maintain emotional distance, actively reject existing problems, and display passive and indirect responses such as ignoring their partner or displaying passive-aggressive behaviors (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). Therefore, avoidant individuals should be particularly likely to trigger passive defensive neglect responses (Bonache et al., 2019; Feeney et al., 2017; Fowler et al., 2011; Gaines et al., 1997). However, Dougall (1998) mentions that the preoccupied attachment style (like the anxious-ambivalent attachment) is related to the loyalty dimension, which is defined as waiting passively for things to improve in women. Dougall (1998) also mentions that a dismissive attachment style (like avoidant attachment) is associated with the exit dimension associated with threatening in men. On the other hand, Mandal, and Lip (2022) argue that men use the loyalty strategy more than women, and this is because men passively wait for things to improve because they are cooler and more rational in difficult situations. In conclusion, inconsistencies in research results regarding the link between attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies seem to point to ongoing uncertainty in this relationship.

Growth fear, as a new concept in the literature, is used to describe individuals who have similar features to the "Peter Pan Syndrome" defined by Kiley (1983) and whose age coincides with the young adulthood period but who do not have the developmental characteristics of this period and who have difficulties in becoming adults (Ates & Ozden-Yildirim, 2018). It is suggested that individuals with growth fear could not experience early secure attachment and therefore developed negative internal working models or maladaptive schemas (Ozden-Yildirim & Ates, 2020). Therefore, it can be said that insecure attachment styles (anxious-avoidant attachment) that lead to negative self-perceptions and perceptions of other people and the world may be related to growth fear. In addition, it is thought that growth fear, a concept with sub-dimensions related to problems in close relationships, may be related to conflict and resolution in close relationships.

This study was aimed at investigating the predictive role of insecure attachment styles and growth fear on constructive and destructive conflict resolution strategies in close relationships. Accordingly, in this study, it was assumed that persons with high levels of avoidance, anxiety, and growth fear might prefer a higher level of destructive conflict resolution strategies (neglect and exit). Moreover, it was assumed that the high use of the 'voice' sub-dimension, one of the constructive conflict resolution strategies, might be related to low levels of anxiety, avoidance, and growing fear. In addition, it was assumed that preference for the 'loyalty' sub-dimension, seen as a relatively low-level constructive conflict resolution strategy, can be clarified by the high level of anxiety and the low level of avoidance and growth fear. Although the link between attachment in close relationships and conflict resolution skills has been studied before, it is believed to close a gap in the literature. because the studies on growth fear, which is a new concept in the field of mental health, are insufficient in the literature and the other variables discussed in this research have not been studied before. It is hoped that the findings of this study will guide the treatment of conflict resolution processes among partners in relationship counseling processes.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Model**

Relational design was used in this study. Studies that attempt to quantify the degree of variation between two or more variables are known as correlational research designs (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

### **2.2. Research Sample**

A total of 492 individuals, 299 women (60.8%), and 193 men (39.2%) between the ages of 18 and 38, who were romantically involved and married, participated in the study. Of the participants, 411 (83.5%) were single and 81 (16.5%) were married. The convenience sampling method was used to determine the research group. The

convenience sampling method involves the researcher working on the most accessible sample (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

### 2.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedure

*Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R)*. ECR is a 36-item, 7-point Likert-type scale developed by Fraley and Shaver (2000) to measure adult attachment styles, with two sub-dimensions measuring avoidant attachment and anxious attachment. The Turkish version of the scale was carried out by Selcuk, Gunaydin, Sumer, and Uysal (2005), and Cronbach's alpha values of the scale were 0.90 for the avoidance, and .86 for the anxiety dimension. In this study, it was calculated as 0.86 for the avoidance, and 0.86 for the anxiety dimension. According to the CFA results, it is seen that the fit indices are at a sufficient level (GFI = .86; NNFI = .86; CFI = .89; RMR = .087).

*The Responses to Dissatisfaction in Close Relationships Accommodation Instrument (EVLN-Accommodation Instrument)*. EVLN-Accommodation Instrument was developed by Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, and Lipkus (1991) to measure the responses to problems in close relationships. It is an 8-point Likert-type scale comprising 16 items and 4 sub-dimensions (exit, neglect, voice, and loyalty). The Turkish version of the scale was carried out by Taluy (2018), and Cronbach's alpha values for the sub-dimensions of the individual's response range from 0.53 to 0.80. In this study, the values ranged from 0.60 to 0.80. To test the construct validity of the scale, factor analysis with the Varimax axis rotation method was applied to the scores obtained from the scales. Consistent with the original form, it was determined that the items were grouped under four factors. During the factor analysis, it was observed that some items were among different factors, unlike the original scale. For this reason, the way in which the items are included in the factors in the Turkish adaptation form is different from the original scale. In addition, the convergent validity of the scale was also examined, and it was found to be at an acceptable level. Although this scale consists of two parts—the individual's reactions and the partner's reactions—only the individual's reactions form was used in this study.

*The Growth Fear Scale*. The scale was developed by Ates et al. (2018) to measure the fears of individuals between the ages of 18-35 about growing up in their normal development process and becoming adults. It is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 14 items and four sub-dimensions. In the original study, Cronbach alpha value for the total scale 0.75. (Ates et al., 2018). In this study, was 0.83. As a result of CFA, fit index values were found as RMSEA=0.073, GFI=0.93, CFI=0.93, IFI=0.93, SRMR= 0.056.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

Mahalanobis distance values ( $\chi^2$ ) were calculated to determine whether the data had outliers that damaged the "linearity" and "normality" assumptions, and no contradictory values were found. Kurtosis and skewness values were examined to see if the data had a normal distribution. It was seen that these values were within the acceptable range of kurtosis and skewness values for the  $\pm 1$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). These values are presented in Table 1. The predictive significance of independent variables (anxiety, avoidance, growth fear, gender, and marital status) was investigated using multiple regression analysis (enter method) on the dependent variables of exit, neglect, voice, and loyalty, respectively.

### 2.5. Ethical

The study was approved by the researcher's university ethics committee (REF: E-70561447-050.01.04-45988). Research data were collected by the researcher through web-based scales. In the study, it was ensured that the participants were volunteers and that their identities were confidential. The data collection process took approximately 30 minutes.

### 3. Findings

First, the connections between the study's variables were investigated. The findings are presented in Table 1.

As seen in Table 1, anxiety is positively related to avoidance ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ), growth fear ( $r = .43, p < .01$ ), exit ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ), neglect ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ), and marital status ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ). However, there is a negative significant relationship between anxiety and voice ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ). Avoidance is positively related to growth fear ( $r = .46, p < .01$ ), exit ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ), neglect ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ), and marital status ( $r = .13, p < .01$ ). However, there are negative significant relationships between avoidance and voice ( $r = -.41, p < .01$ ), and loyalty ( $r = -.18, p < .01$ ). There are positive and significant relationships between growth fear and exit ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ), neglect ( $r = .43, p$

<.01), and marital status ( $r = .27, p < .01$ ). However, there is a negative relationship between growth fear and voice ( $r = -.33, p < .01$ ). In addition, there is a positive correlation between loyalty and gender ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ).

**Table 1.** Correlations among the variables and descriptive statistics

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Anxiety	-								
2. Avoidance	.38**	-							
3. Growth fear	.43**	.46**	-						
4. Exit	.42**	.34**	.42**	-					
5. Neglect	.42**	.29**	.43**	.60**	-				
6. Voice	-.20**	-.41**	-.33**	-.44**	-.43**	-			
7. Loyalty	.07	-.18**	-.07	-.03	-.11*	.41**	-		
8. Gender (M)	.01	-.03	.01	.04	-.04	-.01	.25**	-	
9. Marital status (S)	.19**	.13**	.27**	.07	.06	-.04	-.03	.06	-
Mean	67.46	51.71	34.89	5.97	13.75	22.59	19.95	-	-
SD	18.96	17.37	9.66	5.56	6.40	6.77	5.88	-	-
Skewness	.35	.13	.07	.87	.11	-.61	.22	-	-
Kurtosis	-.40	-.61	-.61	.02	-.33	-.15	-.24	-	-

Gender (M) = Being a male, Marital status (S) = Being single, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

When the correlations and the variance inflation factor (VIF) were examined, it was seen that there was no multicollinearity problem. Therefore, it was decided that the data set was suitable for applying the regression analysis. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the predictive role of anxiety and avoidance, growth fear, gender, and marital status on the dependent variables of exit, neglect, voice, and loyalty, respectively.

**Table 2.** Multiple regression analysis results for predicting exit

Variable	Unstandardized		Bootstrapping BCa 95% CI		Standardized		$R^2$	$F_{(5-486)}$
	B	SE	Lower limit	Upper limit	$\beta$	$t$		
(Constant)	-6.13	1.01	-8.11	-4.15	-	-6.08		
Anxiety	.08	.01	.05	.10	.27***	6.06		
Avoidance	.04	.01	.01	.07	.12**	2.73	.26	35.28***
Growth fear	.16	.03	.10	.21	.27***	5.77		
Gender (M)	.52	.44	-.35	1.39	.05	1.17		
Marital status (S)	-1.09	.61	-2.29	.11	-.07	-1.79		

Gender (M) = Being a male, Marital status (S) = Being single, \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

It is seen that the model ( $F_{(5-486)} = 35.28, p < .001$ ) regarding the prediction of the exit sub-dimension by the independent variables is significant. In addition, anxiety ( $\beta = .27, p < .001$ ), avoidance ( $\beta = .12, p < .01$ ), and growth fear ( $\beta = .27, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted the exit sub-dimension. However, gender ( $\beta = .05, p > .05$ ) and marital status ( $\beta = -.07, p > .05$ ) did not significantly predict the sub-dimension. All variables explain 26% of the variance in the exit sub-dimension ( $R^2 = .26$ ).

**Table 3.** Multiple regression analysis results for predicting neglect

Variable	Unstandardized		Bootstrapping BCa 95% CI		Standardized		$R^2$	$F_{(5-486)}$
	B	SE	Lower limit	Upper limit	$\beta$	$t$		
(Constant)	.52	1.16	-1.77	2.80	-	.44		
Anxiety	.10	.01	.07	.13	.29***	6.48		
Avoidance	.02	.02	-.01	.05	.05	1.20	.26	34.77***
Growth fear	.20	.03	.14	.26	.30***	6.39		
Gender (M)	-.52	.51	-1.53	.48	-.04	-1.02		
Marital status (S)	-1.34	.70	-2.72	.04	-.08	-1.91		

Gender (M) = Being a male, Marital status (S) = Being single, \*\*\* $p < .001$

It is seen that the model ( $F_{(5-486)} = 34.77, p < .001$ ) regarding the prediction of the neglect sub-dimension by the independent variables is significant. In addition, anxiety ( $\beta = .29, p < .001$ ) and growth fear ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ) significantly predict the neglect sub-dimension. However, avoidance ( $\beta = .05, p > .05$ ), gender ( $\beta = -.04, p > .05$ ),

and marital status ( $\beta = -.08, p > .05$ ) did not significantly predict the sub-dimension. All variables explain 26% of the variance in the neglect sub-dimension ( $R^2 = .26$ ).

**Table 4.** Multiple regression analysis results for predicting voice

Variable	Unstandardized		Bootstrapping BCa 95% CI		Standardized		$R^2$	$F_{(5-486)}$
	B	SE	Lower limit	Upper limit	$\beta$	$t$		
(Constant)	33.22	1.29	30.69	35.74	-	25.82		
Anxiety	-.00	.02	-.03	.03	-.00	-.06		
Avoidance	-.13	.02	-.16	-.09	-.32***	-6.88	.19	23.35***
Growth fear	-.14	.04	-.20	-.07	-.19***	-3.90		
Gender (M)	-.31	.57	-1.43	.80	-.02	-.56		
Marital status (S)	.97	.78	-.55	2.50	.05	1.25		

Gender (M) = Being a male, Marital status (S) = Being single, \*\*\* $p < .001$

It is seen that the model ( $F_{(5-486)} = 23.35, p < .001$ ) regarding the prediction of the voice sub-dimension by the independent variables is significant. In addition, avoidance ( $\beta = -.32, p < .001$ ) and growth fear ( $\beta = -.19, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted the voice sub-dimension. However, anxiety ( $\beta = -.00, p > .05$ ), gender ( $\beta = -.02, p > .05$ ), and marital status ( $\beta = .05, p > .05$ ) did not significantly predict the sub-dimension. All variables explain 19% of the variance in the voice sub-dimension ( $R^2 = .19$ ).

**Table 5.** Multiple regression analysis results for predicting loyalty

Variable	Unstandardized		Bootstrapping BCa 95% CI		Standardized		$R^2$	$F_{(5-486)}$
	B	SE	Lower limit	Upper limit	$\beta$	$t$		
(Constant)	20.31	1.17	18.02	22.61	-	17.40		
Anxiety	.06	.02	.03	.09	.18***	3.78		
Avoidance	-.07	.02	-.11	-.04	-.22***	-4.46	.11	13.31***
Growth fear	-.03	.03	-.09	.03	-.05	-.91		
Gender (M)	2.94	.51	1.93	3.95	.24***	5.72		
Marital status (S)	-.62	.71	-2.00	.77	-.04	-.88		

Gender (M) = Being a male, Marital status (S) = Being single, \*\*\* $p < .001$

It is seen that the model ( $F_{(5-486)} = 13.31, p < .001$ ) regarding the prediction of the loyalty sub-dimension by the independent variables is significant. In addition, anxiety ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ), avoidance ( $\beta = -.22, p < .001$ ) and gender ( $\beta = .24, p < .001$ ) significantly predict the loyalty sub-dimension. However, growth fear ( $\beta = -.05, p > .05$ ) and marital status ( $\beta = -.04, p > .05$ ) did not significantly predict the sub-dimension. All variables explain 11% of the variance in the loyalty sub-dimension ( $R^2 = .11$ ).

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

Current research findings have shown that anxiety has a positive relationship with exit and neglect but a negative relationship with voice. Also, the relationship between anxiety and loyalty is not significant. However, multiple regression analysis findings revealed that anxiety positively predicted exit, neglect, and loyalty, but its effect on voice was insignificant. Studies reveal that persons with an anxious attachment style tend to respond to conflicts by exhibiting emotional extremes and focusing excessively on their worries (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). They also tend to put pressure on their spouses, dominate conflict resolution processes (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000), and act more hostilely (Simpson, Rholes, & Philips, 1996). In addition, these individuals also make statements that will arouse feelings of guilt in their partners (Feeney et al., 2019). Therefore, they are more likely to react quickly to conflicts by displaying defensive exit responses. In addition, previous research findings support this result (Gaines et al., 1997; Johnson, 2005; Crowley, 2010). Therefore, it is unsurprising that persons with an anxious attachment style, who are likely to experience ambivalent emotions between love and anger, both seeking intimacy and fearing abandonment, prefer to use the active and destructive exit response. Although it is thought that persons with an anxious attachment style will not tend to use neglect, which is seen as a withdrawal strategy, because they are emotionally reactive and demanding (Gaines et al., 1997; Pietromonaco, et al., 2004), research shows that persons with high scores in the anxiety dimension may also prefer neglect (Crowley, 2010; Gaines et al., 1997; Johnson, 2005). This may be related to their fear of having their lovers reject them due to their sensitivity to rejection (Bonache et al., 2017). In addition, although there is thought to be a negative link between constructive conflict resolution strategies

and insecure attachment styles (Crowley, 2010; Gaines et al., 1997; Watson-Currie, 2004), it was concluded in this study that anxiety predicted the loyalty sub-dimension positively. Consistent with this finding, Dougall (1998) suggests that persons with a preoccupied attachment style—which is comparable to the anxious attachment—tend to wait quietly for things to get better while still being devoted to their relationships. This finding may possibly have an explanation based on research (MacDougall, 2003; Simpson et al., 1996) that shows anxious people to be very clingy and demanding, as well as frequently feeling hurt or guilty both during and after conflict. Since the voice sub-dimension is a constructive and active strategy, previous research findings generally emphasize that anxious attachment predicts this dimension negatively (Crowley, 2010; Gaines et al., 1997). However, the predictive role of anxiety on the voice sub-dimension was found to be insignificant in this study. Consistent with this finding, Johnson (2005) concluded that the use of the voice during the conflict was not predicted by individuals with extreme anxiety and suggested that individuals using the avoidance style were more disadvantaged in closing the dialogue path during the conflict.

While avoidance is positively related to neglect and exit, it is negatively related to loyalty and voice. However, according to the regression analysis results, while avoidance has a positive predictor on exit and a negative predictor on voice and loyalty, a surprising finding is that its predictive role on neglect is not significant. Regarding this last finding, studies suggest that individuals with an avoidance style will display neglect behaviors that reject intimacy passively and indirectly as a withdrawal strategy to maintain emotional distance (Bonache et al., 2019; Crowley, 2010; Feeney et al., 2017; Fowler et al., 2011; Gaines et al., 1997; Johnson, 2005; Watson-Currie, 2004). Although the regression result for the prediction of neglect in the current study is insignificant, it can be said that there is a positive link between avoidance and neglect and that avoidance has an indirect effect on neglect due to the expected variance of anxiety. In addition, the finding that avoidance is a positive predictor of exit is consistent with earlier research findings (Crowley, 2010; Gaines et al., 1997; Johnson, 2005; Watson-Currie, 2004). This can be interpreted as individuals with an avoidance style using the active and destructive exit response to distance themselves from their partners when conflicts increase (Mikulincer et al., 2012). In agreement with earlier research findings (Crowley, 2010; Gaines et al., 1997; Watson-Currie, 2004), it was concluded that avoidance negatively predicts constructive conflict resolution strategies (voice and loyalty). This result is not surprising for avoidant individuals who reject seeking intimacy in relationships (Gaines et al., 1997).

Positive and significant relationships exist between growth fear, anxiety, avoidance, exit, and neglect. However, there is a negative link between growth, fear, and voice. Its relationship with loyalty is not significant. In addition, growth fear predicts exit and neglect positively and voice negatively, but its predictiveness of loyalty is not significant. Studies on growth fear are limited in the literature. However, studies on the relationship between maladaptive schemas developed due to early insecure attachment experiences and growth fear (Hayran, 2020; Ozden-Yildirim et al., 2020) are consistent with the positive relationship between anxiety and avoidance. Ates et al. (2018) defined growth fear as a concept to express individuals avoiding taking on the responsibilities required by adulthood and experiencing social and emotional dilemmas and having various difficulties in close relationships, as well as in most areas of life. It is also suggested that it has similar characteristics to the 'Peter Pan Syndrome' concept put forward by Kiley (1983). Although not discussed separately in the current study, each of the sub-dimensions of growth fear may cause various difficulties and conflicts to be experienced in close relationships. In line with the findings of this study, these individuals may prefer to use destructive conflict resolution strategies rather than constructive conflict resolution strategies. Hayran (2020) concluded that the growing fear is predicted by the disconnection schema, where persons are afraid of being abandoned and abused in their relationships and develop beliefs that their relatives do not love or want them (Arntz & Jacob, 2019). Since these individuals feel they are defective, unloved, and worthless, they may have negative effects in a romantic relationship and have difficulty maintaining these relationships (Hayran, 2020). In addition, Ozden-Yildirim et al. (2020) concluded that the sub-dimensions of growth fear are generally related to maladaptive schemas such as emotional deprivation, vulnerability to harm, social isolation or mistrust, and dependence. As we mentioned above, these schemas are also among the characteristics of individuals with an avoidant or anxious attachment style. Therefore, like people with an avoidant attachment style who try to maintain emotional distance and refuse to seek intimacy (Gaines et al., 1997), individuals with growth fear may use exit and neglect. In addition, individuals with growth fear may also use these destructive strategies, similar to individuals with an anxious attachment style who are frail and show dependency patterns in the face of threats (Gaines et al., 1997).

Because of these characteristics, it is evident that these individuals will not prefer to talk about problems with their partner (i.e., voice).

In the current study, gender only has a predictive role in loyalty. Accordingly, men use the loyalty strategy more during conflict. This finding may be surprising. Because they are generally expected to be more anxious, it can be assumed that women tend to passively wait for things to improve. Indeed, Dougall (1998) confirms the assumption. However, consistent with the current study finding, Mandal et al. (2022) concluded that men are more likely to employ the loyalty strategy than women. This is explained by the fact that women tend to argue more and overreact emotionally in challenging situations, while men are more calm and more rational. Therefore, men's passive waiting for things to improve can be attributed to these tendencies. Finally, the predictive role of marital status in the current study was found to be insignificant for all sub-dimensions. However, it is also seen that there is a positive link between avoidance, anxiety, and growth fear, and being single. Considering the common variances with these variables, it can be said that being single is indirectly related to destructive reactions in conflicting relationships. In connection with this result, Mandal et al. (2022) suggest that marriage generally gives partners greater stability, resilience, security, and certainty than informal relationships.

## 5. Limitations and Recommendations

This research has some limitations. First, the concepts covered in the study are limited to the self-report scales used in this study, and bias errors may occur since the study data were collected through self-report scales. Second, because a cross-sectional design is used, it can be challenging to predict cause-and-effect relationships. In future research, experimental and longitudinal studies can be carried out to address the relationship between variables. With mixed-methods research, both quantitative and qualitative data can be obtained. In addition, only the individual response form of the conflict resolution response scale was used in this study. In future research, more effective results can be obtained using the partner response form. In addition, studies can be carried out for both partners. In addition, since this study was studied on male and female samples, a new concept in the literature, 'growth fear', occurred as a variable. 'Peter Pan' syndrome, which expands this concept in future studies and is the subject of many studies abroad, can only be used as a variable for the male sample.

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