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A study of psychological violence in intimate partner relationships among university students: a mixed-methods research

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The aim of this study is to examine university students' attitudes and experiences regarding psychological violence in intimate partner relationships in the context of attachment styles, gender roles, and parasocial interactions. In this study, a mixed-methods research design, specifically the explanatory sequential design, was employed. In the quantitative phase, the attitudes of 508 university student participants towards dating violence were examined with structural equation modeling in terms of attachment styles, parasocial interaction levels and gender roles perceptions. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 university students who had experienced psychological violence in their romantic relationships, and the interviews were analyzed with the interpretive phenomenological analysis method. According to the conducted structural equation model, anxious attachment and avoidant attachment predict attitudes towards female psychological dating violence, while anxious attachment predicts attitudes towards male psychological dating violence. In the qualitative phase, the analysis revealed four main themes concerning perceptions of attachment styles: self, attitudes in relationships, evaluation tendencies in relationships, and relationship maintenance styles. Regarding perceptions of gender roles, two main themes emerged: gender equality and relationship roles. Media interactions yielded three main themes: interaction engagement, social learning effects, and the role of media within relationships. Lastly, perceptions of romantic relationship experiences were organized into four main themes: relationship encounters, relationship expectations, relationship issues, and dating violence. The findings suggest that people's attachment styles, gender roles and interactions with different media channels are effective in their attitudes and experiences towards psychological violence in dating. The results emphasize that personal and social patterns are important in attitudes towards dating violence and that further studies on this subject should be increased.

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Introduction

Individuals experience violence within interpersonal relationships, including romantic relationships. As a form of romantic involvement, dating is a relationship type that can either terminate with one or both parties or continue into more official relationships such as engagement, marriage, or cohabitation, involving social interactions (Straus 2004a). The concept of violence occurring between partners within dating relationships was first highlighted through studies conducted with university students by Makepeace (1981, 1983). Sugarman and Hotaling (1989) defined dating violence as “all words, gestures, and actions involving the use of painful or injurious physical or psychological force or threat in a dating relationship.” Dating violence encompasses all behaviors that endanger the physical, psychological, or sexual integrity of a partner or harm its development (Lavoie et al. 2000). The World Health Organization (WHO) included dating violence within the category of intimate partner violence in its report of 2013. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2024) states that dating violence can be committed in person, online, and through technological means. Accordingly, dating violence is a type of violence that includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological aggression, and stalking behaviors (CDC 2016). When examining the causes and risk factors of violence toward partners, various factors such as gender (Price et al. 1999), age (Makepeace 1981, 1983; Straus 2004a), attachment styles (Doumas et al. 2008; Follingstad et al. 2002; Gormley 2005; Sharpe and Taylor 1999; Sommer et al. 2017; Velotti et al. 2022), gender perceptions (Keçeci and Ekşi 2020; Herrero et al. 2017; Reyes et al. 2016; Santana et al. 2006), and media (Bailey et al. 2024; Brooks-Russell et al. 2015; Friedlander et al. 2013) have been found to play significant roles. Examining dating behaviors among youth, it becomes evident that attachment styles, media usage, and attitudes toward gender roles influence the direction of relationships (Weisskirch and Delevi 2012).

In all human relationships, including romantic relationships, mutual feeling, thought and behavior structures are established between individuals. Bowlby (1969), who put forward the attachment theory, states that attachment is the emotional bond that the child established with the mother from the early period and later with others. Attachment begins in the early stages of life and persists into later years, manifesting in romantic relationships as well (Hazan and Shaver 1987; Mikulincer and Shaver 2005). The attachment styles of couples can serve as significant predictors of negative experiences and violence within romantic relationships (McClellan and Killeen 2000; McDermott and Lopez 2013; Richter et al. 2022). It has been revealed that unhealthy patterns in the attachment styles of university students are an important variable in dating violence (Castillo-González et al. 2024). One of the areas in which individuals interact is media programs and characters (Rubin and Mchug 1987). Studies have shown that individuals' attachment styles have an impact on the level of interaction they have with media figures (Cole and Leets 1999; Greenwood et al. 2008; Theran et al. 2010) Figs. 1 and 2.

Individuals' engagement with TV broadcasts is inherently one-sided in nature, lacking mutual communication, yet viewers often exhibit cognitive, emotional, or behavioral reactions to the programs they watch. In this regard, parasocial interaction denotes a one-way, viewer-initiated relationship with the television character being followed, and it is under the viewer's control (Horton et al. 1956). This relationship aligns with the nature of an individual's attachment styles (Paravati et al. 2022; Rain and Mar 2021; Wang et al. 2008), and the intensity of parasocial interaction, along with the character's nature, also affects beliefs and expectations within romantic relationships (Erickson and Dal Cin

2018; Jin and Kim 2015; Tukachinsky and Dorros 2018). The content of the programs followed significantly influences the perspectives of adolescents and young adults on romantic relationships, often serving as role models for behavior in dating relationships (Connolly et al. 2010; Erickson et al. 2018). For this reason, how men and women are positioned in society and in the media becomes important for the structure of all relationships.

For every individual living within a society, the culture imposes various responsibilities, roles, and assumptions, expecting them to conform accordingly. Gender roles encompass all attitudes, behaviors, and actions that society expects individuals, based on their biological sex, to perform or not to perform within the social context (West and Zimmerman 1987). Within romantic relationships such as marriage and dating, individuals and societies hold expectations for gender-related roles that partners should reciprocally fulfill (Cameron and Curry 2020; Scott 2006; Vangelisti and Daly 1997). The passive roles ascribed to women, the societal glorification of violence, and the prevalence of traditional gender roles are significant risk factors for violence within relationships, associated with gender, (Jewkes 2002; Moore and Stuart 2005). Beliefs and expectations regarding the gender roles of men and women can lead to a situation that blames the victim and justifies the perpetrator in case of violence caused by an intimate partner (Scarduzio et al. 2017). And this situation may appear as a factor in the normalization of partner violence.

During an individual's adolescent years, a developmental task is to establish closeness, which encompasses forming romantic relationships (Erikson 1968). University students, during this period, can encounter partner violence, ranging from unilateral (victim/perpetrator) to bilateral forms, in their established dating relationships, as well as experiencing no violence at all (Flake et al. 2013; Orcutt et al. 2005). Dating violence among university students is common in all countries and brings with it many risky situations in terms of its consequences (Pengpid and Peltzer 2020). Research indicates that young individuals are more frequently exposed to psychological violence in dating relationships (Iconis 2013; Uğur and Kılıç 2021). Attitudes towards violence and acceptability of violence also bring about the feasibility and disclosure of violence (Karatay et al. 2017; Özdemir 2019; Spencer et al. 2021). Attitudes towards intimate partner violence are influenced by attachment styles (Finkel and Slotter 2006), perceptions of gender roles (Kerman and Ozturk 2022), and the influence of media (Wang 2018), which emerge as individual or holistic risk factors (Wang 2016). There are limited studies on variables and effects associated with dating violence among university students (Duval et al. 2020). However, when we look at it, we see that dating violence experiences are high among this group (Korkmaz et al. 2020). Therefore, it is important to determine the dating violence experienced by university students and the effects of the factors that cause it. With this aim, this mixed-method study intends to address the following questions:

1. Do attachment styles, parasocial interaction levels, and the formation of gender roles' mean scores among university students predict their levels of acceptance of dating violence?
2. What are university students' views and experiences regarding attachment styles, gender roles, and media interactions within their intimate partner relationships?
3. How do university students experience their romantic relationships?

Method

When we look at the studies conducted on intimate partner violence experienced in romantic relationships of university

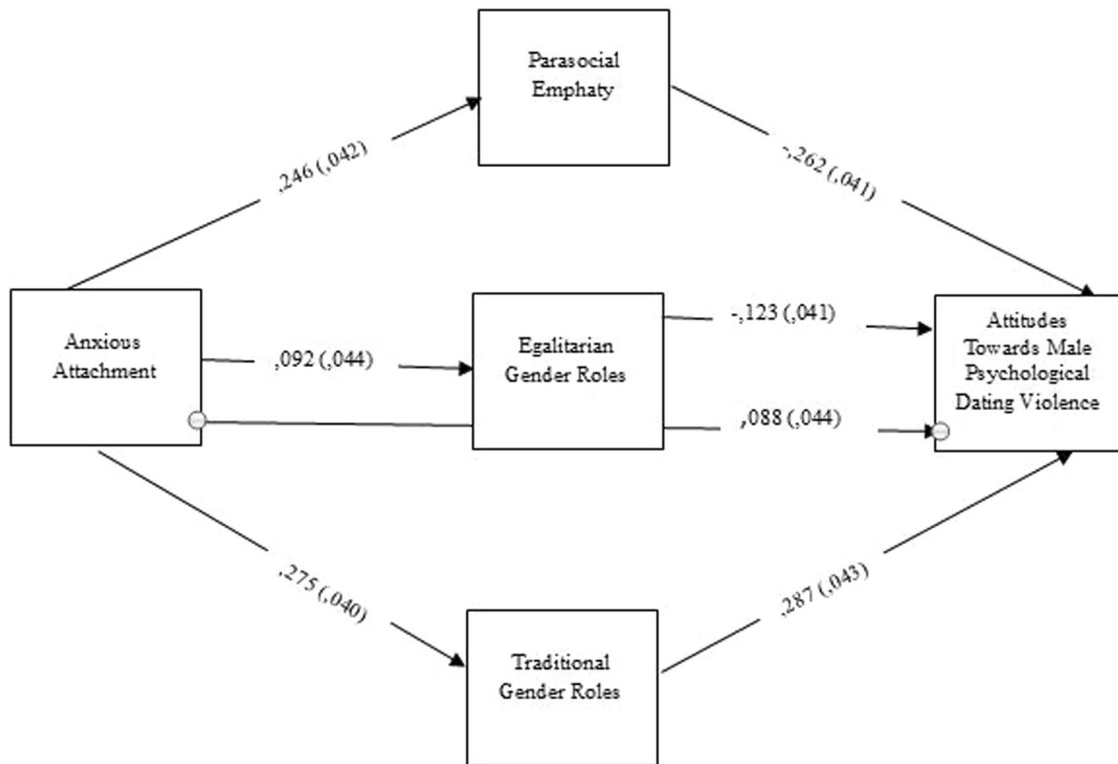


Fig. 1 Path analysis diagram for attitudes towards male psychological violence.

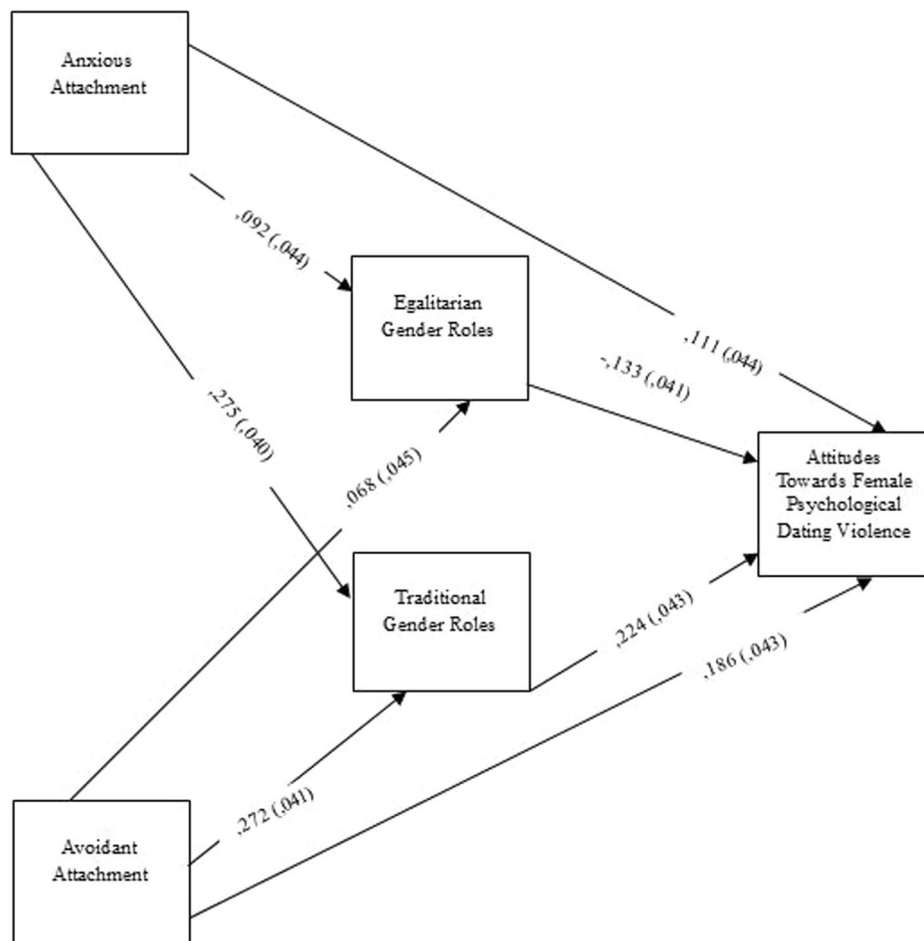


Fig. 2 Path analysis diagram for attitudes towards female psychological violence.

students, only quantitative studies (Straus 2004a; Straus 2004b; Price et al. 1999) or it seems that qualitative studies are aimed only at the experiences of women or men (Ismail et al. 2007; Walker et al. 2020). This study was conducted using a mixed method in order to provide a better understanding and examination of the research topic and to develop a holistic perspective on the problem posed. Mixed method research is a research method that provides both quantitative and qualitative data collection, analysis and reaching results. By using both quantitative and qualitative research methods with the mixed method, the researcher benefits from the powerful and advantageous aspects of both methods (Creswell 2009).

At the quantitative stage of the study, a model was created regarding the effect of attachment styles, gender perceptions and parasocial interaction levels on university students' attitudes towards psychological violence applied in flirting, and the created model was tested by subjecting it to statistical analyses. Analyses have been carried out with the structural equation model regarding the variables under study, and in this way it is aimed to decipher and determine the indirect and direct relationships between them simultaneously by making a theoretical modeling of the concepts involved in the research. In the qualitative phase of the research, university students' attachment styles, media interactions, gender perceptions and experiences in romantic relationships were examined, and the titles were framed according to their romantic relationships in accordance with the dependent variable investigated in the quantitative phase. It was thought that by including male and female participants in both quantitative and qualitative stages of the study, it would be possible to see similar and different results between the sexes in relation to the research topic at both stages.

At the first stage of the study, university students' acceptance levels against psychological violence applied in flirting were examined, while interviews were conducted with university students who experienced psychological violence in their current or previous relationships at the qualitative stage. While attitudes directly or indirectly affect the formation of behaviors (Cooper and Croyle 1984), behaviors that occur in the social environment also appear as an element that allows the attitude to be observed and exhibited from the outside (Gawronski 2007; Kağıtçıbaşı 2010). Thus, it is aimed to obtain the effects of the concepts investigated at the quantitative stage on attitudes with statistical data. In the qualitative stage, it is aimed to examine in depth the mental evaluations of the participants whose attitudes are shown in the behavioral dimension their opinions and evaluations regarding these behaviors and the variables found to have significant and meaningless effects in the quantitative stage.

Sample. Quantitative and qualitative data of the research collected during the 2021–2022 education period from the university students studying between 1st and 6th grade in Turkey. In selecting the quantitative research group, a non-probability sampling method, specifically convenience sampling, was employed. This method is utilized to facilitate factors such as time, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency (Büyükoztürk et al. 2015). In the quantitative phase; the data collection tools prepared were delivered to the participants online, and the volunteer participants were asked to fill them in. A total of 508 university students, 124 males (24.4%), 384 women (75.6%), participated. Participants are between the ages of 18–25 and the average age is 20.69. It was observed that 185 (36.4%) of the participants were currently in an ongoing relationship and 323 (63.6%) were not currently in a relationship. When the relationship status of the participants in the last year was examined, it was seen that 307 (60.4%) were in a relationship and 201 (39.6%) were not in a relationship.

In interpretative phenomenological analysis, purposive sampling, which is more restrictive in reaching individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, is frequently employed (Langridge 2007). Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific criteria to gain insight into an appropriate group that relates to the research topic (Creswell 2017). In the qualitative phase, in accordance with the criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, students who were still attending formal university education. Bu doğrultuda between the ages of 18–25, and who declared that they were exposed to psychological violence in their previous and/or current relationships were reached. For this purpose, student groups of different universities were reached online; interviews were held with 17 participants who volunteered to participate in the study and met the determined criteria. During the interviews, 9 female and 8 male students were reached, and the interviews with 2 male and 1 female student were conducted as a pilot study, the interview questions were finalized, and the interviews with a total of 14 students were analyzed. All participants are formal university students and their ages vary between 19–24. The longest settlements are 10 metropolitan cities and 4 cities; 12 of them stated their income levels as low, 1 as medium and 1 as high. No diagnosis or treatment was mentioned as a medical diagnosis except for one, and 6 of them stated that they received a psychological and psychiatric diagnosis or treatment.

Data collection tools. Attachment Styles Scale in Interpersonal Relationships: The scale created by Kandemir and İlhan (2017) consists of 3 factors and 21 items. Of the scale consisting of 21 items, 7 items are related to secure attachment style, 7 items are related to anxious attachment style, and the last 7 items are related to avoidant attachment style. The scale is a 7-point Likert type and is scored as 1 = Not at all suitable for me, 4 = Moderately suitable for me, 7 = Always suitable for me. As a result of exploratory factor analysis, the eigenvalues regarding how many factors the scale could have were examined and it was seen that there were three structures, that is, factors, above 1. The eigenvalue of the first factor obtained is 3.179, the eigenvalue of the second factor is 2.768 and the eigenvalue of the third factor is 1.997. When the factor loadings were examined, it was seen that the first factor explained 17.66% of the variance; It was determined that the second factor explained 15.37% of the variance, the third factor explained 11.09% and 44.12% of the total variance, and it was seen that the items had the theoretically desired load values. Reliability analysis of the scale was conducted and according to Cronbach's alpha analysis, the result was found to be 0.80, 0.74 and 0.72, respectively, depending on the factors. According to the Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis conducted for this study, sub-dimension coefficients were calculated as 0.69, 0.73, 0.61.

Parasocial Interaction Scale: The 20-item scale developed by Rubin et al. (1985) to measure the parasocial interaction between the audience and their favorite news anchor, was later reduced to 10 items by Rubin and Perse (1987) and also included parasocial interaction. interaction between viewers and their favorite TV characters. It has been adapted to describe parasocial interaction. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Arda (2006). 6 items were taken from the original 1985 scale, and 8 items were taken from the 1987 scale, which is the short version of this scale. In the adaptation study, items 2, 5, 6, 9, 13 and 14 were taken from the scale developed by Rubin et al. (1985); Items 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12 were taken from the scale created by Rubin and Perse (1987). It consists of a total of 14 items and three subscales: parasocial friendship, parasocial empathy and parasocial interest. 3rd, 6th, 9th, 14th on the scale. items friendship; The 1st, 2nd,

4th, 10th and 13th items are in the empathy dimension, while the 5th, 7th, 8th, 11th and 12th items are in the interest dimension. The total Cronbach's alpha value of the scale, which is scored between 1 and 5 in Likert type, is 0.94; It was calculated as 0.78 for the friendship sub-dimension, 0.75 for the empathy sub-dimension and 0.78 for the interest sub-dimension. There are no reverse scored items in the scale, and a high score indicates high parasocial interaction. In the reliability analysis conducted for the research, the reliability coefficients of the sub-dimensions were calculated as 0.78, 0.72 and 0.79.

Socialization of Gender Norms Scale: The scale, which aims to determine the gender role messages that university students receive from their environment during the socialization process, was developed by Epstein (2008). The original form of the scale consists of five dimensions and 23 items: traditional gender roles, egalitarian gender roles, being big and strong (durable), being good and pleasant, and body awareness. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Arıcı (2011). The Turkish form consists of two subscales and 19 items. The first dimension is called "Traditional Gender Roles" and the second dimension is called "Egalitarian Gender Roles". It was observed that the two factors together explained 32.88% of the variance. There are five items in the first sub-dimension, and 14 items in the second sub-dimension. The scale is answered according to the four-point Likert type by selecting one of the options "not at all", "very little", "somewhat" and "a lot". Scoring is between 0 and 3 for each item, and a maximum of 15 points can be obtained for egalitarian messages and a maximum of 42 points for traditional messages. While the Cronbach alpha coefficients of the scale sub-dimensions were found to be 0.79 for traditional gender roles and 0.63 for egalitarian gender roles in the original study, they were calculated as 0.83 and 0.77, respectively, in our study.

The Attitudes towards Dating Violence Scales: The scales developed by Price et al. (1999) determine the attitudes of men and women towards physical, psychological and sexual violence in dating (Price et al. 1999). The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Yumuşak and Şahin (2014). The scales are 5-point Likert type (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). Increasing scores from the scales indicate increased acceptance of dating violence. The Attitude Scale Towards Men's Psychological Violence in Dating consists of 15 items and its internal consistency coefficient is $\alpha = 0.81$. The Attitude Scale Towards Psychological Violence by Women in Dating consists of 11 items and its internal consistency coefficient is $\alpha = 0.75$. The internal consistency coefficients of the study scale were calculated as 0.77 and 0.80.

In the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview form created by the researcher was utilized. (For example; How is your bond with your partner in dating relationships? What impact do TV series/movies or media have on your romantic relationship? How do you think a man/woman should behave in a relationship? What do you think are violent behaviors in dating?) Semi-structured interviews are flexible discussions in which framework questions are determined prior to the interview, and the shaping of questions is adjusted based on the progression of the interview (Merriam 2015).

Data analysis and interpretation. In the quantitative phase of the study, the investigation aimed to explore the relationship between university students' attitudes towards psychological violence in dating and their attachment styles, gender role formations, and parasocial interaction levels. Initially, the multivariate normality of variables was assessed to ensure the assumptions of path analysis. It was observed that the data met the assumptions of multivariate normality [skewness within $-2 < \text{skewness} < +2$;

kurtosis within $-2 < \text{kurtosis} < +2$]. Regarding multicollinearity issues among predictor variables, it was determined that multicollinearity was absent in the analyses ($VIF < 10$, $Tolerance > 10$). The assumption of linearity between variables was assessed through correlation coefficients and subsequently examined using the designed path analysis model.

An interpretative phenomenological research method was employed in the qualitative phase. In phenomenological research, the primary aim of data analysis is to reach the essence of the experience and uncover its underlying reasons (Merriam 2015). The MAXQDA software was utilized for the analysis of data obtained from interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize the concept of credibility instead of validity and reliability in qualitative research. They propose that credibility replaces internal validity, transferability replaces external validity, dependability replaces internal reliability, and confirmability replaces external reliability. In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted to enhance credibility, and transcriptions of the deciphered data were read multiple times. For transferability, participants' phrases were directly integrated into findings. To ensure dependability, participants were contacted after the analyses, and participant confirmations were obtained regarding the identified themes. Moreover, during the coding, sub-theme, and theme creation processes, the opinions and feedback of experts who have conducted phenomenological research were sought to enhance consistency.

Results

Findings related to the quantitative phase. In accordance with the assumptions of multivariate statistics, skewness and kurtosis values were examined to determine whether the research variables exhibited a normal distribution. Skewness and kurtosis values were evaluated within the range of $+2$ to -2 , which is considered sufficient for the normality assumption (Field 2009; Trochim and Donnelly 2001). In this study, the kurtosis values ranged from 0.069 to -1.674 , and the skewness values ranged from 0.069 to -1.258 , all falling within the $+2$ to -2 range. Pearson Correlation analysis was performed to examine the linearity of the relationship between the variables. The correlation values between the scores of the participants regarding the variables are presented in the table (see Table 1).

The analyses of the model tested in the research were conducted using the Mplus6 program, and fit indices were obtained. In the evaluation of fit indices, the criteria proposed by Byrne (2013) and Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003) were utilized as reference values. The obtained values were as follows: $\chi^2 = 15.067$; ($df = 7$, $p < 0.05$); ($\chi^2/df = 2.1524$; $RMSEA = 0.048$; $SRMR = 0.021$; $CFI = 0.994$; $TLI = 0.961$). It is observed that the obtained values fall within the range of good fit and acceptable fit criteria Table 2.

Upon examining the coefficients related to the variables, it is evident that there exists a moderate to low level of effect size. When considering the explained variance values presented in the table, it is found that 15.8% of the variance in attitudes towards female psychological dating violence inflicted ($\beta = 0.158$; $p < 0.05$), and 15.4% of the variance in attitudes towards male psychological dating violence inflicted ($\beta = 0.154$; $p < 0.05$) are explained by the relevant external/independent variables (see Table 3).

When the direct and indirect effects between the independent and dependent variables are examined, it is seen in Table 4 that the relationship between secure attachment and the attitude towards psychological violence in dating is explained by the variable gender roles ($\beta = -0.017$; $p < 0.05$); that the variables of anxious attachment and avoidant attachment and attitudes

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation values.

	Correlation values												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
Secure attachment	36.289	0.2536	5.7156	17.00	49.00	0.069	0.170	0.069	0.110*	-0.120**	-0.098*	-0.165**	
Anxious attachment	28.309	0.3603	8.1207	8.00	49.00	-0.512	-0.139	0.239**	0.069	0.245**	0.108*	0.133**	
Avoidant attachment	28.049	0.2941	6.6281	10.00	49.00	-0.137	0.069	0.053	0.035	0.244**	0.126**	0.233**	
Parasocial friendship	10.906	0.1835	4.1352	4.00	20.00	-0.746	0.121	0.652**	-0.024	0.143**	0.018	0.088*	
Parasocial empathy	17.526	0.1941	4.3751	5.00	25.00	0.170	-0.559	1	0.056	0.156**	-0.095*	0.027	
Parasocial interest	16.435	0.2190	4.9369	5.00	25.00	-0.594	-0.256	0.908**	0.014	0.090*	-0.007	0.041	
Parasocial interaction scale	44.866	0.5298	11.940	14.00	70.00	-0.311	-0.258	1	0.018	0.144**	-0.031	0.057	
Egalitarian gender roles	12.447	0.1231	2.7755	4.00	15.00	0.596	-1.180		1	0.131**	-0.095*	-0.105*	
Traditional gender roles	21.285	0.3539	7.9775	0.00	42.00	-0.260	-0.137			1	0.292**	0.284**	
Attitudes towards male psychological dating violence	23.193	0.321	7.2347	15.00	53.00	1.674	1.236				1	0.660**	
Attitudes towards female psychological dating violence	17.602	0.280	6.3101	11.00	45.00	1.660	1.258					1	
N	508	508	508	508	508	508	508	508	508	508	508	508	508

**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

Table 2 Comparison of standard goodness of compliance criteria and research results.

Fit measures	Good fit	Acceptable fit	Fit values obtained in the study
χ^2	$0 \leq \chi^2 \leq 2sd$	$2sd \leq \chi^2 \leq 3sd$	15.067
P	$0.05 \leq p \leq 1.00$	$0.01 \leq p \leq 0.05$	0.0351
c2/df	$0 \leq c2/df \leq 2$	$2 \leq c2/df \leq 3$	2.1524
RMSEA	$0 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.05$	$0.05 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.08$	0.048
SRMR	$0 \leq SRMR \leq 0.05$	$0.05 \leq SRMR \leq 0.10$	0.021
CFI	$0.97 \leq CFI \leq 1.00$	$0.95 \leq CFI \leq 0.97$	0.994
TLI	$0.95 \leq TLI \leq 1.00$	$0.90 \leq TLI \leq 0.95$	0.961

towards female psychological dating violence were explained through the variable of traditional gender roles ($\beta = 0.062$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.061$, $p < 0.01$); that the relationship between anxious attachment and the attitudes towards male psychological dating violence is explained by the variables of parasocial empathy and traditional gender roles ($\beta = -0.065$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.079$, $p < 0.01$); It was determined that the relationship between avoidant attachment and the attitude towards psychological violence in dating was explained by traditional gender roles ($\beta = 0.078$; $p < 0.01$). It was found that while there was a specific indirect effect on egalitarian gender roles ($\beta = -0.016$; $p < 0.05$) between secure attachment and the male's attitude towards psychological violence in dating, the total effect was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.063$; $p > 0.05$) (see Table 4).

Findings related to the qualitative phase

Attachment styles. Through the interpretative phenomenological analysis of participants' experiences and perspectives on attachment styles, four main themes emerged: 'Self,' 'Attitudes in Relationships,' 'Evaluation Tendencies in Relationships,' and 'Ways of Sustaining Relationships.' These main themes were further subdivided into a total of eight subthemes: 'Personality Traits,' 'Self-Evaluation,' 'Passivity in Relationships,' 'Adaptation,' 'Negative Attribution to Relationship System,' 'Positive Experiences,' 'Cautious Relationship Formation,' and 'Excessive Closeness.'

Self: In the theme of self, individuals' self-descriptions regarding their attributes and their mental evaluations of themselves based on these descriptions are present. The first subtheme related to the self emerged as personality traits. Participants' self-descriptions and thoughts revealed a range of personality traits such as patient, aggressive, well-meaning, calm, fragile, warm-hearted, impatient, ambitious, and distant: "My name is x, by the way. I have a fairly calm personality. There are very few people I can't get along with." (M2) While describing themselves, participants appear to embody these definitions in their behaviors and communication patterns, particularly in their interactions with others. "I usually start talking to people quickly, I quickly initiate conversations. I can easily engage in conversation with even someone I don't know. I am warm-hearted." (M5)

Another subtheme within the self theme is self-evaluation. Participants classify their attributes as positive or negative, and they engage in evaluations related to satisfaction and dissatisfaction. For instance, participant E1, while listing their positive traits, states: "If I were to rate myself on a scale of 1 to 5, I'd give myself a 4....Except for my friends around me, everyone thinks they're by my side due to the significant responsibilities I have that others can't handle." (M1) Participant K3 evaluates their own attributes

Table 3 Standardized regression coefficients of the tested model.

Predictor	Predicted	B	Se	p
Secure attachment		-0.077	0.042	0.069
Anxious attachment		0.111	0.044	0.012*
Avoidant attachment		0.186	0.043	0.000**
Parasocial friendship		0.056	0.060	0.354
Parasocial empathy		-0.098	0.061	0.109
Parasocial interest	Attitudes towards female psychological dating violence R² = 0.158 (p = 0.000)	0.028	0.063	0.659
Egalitarian gender roles		-0.133	0.041	0.001**
Traditional gender roles		0.224	0.043	0.000**
Secure attachment		-0.029	0.042	0.495
Anxious attachment		0.088	0.044	0.048*
Avoidant attachment		0.078	0.044	0.075
Parasocial friendship	Attitudes towards male psychological dating violence R² = 0.154 (p = 0.000)	0.053	0.060	0.380
Parasocial empathy		-0.262	0.061	0.000**
Parasocial interest		0.098	0.063	0.122
Egalitarian gender roles		-0.123	0.041	0.003**
Traditional gender roles		0.287	0.043	0.000**
Secure attachment		-0.045	0.042	0.285
Anxious attachment	Traditional gender roles R² = 0.139 (p = 0.000)	0.275	0.040	0.000**
Avoidant attachment		0.272	0.041	0.000**
Secure attachment		0.131	0.044	0.003**
Anxious attachment	Egalitarian gender roles R² = 0.023 (p = 0.080)	0.092	0.044	0.038*
Avoidant attachment		0.068	0.045	0.130
Secure attachment		-0.069	0.044	0.121
Anxious attachment	Parasocial interest R² = 0.036 (p = 0.026)	0.171	0.044	0.000**
Avoidant attachment		0.003	0.045	0.946
Secure attachment		-0.026	0.044	0.561
Anxious attachment	Parasocial empathy R² = 0.065 (p = 0.002)	0.246	0.042	0.000**
Avoidant attachment		0.081	0.044	0.066
Secure attachment		-0.101	0.044	0.022*
Anxious attachment	Parasocial friendship R² = 0.051 (p = 0.007)	0.184	0.043	0.000**
Avoidant attachment		0.065	0.044	0.142

**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.
p values that are statistically significant are shown in bold.

negatively: “They could say I’m very submissive and fragile. I’m uncomfortable with this. I want to fix this situation, but well, I can’t.” (F3)

Attitudes in relationships: The second main theme in attachment styles is attitudes in relationships. Expressions related to participants’ behaviors, emotions, and communication methods while engaging with others are encompassed within this theme. Within this main theme, subthemes of passivity and adaptability within relationships are identified. It is observed that passive behaviors within relationships occur either willingly by participants or despite their dissatisfaction: “And also, I used to lack self-confidence a lot. I was using some medications, and with their effect, I somewhat improved. If it were before, I probably wouldn’t be able to participate in this study. I couldn’t raise my hand or speak up in class.” (F4) “In the beginning, it’s difficult. I can’t easily communicate with people I’ve just met. I’m not a very outgoing person.” (F5) Participants mention that within the subtheme of adaptability in their relationships, they adopt an attitude of getting along with everyone and accommodating: “...At first, they might be hesitant due to judgments or such, but later on, they start showing everything about themselves. Because I accept people as they are.

Even when I’m with my friends, I adapt to any situation.” (M3) Another experience within this subtheme is when participants perceive situations as threats to their boundaries; they either continue to adapt or decide to stop adapting: “Recently, I cut ties with my closest friend. This happened because my views on my own life changed. And this didn’t sit well with them; they wanted to cut ties....We can say we cut ties because I didn’t want others to have a say in my life.” (F2)

Evaluation tendencies in relationships: Another main theme related to attachment styles is the evaluation tendencies in relationships. Comprising two subthemes, negative attributions to the relationship system and positive experiences, this theme reveals how participants evaluate their relationships in various forms. Within the subtheme of negative attributions to the relationship system, participants attribute their relationships with family members to reasons such as the other party’s behavior or the nature of the relationship. For example, they evaluate relationships with statements like: “How should I put it, my father is involved with me, he’s like a friend to me. He talks to me, asks me, but there’s no display of affection.” (F3) Alternatively, they evaluate relationships based on the general characteristics of relationships: “We were very open with my father, but we drifted apart

Table 4 Standardized regression coefficients for total and indirect effects between independent and dependent variables.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Mediating variable	Specific indirect impact			Total indirect impact			Total impact		
			β	Se	P	B	Se	P	β	Se	P
Secure attachment	Attitudes towards female psychological dating violence	Egalitarian gender roles	-0.017	0.008	0.030*	-0.033	0.014	0.017*	-0.110	0.043	0.011*
			0.062	0.015	0.000**	0.040	0.019	0.036*	0.151	0.043	0.000**
Anxious attachment	Attitudes towards female psychological dating violence	Traditional gender roles	0.061	0.015	0.000**	0.048	0.017	0.005**	0.234	0.042	0.000**
			-0.016	0.008	0.037*	-0.034	0.017	0.045*	-0.063	0.044	0.154
Secure attachment	Attitudes towards male psychological dating violence	Egalitarian gender roles	-0.065	0.019	0.001**	0.030	0.022	0.177	0.117	0.044	0.008**
			0.079	0.017	0.000**	0.052	0.020	0.009**	0.130	0.044	0.003**
Anxious attachment	Attitudes towards male psychological dating violence	Parasocial empathy	0.078	0.017	0.000**	0.052	0.020	0.009**	0.130	0.044	0.003**
			0.078	0.017	0.000**	0.052	0.020	0.009**	0.130	0.044	0.003**

**p < .01; *p < .05. p values that are statistically significant are shown in bold.

for about 1–1.5 years, didn't see each other at all. Even when I met him later, maybe I met him to fill the father gap within me, maybe even to use him financially.” (M3) In the subtheme of positive experiences, it is observed that positive developments within negatively progressing relationships and the family relationship's distinct value are viewed as a separate form of relationship: “But now that I'm distant, when we occasionally meet, our relationship improves. I went through a short counseling process. During that time, my awareness about my family increased. Therefore, our relationship is better now.” (F5)

Relationship maintenance patterns: The final main theme in participants' experiences related to attachment styles is the relationship maintenance patterns. This theme consists of subthemes of cautious relationship establishment and excessive closeness. It delves into participants' accounts of how they progressed in their relationships from initiation to termination. Reflecting the mutual nature of relationships, this subtheme provides insights into what is offered by both sides and how the process unfolds. Within the subtheme of cautious relationship establishment, participants' ways and processes of maintaining relationships are observed. It becomes evident that they approach people in relationships with caution and consciously or unconsciously set boundaries. For instance, “As limited as possible, as level-headed as possible. I don't have any social problems or issues, but I'm as reserved as possible when it comes to my personal life... So, I have limited relationships with people.” (M4) It is noted how communication begins, progresses, and how participants typically wait for the other side to take the first step in their position, refraining from initiating it: “How people communicate with me is important. If someone seems distant to me, I'll be distant back. But if they talk to me openly and I don't feel uncomfortable with that openness, I'll behave the same way.” (F7)

In the subtheme of excessive closeness, participants have conveyed their relationship experiences as rapidly becoming intimate, developing an excessive attachment and affection towards their partners, and experiencing sharp and abrupt endings due to the establishment of intense attachment and focus. For instance, one participant shared, “For instance, with someone I've never met before, my credit is always 100. But as time goes by, intentional wrongdoings reduce that credit. In the middle of a relationship, I still tend to be impulsive and touchy. Towards the end of the relationship, I can't recognize myself anymore.” (M1) It's understood that participants establish bonds at a level where they cannot function without the other person, leading to an excessive focus on the other party in the relationship. “Because I tend to be more attached in the relationship, I like shaping my life according to it. At a certain point, I think it's harmful, but emotionally.” (F5) Female participants describe their relationships with their fathers as excessively devoted. For instance, one participant said, “I can't say that I'm devoted to my mother. I'm more devoted to my father. I don't know how to describe it. I love my father more.” (F6) Another participant stated, “Family is everything for a person, I guess. Especially my father.” (F4)

Gender roles. In participants' views on gender, the main themes have emerged as 'Gender Equality' and 'Relationship Roles', consisting of 2 main themes, and further categorized into 4 sub-themes: 'Equal Status, Stereotypical Judgments, Gender Role Expectations, and Gender Role Assignments in Parenthood'. In the described two main themes, it is evident that participants assess the roles of women and men separately, and they evaluate their statuses as women and men within society distinctly.

Gender equality: Two sub-themes, namely equal status and stereotypes, were identified in the participants' views on gender

equality. It was observed that participants conveyed their judgments and approaches regarding the equality of men and women, whether they perceived it, possessed it, or believed it existed in society. In their evaluations of gender equality, it was noted that the expected behavioral patterns were generally similar. *'I don't think this is very much related to gender. It also includes some societal criticism....One side shouldn't have a direction they assume responsibility for just because of their gender or that it should be that way....I don't differentiate between men and women.'* (F5) *'Because I believe in feminism. True feminism is important; women and men are equal and should have equal rights. There are inevitably physical differences, but in that situation, I think they should complement each other. What I'm saying is also valid for men.'* (M3) Furthermore, their experiences revealed instances where they encountered positive or negative attitudes based on gender: *'Society tends to put a lot of pressure on men; it's like we don't have the right to be lazy about anything.'* (M1)¹⁴

In participants' views on gender roles, it was observed that they held both personally formed and observed stereotypes. *'I don't appreciate a woman having a foul mouth, being able to curse; it's off-putting to me, I don't even want to talk to her.'* (M5) They attributed gender-specific traits, stating, *'Apart from that, there are many things imposed by society; a woman should be charming, beautiful, attractive, I think such things shouldn't exist. Of course, they will, but confining a woman in a mold is very wrong.'* (F4) Their expectations for roles and behavioral patterns were expressed as, *'Most importantly, it goes through here. This is not only related to religion. Tradition, customs, norms, these are somewhat ingrained things....But the man should be ahead, take on responsibilities faster.'* (M4)¹⁵

Relationship roles: In this theme, it is evident that participants also evaluate gender within the context of romantic relationships, encompassing specific gender role expectations towards partners and assigning gender roles in parenting. Two sub-themes emerge: gender role expectations and gender role assignments in parenting. Under the sub-theme of gender role expectations, it becomes apparent that there are perceived behaviors within relationships that participants believe should be exhibited or assumed by both parties, woman and man, in their respective roles. They hold notions that men and women possess certain characteristics within relationships: *'But in my opinion, it's the man who should be more sensitive in the relationship. After all, we are trying to exist in a society where women have a tough time. So, I think men should be more careful in relationships.'* (F8) Regarding gender role assignments in parenting, it is evident that participants express the belief that parenthood assigns different societal responsibilities to women and men within romantic relationships: *'Perhaps it could be different in marriage, but we simplify things within relationships, while in marriage, with children and all, it becomes different. She becomes a mother. She assumes different responsibilities. A great responsibility towards her partner, towards her child.'* (F8) In this sub-theme, participants associate motherhood with responsibility while also positioning fatherhood as an important role, albeit in a supportive position to motherhood: *'Just as a woman is meant to be a mother, a man is similarly obligated to be a father. He has to take on the duty a bit more....In my opinion, women bear a much heavier physiological burden, including the psychological burden, both before and after childbirth. The man doesn't go through the same burden, but during this process, he can try to assist in lightening or sharing the load for his partner. Or, after becoming a father, he has a load that comes with his own fatherhood, and he can willingly increase that load a bit to support his partner.'* (M4)¹⁶

Media interactions. Participants' experiences and perspectives on media interactions are comprised of three main themes: 'Interact, Engagement, Social Learning Effect, and Media's Position in Relationships,' and six sub-themes: 'Interaction with Characters, Interaction with Narrative, Direct Impact, Indirect Impact, Utilizing Media Tools, and Sharing the Relationship on Media.'

Interact: Participant interactions with media content (TV series, movies, social media videos, etc.) are encompassed within this main theme. It is observed that participants' interactions are shaped by engagement with characters and narratives in the content they follow. Participants' interaction with characters in the content they follow is manifested through showing interest in the characters within the production: *'I really liked the main characters there. For instance, I liked their qualities, they were very intelligent, for example, intelligence is crucial in the opposite sex for me, they should be intelligent.'* (F8) This interaction also involves forming a connection with the character: *'Actually, if we talk about a character that somewhat resembles me, Tom Shelby, for instance, he genuinely values the woman he loves, then he learns that the woman is a spy, and still, he doesn't do anything to harm her... Because he loves her deep down, no matter how much of a spy she is, he can't hurt her.'* (M2) Additionally, participants pay attention to the narrative structure of the media programs they follow, and the storyline and subject matter of the program play a role in their interest: *'The flirting as snacks in the program reminds me of my own flirtation times, and this makes me happy. I realize I miss those times.'* (F7)¹⁷

Social learning effect: Participants not only interact with the media programs they watch but also express the ways in which they are influenced by these programs. These effects, which can have reflections on their lives or induce changes, are categorized into two sub-themes: direct and indirect effects. Within the sub-theme of direct effects, it is evident that the content they consume can influence their behaviors, as well as prompt them to make comparisons and evaluations about their current experiences and the experiences they watch: *'People's posts on Instagram have a significant impact on individuals. No matter how much I try to resist, someone who uses Instagram intensively has no chance of not being affected.'* (F2) In the sub-theme of indirect effects, participants express that the content they watch can indirectly shape their thoughts: *'I used to think that you've seen this in every show, a man never stays with just one woman. They always get divorced after getting married. Because the show won't continue otherwise, there has to be something going on. I also think this could be possible, and it might cause me to fear marriage.'* (F1) They also acknowledge the impact of media content on their experiences: *'As a society, in terms of romantic relationships, they've made commitment easier in shows and movies, taking it to another level. There's no longer any commitment; they define it as if it's non-existent. Even if someone cheats on someone else, they still portray them as being committed to them.'* (M5)¹⁸

Media's positions in relationships: It is apparent that participants, as media consumers and users, also involve various platforms in their romantic relationships. In positioning media within their relationships, participants express their views on reflecting their relationships in media and utilizing media as tools in their relationships. Participants use media with varying frequency and intensity. *'No matter how much my girlfriend cares, it's unimportant to me; she uses my account too, logs in and out, but I don't log into hers. I don't attach much importance to it. I'll share photos, sometimes send stories with her.'* (M2) It is observed that they use media tools as a means of communication in their romantic relationships and engage in relationship-related sharing:

'Who the opposite sex follows on social media isn't important to me. But I would want them to share photos with me.' (F2)

Participants also evaluate the appropriateness and limitations of sharing their relationships or relationship-related content on the social media platforms they use: *'It's good to remind occasionally; people of the opposite sex, especially for both sides, can pose a danger. It doesn't need to be done constantly, though.'* (M6) The dimension of the relationship appears to be an important criterion for participants when considering sharing content: *'For instance, I wouldn't share something about them right at the beginning of my relationship. Because having people in my life, having them know about it, getting to know them, it needs to happen a bit after the relationship is more settled, when it's within the framework of respect, trust, and love.'* (F5)

Romantic relationship experiences. The qualitative research, conducted through interpretative phenomenological analysis, delved into participants' romantic relationship experiences in the final part. Participants' romantic relationship experiences are categorized into four main themes: 'Relationship Experiences, Relationship Expectations, Issues in Relationships, and Dating Violence,' and eight sub-themes: 'Negative Experiences, Positive Experiences, Mutual Expectations, Jealousy as an Expectation, Causes of Relationship Problems, Continuation Despite Relationship Problems, Types of Relationship Violence, and Definitions of Psychological Violence.'

Relationship experiences: Participants' views and experiences regarding the main theme of relationship experiences are expressed through two sub-themes: negative experiences and positive experiences. Within these, negative experiences encompass moments, behaviors, and words that include lack of trust, exposure to physical violence, feelings of tension, criticism, exposure to manipulation, exertion of pressure, control and intervention on the individual, indifference, distancing, and unwanted sexual contact:

"I haven't applied it, but I was exposed to it; my current girlfriend slapped me twice. (M3)

I got really angry at her, pushed her away, and slapped her. She, in response, hit me so that I'd stop pushing her and doing that. We went through something really toxic like this. (F6)

I used to feel safe and trusted her a lot, I mean in everything, every sentence she used. But after the lies she told me, I started to lose trust. (F1)

"In a sexual sense, he was constantly pressuring me. Even when I didn't want to, he would push me into things. I'd say I don't want to, and he'd start a fight. Then he'd say, 'It's because of you that we're fighting. If you just agree, there wouldn't be a fight,' and he'd push me. He blamed me for not wanting or resisting....Apart from that, there was emotional violence regarding my friends, etc. I started to think, I've been with these people for 20 years, and I haven't had a proper relationship in all that time. I've started to doubt myself (F4)

Participants express their positive relationship experiences by valuing feeling close to that person, respecting and feeling valued, and being appreciated. They highlight mutual behaviors in the relationship: *'Because she's doing something that she values for me, and that makes me happy.'* (M2) They also emphasize their own behaviors: *'I generally try to be understanding. I respect her private life. I never go through my boyfriend's phone, social media, etc. I*

try to make her feel trusted. I try not to accuse her of ridiculous things.' (F4) These positive aspects are evaluated as essential components of their positive experiences."

Relationship expectations: Participants develop expectations for their romantic relationships based on their past and current romantic relationship experiences, as well as other life experiences. These expectations are divided into two sub-themes: mutual expectations and jealousy as an expectation. Within mutual expectations, participants desire to see the behaviors they offer to their partner reciprocated emotionally: *'She does what no one else does. You know how they say she sees what no one else sees. I see that in her and she knows me really well. Similarly, I know her too.'* (M3) They also express behavioral expectations: *'It would be better if she let me know if she is going out. I generally do, and the other side does too. Communicating during the day before going to sleep. When we're busy with work, both sides should leave each other alone to focus on their work.'* (M6)

In the second sub-theme, participants do not directly categorize jealousy in their romantic relationships as positive or negative. They accept jealousy within the relationship to some extent, consider it normal in certain situations, and condition its evaluation on circumstances. One participant states, *'In my opinion, jealousy is normal as long as it doesn't go too far, meaning as long as it doesn't reach a level that restricts life.'* (F4) Others express their views: *'For instance, not sharing anything with anyone, including family. That would be violence. Not wanting to share with the opposite sex, in my opinion, isn't violence. Of course, there's a degree to this, but unless it's excessive, it's not violence.'* (F3) *'I also get jealous of the opposite sex. If there's a certain level of intimacy, for example, there's a boundary with a friend, you talk, you smile, but you don't hug and kiss too much, like with an ordinary friend.'* (F8) *'If the opposite sex tries to get close to me and my partner notices and wants to stop them, then it doesn't escalate into violence. There would be jealousy here, but I don't see anything wrong with it when it's done.'* (M6) These participants consider jealousy towards the opposite sex as something normal.

Issues in relationships: Participants' thoughts and experiences regarding the problems in their relationships are gathered under this theme, including how they define the causes of relationship problems and reasons for continuing the relationship despite these problems. The causes of relationship problems are described in the first sub-theme as related to individuals' characteristics in problematic situations in the relationship: *'Fear of losing. More like a fear of losing. Along with a lack of self-confidence, the fear of losing comes. Sometimes people can entertain these kinds of thoughts or engage in these kinds of actions because they love someone so much.'* (M2) The ways partners express themselves: *'At its core, things done without valuing the other person, without valuing their feelings. How you say it is really important.'* (F6) Factors such as past experiences and family play a role: *'Lack of love, generally, let's say, people who apply psychological violence are those who have been subjected to it in the past. Not being loved by their family, pushed away, belittled... They start to adopt this, they think people are always like this, so they start applying it to everyone they encounter.'* (M5) These participants perceive these factors as contributors to the emergence of problematic situations and violence.

Participants are observed to continue their relationships even when they are aware of the problems or dissatisfied with the situation. In this emerging second sub-theme, it is evident that they find certain problems more acceptable within the relationship; they might continue the relationship despite these issues:

A: Have you ever experienced physical violence? M6: Minor things, but I don't think they were intentionally done.

A: *Did you ever do anything like that to them? M6: I did something small, but it wasn't done out of hatred.*

Moreover, it is evident that they can also see themselves as the source of problems. *'Actually, I should have broken up before, there were places where we were unhappy. But it was very toxic, and I didn't want to sever my ties. I didn't want her in my life, but I felt incomplete without her as well. I was treating her badly, I didn't want to do that, but I was treating her badly too.'* (F6)

Dating violence: The qualitative phase of the research was conducted with university students who have experienced psychological violence in their relationships. In this context, how participants experienced violence in their relationships emerged as the final main theme. This theme consists of two sub-themes: types of violence in relationships and definitions of psychological violence. According to participants' opinions and experiences regarding types of violence, it is evident that they define violence in relationships as physical, verbal, emotional, and psychological:

"Physical violence, like hitting. Constantly pressuring someone on a certain issue. Constantly getting angry over dressing modestly, for example, that's also psychological violence." (M6), *"We can divide it into psychological or physical. (M4)"*, *"It could be keeping someone under psychological pressure. It could be making someone feel bad. It could be punishment. It's emotionally and psychologically intertwined. Making someone feel bad about themselves." (F5)*

The participants were identified as university students who have experienced psychological violence in their relationships. When examining how they classified their experiences of psychological violence and how they defined psychological violence, it is observed that they defined psychological violence as insults, manipulation, the way of expression, imposition, and establishing dominance:

"Belittling someone's achievements, clothing, conversations with friends; belittling every behavior of that person, demeaning them in every situation, constantly humiliating them, always putting them down." (F7)

"Like mobbing... It's such a pressure, such manipulation that sometimes people manipulate others." (M2)

"Making someone feel bad about themselves. Actually, those feelings aren't yours. Those thoughts don't belong to you. You're experiencing them, but they're not yours." (F3)

"Trying to make someone do something they don't want to do by force. Increasing the dosage of this. It can also be belittling. Doing this in front of everyone is even greater violence." (M6)

"Psychological violence can also be remaining unresponsive, staying silent, verbal psychological violence, etc." (M4)

Discussion

In this study, the views and experiences of university students regarding psychological violence in their intimate partner relationships were investigated using a mixed methods research model. In the quantitative phase of the research, a structural equation model was established for the variables, and the results indicated that attitudes towards female psychological dating violence were predicted by anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, egalitarian gender roles, and traditional gender roles. The

model explained 15% of the variance in attitudes towards female psychological dating violence. Similarly, for attitudes towards male psychological dating violence, anxious attachment, parasocial empathy, egalitarian gender roles, and traditional gender roles were found to be predictive variables. The model explained 15% of the variance in attitudes towards male psychological dating violence. When examining the indirect effects between independent and dependent variables, it was found that there was an indirect effect between secure attachment and attitudes towards female psychological dating violence through the variable of egalitarian gender roles. Similarly, anxious attachment and avoidant attachment were found to have indirect effects on attitudes towards female psychological dating violence through the variable of traditional gender roles. An indirect effect was also found between anxious attachment and attitudes towards male psychological dating violence through the variables of parasocial empathy and traditional gender roles. Additionally, there was an indirect effect between avoidant attachment and attitudes towards male psychological dating violence through the variable of traditional gender roles. Furthermore, a specific indirect effect was observed between secure attachment and attitudes towards male psychological dating violence through the variable of egalitarian gender roles. However, the total effect was not statistically significant.

In the qualitative phase of the study, the attachment styles of university students who experienced psychological violence in dating relationships were examined, along with their views and experiences related to gender roles and media interactions in dating relationships, and their experiences in romantic relationships. According to the findings, perceptions of attachment styles were organized around four main themes: self, attitudes in relationships, tendencies in evaluating relationships, and relationship maintenance styles. Perceptions related to gender roles were categorized into two main themes: gender equality and relationship roles. Media interactions were categorized into three main themes: interaction engagement, social learning effects, and the role of media in relationships. Furthermore, the experiences in romantic relationships were organized around four main themes: relationship experiences, relationship expectations, relationship problems, and dating violence.

In the study, it was seen that anxious attachment positively predicted egalitarian gender roles. In a study conducted with university students on attachment styles, gender roles and dependency, femininity was positively related to anxious attachment, masculinity was positively related to anxious attachment, femininity was positively related to emotional and instrumental dependency, and masculinity was negatively related to attachment; anxious attachment and femininity predict emotional dependence; Masculinity and anxious and avoidant attachment have been found to predict instrumental dependence (Alonso-Arbiol et al. 2002). In another study conducted with university students, it was found that those with feminine and androgynous gender roles were more committed to their families than those with masculine and undifferentiated gender roles (Haigler et al. 1995). It can be seen that the results of our study are different from the results in the literature. In our society, family structure changes in terms of family communication and values due to many reasons such as technology, migration, women's entry into working life, socioeconomic factors and social changes (Çelik 2010; Yaşar-Ekici 2014). In his research with adolescents across Doğan (2016) found that the attachment styles of young people to their mothers and fathers generally showed similar profiles, and that the level of attachment to the mother was higher in female students. When we look at the results of the research conducted in our country, it is seen that views on social life are shifting from traditional understanding to more

egalitarian understandings, and individuals' commitment to each other is increasing in terms of emotional relationships. Their families are high-level, and this is especially evident in their relationships with people. When the results of our study are evaluated from this perspective, it is possible to interpret behavioral patterns related to anxious attachment as individuals encountering messages about more egalitarian gender roles in social life while they are just emerging in their relationships with others.

In the study, it was seen that anxious attachment positively predicted parasocial empathy. Parasocial empathy negatively predicts attitudes towards psychological violence committed by men during dating; Again, it was determined that parasocial empathy had a negative indirect effect on the effect of anxious attachment on the attitude towards psychological violence committed by men during dating. In a study on attachment styles and empathy, it was stated that those with medium levels of anxious attachment showed more empathy than those with low and high levels of anxious attachment (Wayment 2006). In another study, it was found that those with high levels of cognitive and emotional empathy showed higher parasocial interaction (Cummins and Cui 2014). In another study they conducted with university students, Teke et al. (2021) found that students' parasocial empathy, parasocial interest and parasocial friendship levels were related to their cognitive and behavioral relationship levels, and that parasocial empathy predicted romantic values. In terms of the results of our research, it is thought that it is possible to reach a conclusion that although anxious attachment has an effect on parasocial interaction and sub-dimensions, the empathy feature of individuals causes them to be more aware of behaviors related to psychological violence.

It is stated that traditional gender roles and the style of relationship with the family are important in exposure to dating violence (Yıldırım and Terzioğlu 2018). In a study conducted with male university students, it is found that gender roles are affected by culture. The study found that gender is the most important predictor in approving violence, masculinity is a positive predictor in approving violence, and femininity is a negative predictor in approving violence (Bozkurt et al. 2015). In another study examining the effect of the media on approving intimate partner violence, it was found that different programs in the media had a predictive effect on accepting intimate partner violence through messages about gender roles and the objectification of women (Moss et al. 2022).

In the quantitative phase of the research, university students' attitudes towards psychological violence in dating were examined, and in the qualitative phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with male and female university students who were exposed to psychological violence. Perceptions of social gender appear to be effective in exposure to psychological violence (Keçeci and Ekşi 2020). In a study; The averages of gender role attitude score, anxious attachment dimension score, avoidant attachment dimension score, violence against women attitude score and identity-oriented attitude score were found to be lower in those who were exposed at least once than those who were never exposed to psychological violence (Selçuk 2021). Yumuşak (2013) in his study with university students, those who had dating relationships; It was determined that men in dating relationships had more positive attitudes towards psychological violence than men who were not in dating relationships. For this reason, it was thought that it was appropriate for the purpose of the study to reach people who experienced the phenomenon by analyzing the quantitative results regarding the variables more deeply and clearly.

In a study conducted with university students, it was stated that self-esteem and homophily (feeling close to people with similar

characteristics) are related to parasocial interaction, and those with positive self-esteem evaluations have more parasocial interactions with comedians (Turner 1993). In another study, it was found that anxious attachment was associated with parasocial interaction and watching drama, parasocial interaction had an impact on romantic beliefs, and avoidant attachment had a negative effect on romantic beliefs and parasocial interaction (Jin and Kim 2015). It is seen that parasocial interaction is related to attachment styles in the quantitative phase, and in the qualitative phase, participants make different mental evaluations when establishing relationships with media characters. Nowadays, increasing studies show that young people do not only establish parasocial interaction through TV and use other media/social media networks, they establish parasocial interactions with different media programs and different media characters, these parasocial interactions are effective in many behaviors, including romantic relationships. (Bulut 2020; Liebers and Schramm 2022; Sokolova and Kefi 2020; Sözen 2014). Social media appears as a place where the partner has a new identity in the established romantic relationship (Lopato 2016) and as another variable that affects their behavior in the relationship (Arikewuyo et al. 2022; Yacoub, et al. 2018). Again, it is understood that parasocial interaction and media have an impact on the emergence of attitudes and behaviors towards psychological violence, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In this sense, it is thought that the results of our study contain results supported by the literature.

It was understood that the participants made definitions regarding psychological violence in line with their own experiences and classified the behaviors they had problems with as violence. Psychological violence in relationships is perceived more negatively than other types of violence. The reasons for violence among young people include personal characteristics, relationship dynamics, and pornographic and violent elements in the media (Lavoie et al. 2000). In their study with university students, Selçuk et al. (2018) stated that the most common violence young people are exposed to is psychological violence.

In another study conducted with university students, women perceived jealousy and violent behavior in the digital environment as violence, while men defined it as more normal behavior in a relationship; Men are exposed to violent behaviors such as abusing the relationship, jealousy, interfering, isolating, making people feel guilty, restricting, humiliating and threatening, and it has been observed that jealousy is the type of violence that both parties are most exposed to. (Sunetçi et al. 2016). In another study conducted with university students, it was observed that students stated that they were most frequently exposed to emotional violence in dating relationships, and that they did not classify situations defined as violence in the literature as violence (Özdemir 2019). It is seen that the sub-themes in the main theme of the participants' relationship expectations are mutual expectations and jealousy as an expectation, and jealousy is found to be more acceptable in the relationship. In theories about love, jealousy is considered as a feature among different types of love (Lee 1973, 1977; Sternberg 1998). Jealousy is often seen as an expression of love (Guerrero& Andersen 1996; Özcebe et al. 2002). It is understood that the participants created their own criteria to classify jealousy as violence, and according to their criteria, jealousy is considered normal as long as it does not involve a harmful behavior in expressing love. In terms of our study, it seems that placing jealousy in a different place in romantic relationships is an expected result, but it is thought that it is important to evaluate the criteria regarding the jealousy/violence limit.

When the results of quantitative and qualitative research are evaluated together, the results obtained in the quantitative phase are supported by the results obtained in the qualitative phase; It

was observed that the attachment styles of the participants, their perspectives on gender, their evaluations of the media and their experiences with violence revealed the results predicted in the quantitative phase. It is understood that the behavior and thought patterns of anxious and avoidant attachment show parallel characteristics with psychological violence behaviors in romantic relationships in the literature. It is seen that gender roles and the contents of romantic relationships in media programs have an impact on behavioral expectations in romantic relationships, and it is important to analyze these contents. It is thought that it is important for psychological violence to become more visible in dating relationships, as one of the romantic relationships, and to evaluate attitudes and behaviors towards violence together with attachment, gender and interaction with media tools.

This study examined the relationship between attachment styles, gender, and media interactions in university students' attitudes and experiences towards psychological violence in their romantic relationships. In both stages of the study, it was observed that perceptions and expressions of traditional gender roles were effective in attitudes towards dating violence and in relationships. It is thought that creating educational programs and content for youth and adolescent groups on gender equality, dating violence, and correct communication will be beneficial in correcting the errors in perception. In the study, it was observed that parasocial interaction and media interaction had an effect on intimate partner violence, that the participants did not limit their interaction with the media only to TV, and that they frequently used social media and other series/film platforms. It is thought that developing measurement tools that can address the applications and platforms that young people use more frequently today by developing the context of parasocial interaction in future studies will contribute to the field. The study was conducted with university students. Considering that romantic feelings and interactions start at earlier ages, technology and media use have become more widespread, and that the family effect on attachment styles is more visible at earlier ages, it is predicted that adolescent groups are also at risk for the variable and problem addressed in the study. It is thought that it would be beneficial to conduct a similar study with adolescent groups in the future.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Author contributions

All authors conceived and planned the study. BK administered the surveys, collected data, and performed the quantitative and qualitative analyses. BK prepared the manuscript. DÜ revised it critically for intellectual content. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest. This research derives from the primary writer's PhD thesis. It was previously presented as an oral presentation at the 23rd International Guidance and Psychological Counseling Congress in Turkey.

Ethical approval

All procedures in the study are in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible human experiments committee and the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki, which was revised in 2024. In addition, ethics committee approval dated 05.04.2021 and numbered 3-36 was received from the Marmara University Institute of Educational Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee for all data collection and study content.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from participants at all stages of the study. In the quantitative phase, informed consent was obtained via an online form. In the qualitative phase, the interviews were audio-recorded and verbal consent was obtained during the recording.

Additional information

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