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# Ideal-Actual Mate Mismatch and Relational Outcomes in Romantic Couples<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This study aims at ascertaining how the discrepancy between people's ideal standards and romantic partner traits are associated with relationship constructs among romantic couples. Specifically, this study aims to examine how the relationship evaluations of the parties change when a person's romantic partner does not match the characteristics, s/he dreams or desires within the framework of the Ideal Standards Model. The main hypothesis of the study was that not only the participants' own, but also their partner's ideal-actual discrepancy would be negatively associated with relationship quality, basic need satisfaction and perceived partner responsiveness. A total of 154 romantic couples participated in the study. Results of Actor Partner Interdependence Model analyses revealed that both one's own and one's partner's higher ideal-actual discrepancy were associated with lower perceived partner responsiveness, basic need fulfillment and relationship quality. The findings replicate and support the previous studies regarding relationship quality and provide contributions to the relevant literature in terms of need satisfaction in relationships and perceived partner responsiveness.*

**Keywords:** Ideal-actual mate mismatch, relationship outcomes, romantic couples

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<sup>1</sup> Bu makale yazarın doktora tezinin bir bölümünden doğrudan üretilmiştir.

## Romantik Çiftlerde İdeal-Gerçek Eş Uyuşmazlığı ve İlişkisel Sonuçları

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### Öz

*Bu çalışma, kişilerin ideal standartları ile romantik partner özellikleri arasındaki uyumsuzluğun, romantik çiftlerde önemli ilişki değişkenleriyle nasıl ilişkili olduğunu tespit etmeyi amaçlamıştır. Spesifik olarak, bir kişi hayal ettiği veya arzuladığı özelliklerle uyumlayan bir romantik partnerle birlikte olduğunda tarafların ilişki değerlendirmelerinin nasıl değiştiğini İdeal Standartlar Modeli çerçevesinde incelemek amaçlanmıştır. Temel hipotez, romantik ilişkide olan kişilerin hem kendi hem partnerlerinin ideal-gerçek partner uyumsuzluğunun ilişki niteliği, ilişkide temel ihtiyaçların karşılanması ve algılanan partner duyarlılığı ile olumsuz yönde ilişkili bulunacağı şeklindedir. Bu ilişkiler, sadece kişinin kendi ilişkisel değişkenleri için değil, aynı zamanda romantik partnerinin ilişkisel değişkenleri için de beklenmektedir. Çalışmaya romantik çiftler (N = 154) katılmıştır. Aktör Partner Karşılıklı-Bağımlılık Modeli analizlerinin sonuçları, hem kişinin kendisinin hem de partnerinin ideal-gerçek uyumsuzluğunun, algılanan partner duyarlılığı, ilişkide temel ihtiyaçların karşılanması ve ilişki niteliğiyle olumsuz yönde ilişkili olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular ilişki kalitesi açısından önceki araştırmaları tekrarlayarak ederek desteklerken, ilişkide temel ihtiyaçların karşılanması ve algılanan partner duyarlılığı açısından ilgili alan yazına katkı sağlamaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İdeal-gerçek partner uyumsuzluğu, ilişkisel sonuçlar, romantik çiftler

## Introduction

### Ideal-Actual Mate Mismatch And Relational Outcomes In Romantic Couples

People with romantic relationships need to know whether they are in a good or bad intimate relationship. They need to understand relationship events such as giving causal explanations for relationship satisfaction, problems and conflicts, and they are also in need of deciding whether to become further involved, live together, get married, or break up (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000). The question “on what basis people evaluate, explain, regulate and take actions for their partner and relationships” is one of the most complex and difficult questions for relationship researchers, and there have been an abundance of theories and models developed to address this issue (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, and Giles, 1999). Ideal Standards Model (Fletcher et al., 1999; Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas, 2000a) is one of those models examining the consistency between people’s ideal standards and actual partner qualities. In literature, the predictive validity of the consistency issue which indicates that one’s ideal-actual partner match is supposed to predict relational outcomes has widely been investigated. Researchers have almost agreed on the conclusion that there are different functions of ideal standards for either relationship formation or relationship development. For relationship development, it was suggested that if the romantic partners more closely match ideal preferences, individuals are likely to be more satisfied with them (Eastwick, Luchies, Finkel, and Hunt, 2013). Although there have been numerous research supporting the link between discrepancy and relationship quality (see Eastwick, Finkel, and Eagly, 2011), studies investigating the associations between this discrepancy and other important and effective relational variables are relatively scarce. This indicates a need to understand the associations between ideal-actual mismatch and the other relational variables which are individuals’ need satisfaction within the relationship and perceived partner responsiveness. Thus, in the present study, the main concern is to ascertain how individuals’ dissimilarity of ideals and romantic partner traits are associated not only with one’s own important relationship variables but also with their partner’s

ones. In the following sections, Ideal Standards Model, concerned relational outcomes, relevant literature and the study hypotheses will be presented.

### **Ideal Standards Model**

In this model, ideals refer to a set of expectations, hopes and standards operating in relationships (Fletcher et al., 1999). If the actual experiences are inconsistent with individuals' standards, they can be upset and need to take action for this issue. In this regard, partner and relationship ideals operate as chronically accessible knowledge structures, which are likely to precede, and they are causally related to judgments and decisions made in ongoing relationships (Fletcher et al., 1999).

Both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies previously indicated negative relationship implications of ideal-actual inconsistency. In the initial studies, it was found that participants' ideal-actual inconsistency predicted less relationship satisfaction (Fletcher et al., 2000a; Fletcher et al., 1999) and the likelihood of a breakup (Fletcher et al., 2000a). Additionally, lower ideal-actual match associated with more motivated attempts to improve relationship partner, which in turn, may be detrimental for partner and relationship evaluations (Overall, Fletcher, and Simpson, 2006). More recently, in a 3.5-year longitudinal study, it was found that the match between the ideals and traits negatively predicted divorce with an effect size larger than the most established divorce risk factors (Eastwick and Neff, 2012). Relationship researchers have generally studied relationship satisfaction/quality, break-ups, and divorce. Thus, the present study aimed not only to replicate the findings regarding the association between discrepancy and relationship quality, but also to provide an advanced understanding of this association by using other relational variables.

### **Basic Need Satisfaction in Relationships**

Self-determination theory proposes three basic psychological needs, which are autonomy (i.e., feeling uncoerced in one's action), competence (i.e., feeling competence), and relatedness (i.e., feeling connected to others) (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Particularly, need for autonomy involves the need to feel volition in behaviors and to act as the originator of one's own behavior. The

need for competence represents the need to experience competency in what one does and to feel capable of achieving desired outcomes. The need for relatedness involves the experience of being understood by others, and sense of belonging, attachment, and intimacy with others. It was also posited that these needs are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being, and satisfaction of three essential psychological needs is important for optimal functioning (Deci and Ryan, 2000, 2008). Self-determination theory perspective focusing on how relational partners are affected by fulfillment of those basic psychological needs within relationships is one of the growing literatures in relationship science (La Guardia and Patrick, 2008).

Rodriguez, Hadden, and Knee (2015) recently studied the association between relationship and partner ideals, and fulfilment of basic psychological needs. They found that satisfaction of intrinsic ideals (e.g. warmth-trustworthiness) were more predictive than the extrinsic ones (e.g. status-resources). To date, there are few studies that have investigated the satisfaction of basic psychological needs within romantic relationships and its association with the discrepancy of partner ideals and current partner perceptions. Moreover, far too little attention has been paid to interpersonal implications of this association within romantic relationships.

### **Perceived Partner Responsiveness**

Perceived partner responsiveness is a core organizing principle for studying personal relationships (Reis, Clark, and Holmes, 2004), which are such complex phenomena influencing wide levels of analysis (e.g., the individuals, their interaction, and the social, cultural, and historical context of their interaction) (Reis, Collins, and Berscheid, 2000). In the broadest sense, perceived partner responsiveness to the self involves attending to and reacting supportively to central, core, and defining features of the self. This responsiveness perception leads to feelings of warmth, acceptance, belonging, and trust, which contributes to the development of intimacy, and is central for creating closeness in a close relationship (Reis et al., 2004; Reis, 2007; 2012). Despite the central role of perceived partner responsiveness in romantic relationships, there have been paucity of research investigating the associations of this construct and the ideal-actual discrepancy.

## The Present Research and the Hypothesis

Relationships are such a big deal for both human beings and the researchers, and romantic relationships are the most influential ones for not only psychological but also physical health. In this regard, what one's hopes of a relationship partner are, who s/he ends up with and how the implications of this hope-end up process operate within the relationship is the main concern of the present work. In line with this, the aim was to examine how ideal standards and real partner perceptions are in play within ongoing romantic relationships. For this aim, romantic couples are included in the study and observed regarding how their gaps of ideal-actual mates are associated with different relational outcomes. The study seeks for consistent empirical support with the previous research for the link between ideal-actual mismatch and perceived relationship quality. Answering the question of "how other need fulfillment in relationships and perceived partner responsiveness are associated with ideal-actual mate mismatch" was another purpose of the study. Moreover, interpersonal effects of these expected associations were also examined considering the dyadic nature of the romantic relationship variables at hand. In line with the rationale and the relevant literature, it was expected that having lower discrepancy between ideals and current partner perceptions is expected to be associated with having higher relationship quality, feeling more satisfied with basic psychological needs in the relationship and with perceiving the partner as more responsive. The discrepancy between ideal standards and current partner is expected to be associated with relationship outcomes not only for individual's own scores but also for their partners' scores.

## Method

### *Participants*

154 heterosexual romantic couples and 28 individuals (just one of the partners) from different universities participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30 [(M= 21.74, Median = 21.00, SD= 2.24) for women; (M= 22.87, Median = 22.00, SD= 2.78) for men] and the duration of relationships ranged from 0.75 to 84 months, with a mean of 6.80 months, (Median = 5.00, SD=

9.85). Of the participants, 9.4 % were reported that they were cohabiting with their partner.

### ***Instruments***

The questionnaire package included demographic and relationship related information, and Partner Ideal Standards Scale-Short Form (with Actual Partner Evaluations versions), Perceived Relationship Quality Component Inventory, Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale and The Basic Need Satisfaction in Relationships Scale. By using these scales, the aim was to assess ideal-actual mismatch, relationship quality, basic need satisfaction and perceived partner responsiveness. In the questionnaire package, informed consent and self-report scales were respectively applied to participants. Order of self-report scales and order of questions within these scales were randomized; that is, each participant took the survey with a randomly varying order of scales and questions.

### ***Demographic and Relationship Related Information***

In this section, questions regarding the participant's age, gender, the duration and the state of their relationship, education level and university information was gathered. Moreover, participants were asked whether they cohabit with their partners or not.

### ***Ideal-Actual Discrepancy***

In order to calculate the discrepancy between ideal standards and actual partner characteristics, participants were asked to indicate both ideal preferences for a partner and actual partner evaluations. The measurements and statistical computations of the discrepancy index are presented in the following sections.

***Ideal Standards:*** Partner Ideal Standards Scale-Short Form (Fletcher, Patrick, Kerr, Li, and Valentine, 2014) was used to evaluate participants' notion of ideal partner. The scale was first translated into Turkish and back translated by an academician (PhD) fluent in both languages. The scale includes

12 items (adjectives) and three dimensions (four items for each). Dimensions were (a) warmth (kind, considerate, sensitive, good listener), (b) attractiveness (sexy, attractive appearance, outgoing, adventurous), and (c) status/resources (successful, financially secure, well dressed, -potential to obtain a- good job). Each subscale could be scored separately, or an overall score could be calculated by averaging the twelve items. The overall score was used to calculate the discrepancy scores for the present study. The instruction for the scale was "Everybody has a dream about a partner or a potential spouse and there could be some characteristics that you expect for this ideal partner. Please think about your ideal partner and rate each of the 12 items below in terms of the importance to you in describing your ideal partner." Each item required responding on a 7-point scale ranging from 'very unimportant' (1) to 'very important' (7). All items were averaged, and higher scores indicate higher importance and expectations for an ideal partner. For the present sample, the internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) for total score was .84.

**Actual Partner Evaluation:** Couples rated the same 12 attributes of Partner Ideal Standards Scale-Short Form considering their current romantic partners, as well. They were asked to indicate how well each item describes their actual romantic partner by using 7-point scale ranging from "do not describe my partner" (1) to "very well describes my partner" (7). Again, all items were averaged, and higher scores indicates higher perceptions regarding current partner. The internal consistency reliability coefficient for the total score was .79.

**Discrepancy between Ideal Standards and Actual Partner Evaluations:** The discrepancy variable was calculated using within-person correlation approach as in previous studies (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2000a; Fletcher et al., 2014; Zelenski and Larsen, 2000). For this index, first, data set was restructured to observe within-person correlations. Then, within-subject correlations of each subject's ideals and actual partner evaluations were calculated and entered the main data set, and the case-by-case correlated values were used as a discrepancy variable.

### ***Relationship Quality***

A six-item version of the Perceived Relationship Quality Component Inventory (PRQC) (Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas, 2000b) was used to measure participants' perceived romantic relationship quality. The reliability and validity studies within Turkish samples were conducted by Sağkal and Özdemir (2018). The scale assesses six components of romantic relationships, which are relationship satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion and love. Each component was evaluated with one item by rating on a 7-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = 'not at all' to 7 = 'extremely'). The average of six items was used as an index of romantic relationship quality and higher scores indicated higher levels of perceived relationship quality. Cronbach's alpha was .85 for the present sample.

### ***The Basic Need Satisfaction in Relationships***

The Turkish adaptation of the 9-item The Basic Need Satisfaction in Relationships Scale developed by La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, and Deci (2000) was used to measure the level of perceived need satisfaction within the couple relationship. There is no published adaptation study (A. Uysal, personal communication, July 15, 2016). The items require responding on a 7-point scale from 1= 'strongly disagree' to 7= 'strongly agree'. The three subscales, consisting of three items each, are Autonomy, (e.g., "When I am with my partner, I feel free to be who I am"), Competence (e.g., "When I am with my partner, I feel like a competent person"), and Relatedness (e.g., "When I am with my partner, I feel loved and cared about"). Each subscale can be used separately, or an overall score can be calculated by averaging the nine items, as well. Overall score was used in the analyses conducted in the present study and the internal consistency reliability coefficient for the total scale was .80.

### ***Perceived Partner Responsiveness***

An 18-item Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (Reis, 2007; 2012) was used to measure perceptions of the partner's responsiveness. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Taşfiliz, Sağel, and Selçuk (2017). Perceived Partner

Responsiveness Scale assesses the level of perceived validation (e.g., “My partner values and respects the whole package that is the ‘real’ me”) and understanding (e.g., “My partner is aware of what I am thinking and feeling”) of the partner. Within the instruction, it was informed that the phrase “my partner...” would be substituted for the first person pronoun for each of the items, and the scale would be scored from 1 (not at all true) to 9 (completely true). Cronbach’s alpha was .95 for the present sample.

## **Procedure**

The questionnaire package used in this study was first submitted for the approval of Middle East Technical University, Human Participants Ethic Committee. After the approval of the ethic committee, heterosexual romantic couples were reached out by using convenience sampling approach with snowball technique and two paths were followed (within the years 2016-2017). First, students within romantic relationships recruited from undergraduate courses offered in the Middle East Technical University and TOBB University for an extra course credit upon participation with the partner. Second, the announcement of the study along with the link to the online application of the study was posted to social media websites, using many different accounts of people who volunteered to help distribute the survey. The announcement of the study was also e-mailed to student accounts by volunteer lecturers (of undergraduate Psychology courses) in Bahçeşehir University and Bilkent University. For all techniques, participants first filled the online application for by determining a nickname for themselves and for their partner. Then, the researcher e-mailed the main questionnaire package to each couple of participants concurrently in the shortest time possible.

## **Data Analytic Strategy**

In order to estimate actor and partner effects of discrepancy variable on actors’ relational outcomes, APIM analyses (Kenny, 1996) was conducted and two intercept models which allows men and women intercepts to be different and correlated were tested by using SPSS program. This dyadic approach allows to estimate the interpersonal effects of one partner’s ideal-

actual partner discrepancy on the other partner's relational outcomes (a partner effect), controlling for the individual's own discrepancy (an actor effect) (see Campbell and Kashy, 2002; Kashy and Kenny, 1999). In APIM analysis, total discrepancy index was used as predictor and other relational variables which are relationship quality, need satisfaction and perceived partner responsiveness were used as outcome variables. The estimates for actor and partner effects for two intercept model in SPSS were unstandardized regression coefficients and should be interpreted in that regard.

## Results

It was expected that the interpersonal effects of one partner's ideal-actual partner discrepancy on the other partner's relational outcomes (a partner effect), controlling for the individual's own discrepancy (an actor effect) would be significant. APIM analyses were conducted for each outcome variable separately. Related estimates for each outcome variable were given in Table 1.

Specifically, it was expected that one partner's discrepancy would be associated with not only his/her own, but also other partner's relationship quality, basic need satisfaction in relationship and perceived partner responsiveness. For the relationship quality, two intercept model revealed that actor effects [ $B = .47, t(136) = 2.74, p < .01$ ] were significant for men while partner effects were significant for women [ $B = .63, t(136) = 3.31, p < .001$ ]. That is, if women's partner's perceptions about current partner were worse than ideal standards, they tended to report less relationship quality. However, men's own discrepancy was associated with only their own relationship quality. There was also between couple variability for relationship quality ( $B = .47, Wald Z = 6.99, p < .001$ ).

For the basic need satisfaction in relationships, two intercept model demonstrated that both actor effects [ $B = .33, t(136) = 3.11, p < .01$ ] and partner effects [ $B = .26, t(136) = 2.53, p < .05$ ] were significant for men. Whereas just actor effects were significant for women [ $B = .24, t(136) = 2.30, p < .05$ ]. That is, if men's own and their partner's discrepancy between ideals and perceptions were higher, they tended to report less fulfillment of basic needs. However, women's own discrepancy was associated with only their

own needs. There was also between couple variability for need satisfaction for this index ( $B = .26$ , Wald  $Z = 2.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

For perceived partner responsiveness, two intercept model revealed that, both actor effects and partner effects were found to be significant for men [actor effects:  $B = .93$ ,  $t(136) = 3.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ; partner effects:  $B = .83$ ,  $t(136) = 3.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ] and women [actor effects:  $B = .51$ ,  $t(136) = 2.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ; partner effects:  $B = .72$ ,  $t(136) = 3.86$ ,  $p < .01$ ]. Particularly, for both groups as expected, not only individual's own but also their partner's ideal-actual consistency was positively related to their partner responsiveness perceptions. There was also between couple variability for perceived partner responsiveness for this index ( $B = .53$ , Wald  $Z = 8.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 1. Estimates of Fixed Effects for Relationship Quality, Basic Need Satisfaction and Perceived Partner Responsiveness.**

Parameter	Estimate	SE	t	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
<i>Relationship Quality</i>					
Intercept-Man	5,90***	0,11	54,34	5,68	6,11
Intercept-Woman	5,71***	0,12	47,68	5,47	5,95
Actor Discrepancy- Man	0,47**	0,17	2,74	0,13	0,81
Actor Discrepancy-Woman	0,22	0,19	1,20	-0,14	0,59
Partner Discrepancy-Man	0,26	0,17	1,52	-0,08	0,59
Partner Discrepancy-Woman	0,63***	0,19	3,31	0,25	1,00
<i>Basic Need Satisfaction</i>					
Intercept Man	4,02***	0,07	60,08	3,89	4,15
Intercept Woman	4,18***	0,07	62,47	4,05	4,32
Actor Discrepancy Man	0,33**	0,11	3,11	0,12	0,54
Actor Discrepancy Woman	0,24*	0,10	2,30	0,03	0,45
Partner Discrepancy Man	0,26*	0,10	2,53	0,06	0,47
Partner Discrepancy Woman	0,11	0,11	1,09	-0,09	0,325
<i>Perceived Partner Responsiveness</i>					
Intercept Man	6,64***	0,16	41,58	6,38	6,96
Intercept Woman	6,82***	0,16	42,74	6,50	7,14
Actor Discrepancy Man	0,93***	0,25	3,67	0,43	1,42
Actor Discrepancy Woman	0,51**	0,25	2,05	0,02	1,00
Partner Discrepancy Man	0,83***	0,25	3,33	0,34	1,32
Partner Discrepancy Woman	0,72**	0,25	2,86	0,22	1,22

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Conclusion of the APIM Analyses

The overview of APIM analyses were presented in Table 2. Actor and partner effects of discrepancy between ideals and actual partner evaluations on relational outcomes were presented together. To summarize, the actor effects were found to be significant for men for all relational variables. Specifically, men's own discrepancy was negatively associated with their own relationship quality, need fulfillment in their relationship and perceived partner responsiveness. However, women's own discrepancy was negatively associated with just for need satisfaction and perceived partner responsiveness. For the partner effects, it was found women's partner's discrepancy was negatively associated with their own relationship quality ratings and perceived partner responsiveness. Moreover, men's partner's discrepancy was negatively associated with their own need satisfaction and perceived partner responsiveness.

*Table 2. Overview of APIM Analyses*

		Within-Person Correlated Discrepancy	
		Actor Effect	Partner Effect
Relationship Quality	Men	*	
	Women		*
Need Satisfaction	Men	*	*
	Women	*	
Perceived Partner Responsiveness	Men	*	*
	Women	*	*

\* indicates significant relationships

## Discussion

The objectives of this study were to replicate previous findings indicating the association between ideal-actual discrepancy and relationship quality, to determine the extent to which discrepancy is related to other central romantic relationship variables and to explore interpersonal associations. For these, Ideal Standards Model was used, since it was addressed as the theoretical articulation of how mate preferences should be related to people's current romantic partners (Durante et al., 2016) and it is suggested as an influential model in close relationship research tradition (Eastwick, Finkel and Simpson, 2019). Couples were included into the study and it was hypothesized that one's partner's own discrepancy level would predict not

only own, but also partner's relational outcomes. Despite slight sex differences regarding significant associations regarding actor and partner effects, it can be said that this hypothesis was mostly supported. Specifically, actor effects demonstrated that as individuals' ideal-actual mismatch increases, their own relationship quality ratings tend to be more negative, and they tend to feel less satisfied with their needs and perceive their partner as being less responsive. Moreover, partner effects revealed that as individuals' partners' ideal-actual mismatch increases, their own relationship quality ratings tend to be more negative, and they tend to feel less satisfied with their needs and perceive their partner as being less responsive.

Ideal Standards Model researchers investigated and observed partner effects for relationship quality in the past (e.g., Campbell et al., 2001; Overall et al., 2006); however, there were limited research regarding interpersonal effects of the discrepancy level, not only for relationship quality, but also for other included relationship variables. In this sense, the present work is prominent as a dyadic research investigating both actor and partner effects of ideal standards, and it can be concluded that partner's ideals and mismatch of ideals and current perceptions are also predictive and central for relationship process. That is, the importance of match in the eyes of the partner seem to be mostly associated with the extent to which people evaluate their relationship as more positive, the extent to which people feel understood, cared for, and appreciated by their romantic partner and the extent to which people feel autonomous, competent and related within their romantic relationship.

As addressed in previous studies (see Reis, 2012), perceived partner responsiveness was found to be the most prominent relational outcome among the examined variables in the present study. For both men and women, both actor and partner effects were significant, which means not only one's own, but also one's partner's ideal-actual mismatch predict how much responsive one would perceive his/her partner (such as kind, considerate, being a good listener, etc.). There is a lack of research in the literature investigating the link between inconsistent ideals-actuals and perceived partner responsiveness. The present work demonstrated the significance of ideal-actual mismatch discrepancy in the perception of partner responsiveness.

In Ideal Standards Model literature, in both initial studies and later studies, the predictive validity of ideal standards was supported for relationship quality within the ongoing relationships context (Campbell et al., 2001; Eastwick and Neff, 2012; Fletcher et al., 1999; 2000a; Overall et al., 2006). More recently, a meta-analysis also revealed that the individuals who perceive their partners closer to their ideal standards tend to be more satisfied with their relationships and the current partner (Eastwick et al., 2013). In the present study, there were also significant associations for relationship quality supporting and replicating previous findings. However, actor effects were observed only for men and partner effects were observed only for women. That is, men's own discrepancy was negatively associated with their own relationship quality whereas women's partner's discrepancy was negatively associated with their own relationship quality. A possible explanation for these unexpected gender differences not only for relationship quality but also need satisfaction may be derived from the lack of adequate statistical power of the current study. If there was a higher sample size, all the expected associations might have been observed for both sexes.

Another expectation was that ideal-perception inconsistency would be associated with lower satisfaction feelings of basic needs drawing from the self-determination theory perspective. In literature, there is scarce research directly studying this observed link. However, Rodriguez et al. (2015) found that match of intrinsic ideals (regarding warmth-trustworthiness) with actuals were more directly associated with higher satisfaction feelings of basic needs in romantic relationships than match of extrinsic ideals (regarding status and resources). Although, there was no segregation for intrinsic and extrinsic ideals in the analyses of the present study, it was found that higher gaps between ideals and perceptions were associated with feeling of less autonomy, less competence and less relatedness within the relationship.

At first glance, it might seem that need satisfaction is similar to relationship satisfaction, and the question "how do these two constructs differentiate from each other?" may be raised. However, it was claimed that high quality close relationships involve more than simply feeling satisfied (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Instead, relational well-being arises if the context is in support of fulfillment of basic needs, which in turn make it easier for the couples to manage relational disagreements and conflicts (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Hence, basic need satisfaction includes complete functioning within

the relationships, and present work revealed that the closer the current partner to the ideal standards the more satisfied psychological needs in romantic relationships.

### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies*

As mentioned above, limited sample size is one of the limitations of the current study. The present study is also limited in terms of some measurement issues and generalizability. There are two main limitations regarding measurement issues, and the first one is in terms of retrospective evaluations of ideal standards. Participants were asked to rate partner- and relationship-related scales along with their ideal standards for a romantic partner. However, they rated their ideal standards for a romantic partner retrospectively. Particularly, they rated the important characteristics of their ideal partner while within a romantic relationship, and we do not know whether their described current ideal partner is different from the one before their relationship. However, there is no other method of assessing the mismatch between ideal and actual partners in cross-sectional designs like the present one. Although the present work is the one making contribution to the field by investigating predictive validity of ideal standards for different relational outcomes, longitudinal designs are recommended for future research. Moreover, as claimed by previous studies, there could be possible shifts in ideals operating in dating relationships (Campbell and Stanton, 2014; Eastwick and Neff, 2012), and increase in interdependence between romantic couples may result in shrinking of the gap between ideal standards and the current perceptions (Eastwick et al., 2011). Recently, it was found that after entering relationships, people tend to adjust their ideal preferences towards the attributes of the partner (Gerlach, Arslan, Schultze, Reinhard and Penke, 2019).

Second limitation in terms of measurement issues is that individuals' idiosyncratic ideal standards or values in terms of a romantic partner were not evaluated in the present study. Instead, certain traits, which are suggested by Ideal Standards Model, were used to assess individuals' ideal standards. However, individual differences in terms of values and ideal standards might have different relational outcomes. Thus, it might be better for future studies to evaluate idiosyncratic ideals, along with certain traits.

Lastly, the present study has also generalizability problems regarding sample characteristics. Most of the participants were university students and they were dating romantic couples. The implications of the ideal standards could be different in marital context, and future studies could explore how the ideal preferences of spouses relates to the recommended relational outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

The present study was set out with the aim of examining the link between ideal-actual mismatch and romantic relationship evaluations. The hypothesis of the study was mostly supported, and the results not only confirmed the previous findings, but also contributed additional evidence for the Ideal Standards Model research, suggesting new links. That is, for instance, if people perceive their partner as being adventurous as they desire, they evaluate the relationship as more positive, feel more satisfied with their psychological needs and perceive themselves more cared for.

As stated in literature, ideals are pivotal components of the social mind that provide guidance and regulation for people's interpersonal worlds (Fletcher and Simpson, 2000), which results in shaping relationship development (Eastwick and Neff, 2012). Hence, the present study contributes to extend the knowledge in this field, with the main concern for understanding what people hope for in a relationship partner, who s/he ends up with, and how the implications of this hope-end up process operate.

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