



Partner Buffering: A Conceptual Review

Partnerin Tampon İşlevi: Kavramsal Bir Derleme

 Elvan Baran Karalar¹,  Çiğdem Yavuz Güler¹

¹Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University, Istanbul

ABSTRACT

Attachment theory posits that the relational patterns individuals develop during childhood tend to persist throughout life. In this context, attachment styles—secure, anxious, or avoidant—play a decisive role in shaping the functioning of romantic relationships. Individuals with insecure attachment styles often experience difficulties in their romantic relationships, and these challenges are reflected in relational dynamics. One of the approaches developed in recent years to address such difficulties is the partner buffering concept, which suggests that individuals may overcome challenges arising from insecure attachment through the regulatory support of their partners. The concept also refers to the supportive behaviors enacted by one partner to alleviate the other's emotional distress in the context of a romantic relationship. This approach emphasizes that within a relationship, not only the individual but also the partner assumes an active role, and that relational processes are shaped through mutual regulation. Thus, partners play a functional role in alleviating each other's difficulties, balancing emotional burdens, and strengthening the sense of security within the relationship. In this review, the concept of partner buffering is examined, and key studies in the literature are analyzed. The aim is to demonstrate how the negative effects of insecure attachment styles in romantic relationships can be regulated and to explain how this emerging theoretical framework contributes to relational dynamics. In conclusion, when the partner buffering function is understood as a reciprocal rather than an individual process, it becomes evident that it can substantially mitigate the impact of insecure attachment in romantic relationships.

Keywords: Partner buffering, attachment styles, couple relationship

Öz

Bağlanma kuramı, bireylerin çocukluk dönemlerinde geliştirdikleri ilişki kalıplarını yaşam boyu sürdürdüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bireylerin bağlanma stilleri; güvenli, kaygılı ya da kaçınan biçimlerde şekillenebilir ve bu stiller romantik ilişkilerin işleyişinde belirleyici rol oynar. Özellikle güvensiz bağlanma stillerine sahip bireylerin romantik ilişkilerinde zorlanma yaşadığı ve bu durumun romantik ilişkiye yansımalarının olduğu görülmektedir. Son yıllarda bu konuda geliştirilen yaklaşımlardan biri olan partnerin tampon işlevi (partner buffering), bireylerin güvensiz bağlanma stilinden kaynaklı zorlanmalarını partnerlerinin desteğiyle aşabileceğini öne sürmektedir. Ayrıca kavram romantik ilişkide yaşanan herhangi bir duygusal sıkıntı karşısında partnerlerden birinin bu sıkıntıyı gidermek amacıyla giriştiği destekleyici davranışları ifade etmektedir. Bu yaklaşım, bir ilişkide yalnızca bireyin değil, partnerin de aktif bir rol üstlendiğini ve ilişkisel sürecin karşılıklı düzenlemeyle şekillendiğini vurgulamaktadır. Böylece partnerler, birbirlerinin zorluklarını hafifletme, duygusal yüklerini dengeleme ve güven ortamını güçlendirme konusunda işlevsel bir rol oynayabilmektedirler. Bu derlemede, partnerin tampon işlevi kavramı ele alınmış, literatürde yer alan temel çalışmalar incelenmiştir. Amaç, romantik ilişkilerde güvensiz bağlanma stillerinin neden olduğu olumsuzlukların nasıl düzenlenebileceğini ortaya koymak ve bu yeni kuramsal yaklaşımın ilişkisel dinamiklere nasıl katkı sunduğunu açıklamaktır. Sonuç olarak partnerin tampon işlevi kavramı bireysel değil karşılıklı bir süreç olarak ele alındığında, romantik ilişkilerde güvensiz bağlanma stillerinin etkilerini ne derece azalttığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Partnerin tampon işlevi, bağlanma stilleri, çift ilişkisi

Introduction

Romantic relationships constitute a dynamic process characterized by the establishment of meaningful emotional bonds and the inclusion of components grounded in love, loyalty, and trust (Karpuz and Çelik Özkan 2024). Within these relationships, partners do not merely form an emotional connection; they also contribute to each other's processes of coping with stress, the shaping of self-perceptions, and the enhancement of psychological resilience (Reis and Shaver 1988). In this regard, the partner's role extends beyond that of a mere companion, assuming functions as a regulatory, supportive, and restorative agent.

Within this framework, the concept of partner buffering refers to the strategic behaviors exhibited by one partner in a romantic relationship to alleviate the other's emotional distress, enhance feelings of security, and maintain relational stability (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007). Partner buffering behaviors may be displayed both consciously and unconsciously by individuals. These behaviors represent strategic responses aimed at strengthening the sense of trust within the relationship, responding to the partner's needs, and facilitating a smoother resolution of potential conflicts in the romantic context. This concept has been gaining increasing prominence in the literature—particularly within the domains of attachment theory, stress coping, interpersonal emotion regulation, and romantic relationship processes (Lemay and Neal 2014, Simpson and Overall 2014).

One of the distinctive aspects of the concept is that it provides an effective protective mechanism not only in response to the needs of insecurely attached individuals but also against everyday stressors encountered within the relationship. In this way, partner buffering positions the partner's role at a critical intersection in romantic relationships—contributing both to individual psychological well-being and to relational stability and satisfaction. In the literature, the concept is referred to as “partner buffering”, and it does not yet have an established equivalent in Turkish. We propose using the expression “partnerin tampon işlevi” as its Turkish translation. The aim of this study is to examine and explicate the concept of partner buffering and the processes that give rise to it. Furthermore, by drawing attention to existing gaps in the literature, this study seeks to provide a theoretical foundation for future empirical research.

Attachment Theory

Attachment is a complex structure that forms the foundation of relationships. From the moment a human being is born, they establish closeness with their caregiver. This closeness continues throughout the individual's life. The foundations of Attachment Theory were laid in the 20th century by John Bowlby (1958). According to Bowlby, attachment is the tendency of an individual to seek proximity to a figure in order to ensure a sense of security when under stress. Individuals turn to their attachment figures not only when they feel distressed but also to maintain their emotional well-being (Sroufe and Waters 1977). However, the quality of individuals' attachment relationships is shaped by the caregiving styles they experience from an early age (Bowlby 1969, Ainsworth et al. 1978). These early experiences influence future relationships. In line with this view, an important concept in Attachment Theory is the “internal working model” (Atak and Taşan 2012). Internal working models consist of traces in episodic memory derived from one's past experiences with attachment figures, as well as general beliefs, attitudes, and values regarding close relationships (Collins and Read 1990, Pietromonaco and Carnelley 1994). According to this model, two basic schemas develop in the mother-child interaction: the “worthy self” and the “reliable other.” These two schemas are associated with attachment anxiety and with distance-maintaining or avoidance behaviors observed in close relationships (Kesebir et al. 2011). This tendency is not limited to childhood; rather, it emerges in adulthood as well, particularly in the context of romantic relationships, exhibiting similar dynamics (Bowlby 1969, Mikulincer and Shaver 2007). Reis and Shaver (1988) linked attachment styles with romantic love, arguing that individuals' attachment styles determine the nature of their relationships with their partners in romantic contexts. According to this view, securely attached individuals do not fear being in a romantic relationship or being abandoned. They hold a positive outlook toward both themselves and others. Avoidantly attached individuals, on the other hand, tend to avoid closeness in most of their relationships. For those with this attachment style, trusting and forming bonds with others is quite difficult. In anxious attachment, individuals harbor thoughts of being unloved and strive to form closer

relationships with their partners. Individuals with this attachment style frequently experience a fear of losing their partners (Reis and Shaver 1988).

As a result, anxiously attached individuals remain constantly alert regarding their partner's love and the possibility of rejection, which may lead to dysfunctional behaviors within romantic relationships (Collins and Feeney 2004). This, in turn, can cause dissatisfaction and anger in their partners (Downey et al. 1998). Avoidantly attached individuals, on the other hand, tend to distance themselves from their partners and refrain from seeking support in stressful situations, attempting to cope with emotional distress on their own (Mikulincer and Shaver 2003). In both forms of insecure attachment, problems within romantic relationships may intensify, leading to relational instability (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007). In recent years, the role of partners in regulating these negative cycles has been increasingly investigated (Lemay and Dudley 2011). Partner buffering has emerged particularly in this context as a new area of research that explores the regulatory effect of romantic partners on insecure attachment styles. In this article, we will summarize current studies on partner buffering and its positive influence on insecure attachment styles.

Partner Buffering and Conceptual Framework

Partner buffering in romantic relationships has been defined as the supportive behaviors or actions undertaken by one partner to alleviate the other's emotional distress (Overall et al. 2013, Simpson and Overall 2014). This phenomenon is not limited to attachment-related difficulties; it is also applicable in cases where individual characteristics such as high neuroticism, low self-esteem, or heightened sensitivity to rejection are present (Simpson and Overall 2014). Recent research has demonstrated that partner buffering serves as an effective mechanism for preventing the negative outcomes associated with insecure attachment. Simpson and Overall (2014) proposed a model suggesting that insecure attachment can be buffered by one's partner (Figure 1). This model illustrates how partner buffering operates in the face of a stressful situation. According to the model, when individuals with insecure attachment experience stress, their attachment systems become activated. In romantic relationships, one partner (the non-stressed, buffering or agent partner) may, either intentionally or unintentionally, engage in buffering behaviors to soothe the stress of the other partner (the stressed or target partner).

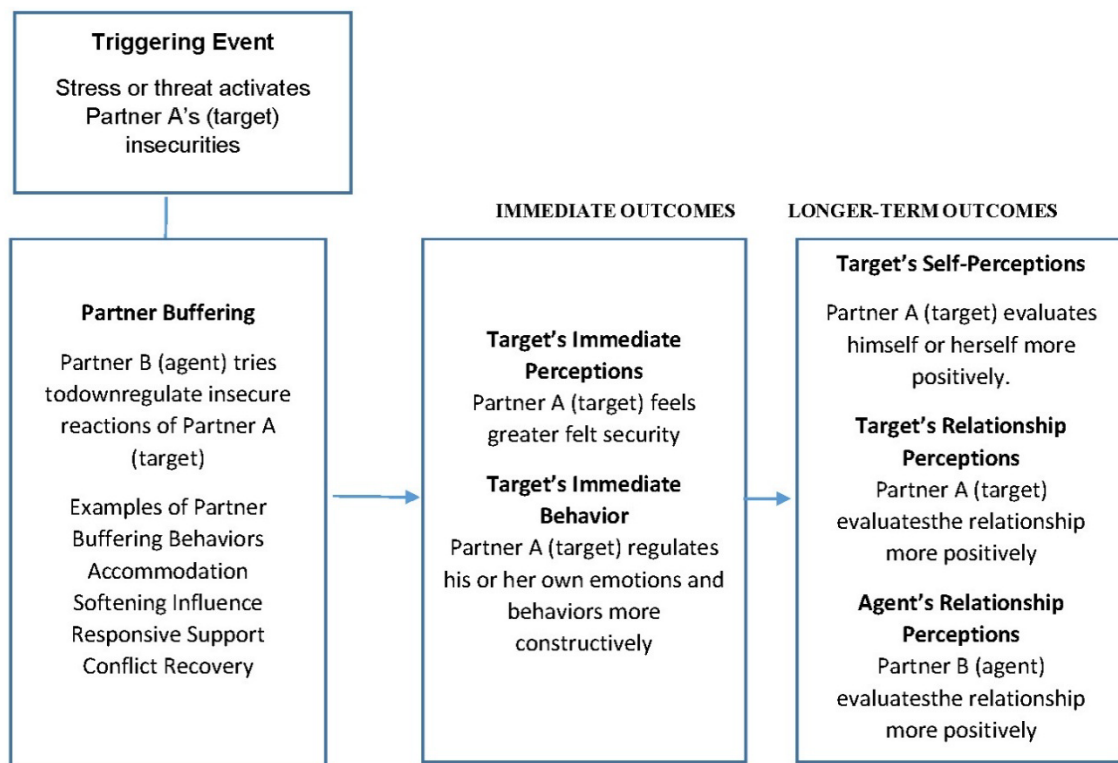


Figure 1. Regulatory role of partner buffering (Simpson and Overall 2014)

In a study by Tran and Simpson (2009) examining partner buffering behaviors, it was observed that the partners of anxiously attached individuals tended to calm them, maintain the relationship, and attempt to resolve relational problems. These individuals were found to experience emotional relief in response to affectionate touch from their partners (Carmichael et al. 2020). Overall et al. (2013) demonstrated that partners of avoidantly attached individuals were more successful in resolving conflicts within the relationship when they exhibited buffering behaviors that respected their partner's autonomy and adopted gentler approaches. Furthermore, avoidantly attached individuals feel safer when their partners refrain from making demanding requests that might burden the relationship and instead engage in relaxed, nonthreatening conversations. Engaging in enjoyable activities, expressing gratitude, and spending quality time together enhance the relational well-being of such individuals (Park et al. 2019).

In a multi-observational study conducted by Girme and Overall (2023), partner buffering was identified as a facilitating factor in emotional recovery following conflict. The study reported that individuals with high attachment anxiety recovered more quickly and evaluated their relationship more positively when emotionally comforted by their partners. The support and buffering provided by one partner—such as offering personalized care and comfort to a distressed partner—can facilitate the other partner's personal growth (Girme et al. 2013), enhance relationship quality (Farrell et al. 2016), and reduce chronic attachment insecurities (Arriaga et al. 2020). Although the literature predominantly reports that partner buffering leads to outcomes such as increased attachment security and improved relationship quality, this effect is not always positive (Eller and Simpson 2020). Factors such as the individual's willingness to be buffered or supported within the relationship and the precise nature of their emotional needs play a significant role (Reis and Clark 2013). In this context, three elements emerge as determinants of the success or failure of partner buffering (Eller and Simpson 2020): motivation, ability, and timing.

For partner buffering to be effective, it depends not only on the efforts of the supportive partner but also on the motivation of the target individual (the one in need of buffering) to accept the support and achieve emotional regulation (Simpson and Rholes 2012). Many theoretical models assume that target individuals are willing to reduce their emotional distress; however, this is not always the case. Attachment styles, in particular, play a significant role in shaping this motivation. Individuals with avoidant attachment tendencies place excessive importance on maintaining autonomy due to past experiences with inadequate or rejecting caregivers (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007). These individuals may perceive emotional support attempts from their partners as threats to their independence and respond with defensive or withdrawal-oriented—avoidant—reactions (Fraley and Shaver 2000, Mohr and Fassinger 2003). Therefore, to provide effective partner support, it is recommended that buffering strategies be implemented in a gentle manner that respects the individual's need for autonomy and avoids intruding upon the partner's personal boundaries (Collins and Feeney 2004).

Individuals with anxious attachment tendencies, on the other hand, may become excessively dependent on their partners for emotional regulation. These individuals often display a heightened preoccupation with seeking closeness, frequently monitoring their partner's attention and affection toward them (Shaver and Mikulincer 2002, Feeney and Thrush 2010). This dynamic can hinder the target individual's ability to develop self-regulation skills, leading to increased dependency and fear of abandonment within the relationship. Such a pattern may render partner buffering ineffective, as the constant seeking or demanding of support from one's partner can disrupt both individual and relational balance (Collins et al. 2011). At times, individuals may continue the relationship without recognizing this excessive dependency, which in turn can lead to emotional exhaustion for the buffering partner. Over time, this situation may result in feelings of dissatisfaction and anger for the partner, reduced relational motivation, and ultimately the deterioration of the romantic relationship (Eller and Simpson 2020).

In conclusion, the target individual's motivation toward the partner's buffering efforts directly determines the effectiveness of this support. While avoidant individuals may withdraw from such buffering attempts, anxious individuals may become overly dependent on them. Therefore, when exhibiting buffering behaviors, partners may need to adopt strategies that are attuned to the target partner's underlying attachment style.

When individuals need emotional or other forms of support, they communicate this need to others. During infancy, such needs are expressed through crying or cooing, while in early childhood, individuals learn to articulate these needs verbally. Although expressing such needs may appear easier in adulthood, it often remains complex. In romantic relationships, the success of partner buffering depends not only on the target individual's need for emotional support or buffering but also on their ability to express this need appropriately. The target individual must be aware of their need and communicate it effectively to their partner. However, avoidantly attached individuals may lack awareness of their emotional needs and be unable to convey them effectively to their partners (Pepping et al. 2013), which can make it difficult for their partners to engage in effective buffering. Conversely, anxiously attached individuals may express their emotions intensely and uncontrollably (Barrett et al. 2001). Both tendencies can hinder the effective communication of buffering needs, making it challenging for the partner to determine the appropriate buffering strategy. The effectiveness of partner buffering can thus be influenced by the target individual's ability to signal their emotions and needs accurately to their partner (Eller and Simpson 2020).

Starting a romantic relationship, getting to know one another, and developing certain relational dynamics can take time (Altman and Taylor 1973). As the romantic relationship progresses, the frequency of buffering behaviors between partners may also change. Especially in the early stages of a relationship, one of the insecurely attached partners may require more buffering; however, as trust develops within the relationship, the frequency of such behaviors tends to decrease over time (Collins and Feeney 2004).

On the other hand, when one partner continuously engages in buffering the other, it may lead to feelings of inadequacy or emotional exhaustion in the buffering partner (Ybema 2002, Le et al. 2018). Such cycles can, in turn, reduce the effectiveness of buffering within the relationship. Therefore, it is beneficial to engage in buffering behaviors with an awareness that partners' needs within a romantic relationship evolve and transform over time.

Role of Partner Buffering in Insecure Attachment Styles

Recent theoretical and empirical studies have demonstrated that partner buffering can transform the effects of insecure attachment on both the individual and the romantic relationship (Overall and Simpson 2013, Stanton and Campbell 2014, Arriaga et al. 2020, Eller and Simpson 2020, Overall et al. 2022). In particular, the Attachment Security Enhancement Model (ASEM) developed by Arriaga et al. (2020) proposes three key propositions to explain these processes. These propositions are as follows:

The first proposition is that individuals' attachment styles may differ within romantic relationships. The motivation of securely attached individuals to maintain the relationship, as well as partners' responsiveness to each other's needs, differs from that of insecurely attached individuals. However, research has shown that partners' insecure attachment styles can be regulated through buffering processes. The second proposition suggests that when partners respond appropriately to the momentary concerns of their insecurely attached partners, the negative impact of these emotions can be alleviated. For example, expressions of love and commitment are effective for anxiously attached individuals, whereas respecting the need for distance is more appropriate for avoidantly attached individuals (Lemay and Dudley 2011, Kim et al. 2018). In the Attachment Security Enhancement Model, these strategic responses may be enacted either consciously or unconsciously by individuals. Such partner behaviors are referred to as soft or soothing strategies. Although soft strategies can resolve temporary feelings of insecurity in a romantic relationship, they do not completely eliminate the underlying attachment insecurity. For instance, an anxiously attached individual may be calmed by their partner's expression of love and commitment in response to momentary distress; however, this may not prevent them from needing similar reassurance in the future. Similarly, an avoidantly attached individual's tendency to withdraw may not entirely disappear over time. Therefore, partners may eventually become fatigued from having to consistently employ strategic approaches in every instance of insecurity.

The final and most significant premise of the Attachment Security Enhancement Model posits that such protective responses, when combined with consistent and reassuring support over time, can reshape individuals' mental representations of the self and others, thereby fostering the development of a more

secure attachment system. This process supports the growth of trust and a sense of self-worth (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016).

This model emphasizes that the ability of insecurely attached individuals to experience more positive outcomes in their relationships depends not only on their own efforts but also on their partners' level of responsiveness and buffering behaviors. Thus, the partner's role is viewed not as a passive observer in the attachment process but as an active regulator.

In stressful situations within romantic relationships, anxiously attached individuals may display intense distress, feelings of threat, and destructive behaviors (Collins and Feeney 2004). However, when their partners exhibit high levels of sensitivity, attentiveness, and commitment, these negative effects can be mitigated (Johnson 2019). A partner's investment in the relationship—demonstrating positive emotions, engaging in soothing physical contact, and expressing love and gratitude—enhances the sense of security experienced by anxiously attached individuals (Mikulincer et al. 2002, Overall et al. 2013).

It is common for avoidantly attached individuals to develop feelings of distrust toward their partners and to prioritize their need for independence (Simpson and Overall 2014). These individuals tend to withdraw and show resistance in situations involving conflict or self-sacrifice. However, when partners demonstrate reliability and respect the avoidant individual's autonomy, such negative reactions can be reduced (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). Effective partner buffering for avoidant individuals involves gentler approaches, such as respecting their autonomy and appreciating their efforts (Collins and Feeney 2004, Johnson 2019). These buffering behaviors help diminish defensive responses, increase relationship commitment, and, over time, reduce avoidant attachment tendencies within the romantic relationship (Simpson and Overall 2014). Examples of partner buffering behaviors that may help alleviate attachment insecurities in individuals with insecure attachment styles within romantic relationships are presented in Table 1 (Overall et al. 2022).

Table 1. Partner buffering of romantic attachment insecurity in couple interactions (Overall et al. 2022)		
Adult attachment orientation	Central ingredients of partner buffering	Examples of partner buffering behaviours
Attachment anxiety	Partner's reassurance of commitment Partners' soothing of feelings of threat and distress	Expressions of commitment, positive regard and gratitude, accommodating negativity, affectionate touch, responsive support, satisfying sex
Attachment avoidance	Partner's demonstration of trustworthiness Partners' respect for autonomy	Soft/indirect forms of influence, recognition of and gratitude for sacrifices, indirect support that respects autonomy, clear, instrumental caregiving, frequent sex

Sexuality and Partner Buffering

Romantic relationships are not limited to the process of forming emotional bonds; they also encompass forms of interaction such as physical contact and sexuality. In a relational context, sexuality is not merely a physical act but a multidimensional experience that functions to establish intimacy, build emotional security, and fulfill attachment needs. From the perspective of Attachment Theory, sexuality serves as a powerful regulatory and restorative factor in partner buffering processes (Raposo and Muise 2021). Particularly among individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety, sexuality represents an expression of emotional closeness and security (Tracy et al. 2003, Schachner and Shaver 2004, Davis et al. 2006, Birnbaum 2007).

One of the most recent and comprehensive findings on sexuality and partner buffering was presented by Raposo and Muise (2021). Their study revealed that, among anxiously attached individuals, perceived partner sexual responsiveness increased both daily and long-term relationship satisfaction and sexual fulfillment. A partner's sensitive approach to sexual needs reinforced feelings of trust, closeness, and commitment in these individuals. The research also indicated that perceived partner sexual

responsiveness plays a crucial role in maintaining relationship stability. Thus, the study demonstrated that sexuality functions as a protective factor for anxiously attached partners. Another study similarly found that sexuality in romantic relationships can buffer partners' insecure attachment styles. In this research, which examined 207 couples, the frequency of sexual activity and marital satisfaction were assessed. The findings showed that sexual frequency was associated with increased marital satisfaction only among individuals with an avoidant attachment style (Little et al. 2010).

In conclusion, sexuality should be regarded as one of the fundamental components of partner buffering. Particularly among individuals with anxious and avoidant attachment styles, a partner's sexual responsiveness enhances feelings of security and relationship stability while facilitating emotional regulation. It is important to recognize that sexuality is not merely a pleasure-oriented interaction but a multifaceted process that serves functions of relational healing, emotional support, and bonding.

Conflict in Romantic Relationships and Partner Buffering

In romantic relationships, individuals' abilities to establish emotional intimacy, seek support, and resolve problems are largely shaped by their attachment styles. In particular, avoidantly attached individuals are characterized by a reluctance to trust their romantic partners, an avoidance of emotional closeness, and a strong desire for autonomy (Mikulincer and Shaver 2003). Individuals with this attachment pattern may perceive their partner's requests for change during conflict as threats, leading them to develop defensive strategies such as anger, withdrawal, and emotional disengagement (Simpson et al. 1992, Rholes et al. 1999).

It has long been established that avoidant attachment negatively affects relationship functioning. Avoidantly attached individuals tend to refrain from both seeking and accepting support from their romantic partners and often display responses that limit emotional intimacy (Collins and Feeney 2000). Such defensive behaviors lead to increased individual stress and decreased relational satisfaction. However, sensitive and buffering behaviors displayed by the partner can mitigate these negative effects, allowing the relationship to recover emotionally at a faster rate (Salvatore et al. 2011).

Accordingly, the study conducted by Overall et al. (2013) examined whether the defensive reactions—such as anger and withdrawal—displayed by avoidantly attached individuals during conflict discussions with their partners could be reduced through the partner's buffering behaviors. The findings indicated that avoidantly attached individuals tend to experience greater anger and withdraw more from the relationship when faced with conflict. However, these defensive responses were significantly mitigated when partners employed buffering behaviors, such as being sensitive to the individual's need for autonomy, emphasizing their positive qualities, and using compassion or humor. Consequently, the level of anger among avoidant individuals decreased significantly, and the conflict resolution process was evaluated as more successful.

These findings suggest that avoidant attachment is not an absolute barrier to romantic relationships; rather, a partner's sensitive and autonomy-respecting approach can temporarily relax this defensive system or help make it function more adaptively within the relationship. Such regulatory behaviors by the partner not only enhance the functionality of the relationship but also serve a protective buffering role. Therefore, this dynamic may improve not only the success of conflict resolution but also the overall sustainability and satisfaction level of the relationship (Overall et al. 2013).

Conclusion

The partner buffering function refers to the supportive behaviors or actions undertaken by one partner in a romantic relationship to reduce the other partner's emotional distress (Simpson and Overall 2014, Overall et al. 2015). This article provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the concept of partner buffering.

The partner buffering function, which plays an effective role in reducing the negative effects of attachment insecurity in romantic relationships, demonstrates that relationship satisfaction is shaped not only by individuals' own psychological resources but also by their partners' sensitivity and regulatory

support (Simpson and Overall 2014, Overall et al. 2022). Partner buffering enables individuals with insecure attachment styles to respond more adaptively to stressful or threatening situations, thereby fostering a more secure environment within the romantic relationship context (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016).

In this review, the effectiveness of the partner buffering function is discussed within the context of three key factors: the target individual's motivation, their ability to express emotional needs and to provide emotional support, and the developmental course of the relationship. These dimensions are supported by empirical findings in the literature (Eller and Simpson 2020). Specifically, anxiously attached individuals tend to respond more positively to supportive behaviors from their partners that involve affection, compassion, and physical closeness, whereas avoidantly attached individuals benefit more from buffering behaviors that respect their autonomy and avoid pressure (Overall et al. 2013, Park et al. 2019).

The effects of partner buffering may not always be positive. When the target individual is not receptive to buffering, or when the partner is unable to sustain supportive strategies over time, relationship satisfaction may decline, and the supportive partner may experience emotional exhaustion (Ybema et al. 2002, Le et al. 2018). At this point, the Attachment Security Enhancement Model (ASEM) posits that partner buffering has the potential not only to provide momentary emotional regulation but also to transform mental representations in the long term (Arriaga et al. 2020). This model suggests that repeated, consistent, and sensitive partner behaviors can gradually influence the target individual's internal working models in a positive way, thereby facilitating a shift toward a secure attachment pattern (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016, Johnson 2019).

In conclusion, the partner buffering function is a mutual regulation strategy grounded in attachment theory, possessing the capacity to transform the negative cycles experienced by individuals with insecure attachment in their romantic relationships. This strategy offers a valuable resource for application in couple therapy interventions. Future research should further explore the long-term effects of cultural contexts, gender roles, and partner buffering on relational stability and quality. Moreover, the absence of a specific measurement tool for this construct in the current literature highlights a significant gap. The development of such an instrument would enable researchers to examine not only positive variables such as relationship satisfaction and quality but also potential negative outcomes—such as burnout experienced by the partner who consistently engages in buffering behaviors—as emphasized throughout this article.

References

- Ainsworth MDS, Blehar MC, Waters E, Wall SN (1978) *Patterns of attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*. New York, Psychology Press.
- Altman I, Taylor DA (1973) *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships*. New York, Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
- Arriaga XB, Eller J, Kumashiro M, Rholes WS, Simpson JA (2020) Self-efficacy and declines over time in attachment anxiety during the transition to parenthood. *Soc Psychol Personal Sci*, 12:658-666.
- Atak H, Taştan N (2012) Romantik ilişkiler ve aşk. *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar*, 4:520-546.
- Barrett LF, Gross JJ (2001) Emotional intelligence: a process model of emotion representation and regulation. In *Emotions: Current Issues and Future Directions* (Eds TJ Mayne, GA Bonanno):286-310. New York, Guilford Press.
- Birnbaum GE (2007) Attachment orientations, sexual functioning, and relationship satisfaction in a community sample of women. *J Soc Pers Relat*, 24:21-35.
- Bowlby J (1958) The nature of the child's tie to his mother. *Int J Psychoanal*, 39:350-373.
- Bowlby J (1969) *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 1: Attachment*. New York, Basic Books.
- Carmichael CL, Goldberg MH, Coyle MA (2020) Security-based differences in touch behavior and its relational benefits. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 12:550-560.
- Collins NL, Ford MB, Feeney BC (2011) An attachment-theory perspective on social support in close relationships. In *Handbook of Interpersonal Psychology: Theory, Research, Assessment, and Therapeutic Interventions* (Eds L Horowitz, S Strack):209-232. Hoboken NJ, Wiley.
- Collins NL, Feeney BC (2004) Working models of attachment shape perceptions of social support: evidence from experimental and observational studies. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 87:363-383.

- Collins NL, Read SJ (1990) Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 58:644-663.
- Davis D, Shaver PR, Widaman KF, Vernon ML, Follette WC, Beitz K et al. (2006) "I can't get no satisfaction": insecure attachment, inhibited sexual communication, and sexual dissatisfaction. *Pers Relatsh*, 13:465-483.
- Downey G, Freitas AL, Michaelis B, Khouri H (1998) The self-fulfilling prophecy in close relationships: rejection sensitivity and rejection by romantic partners. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 75:545-560.
- Eller J, Simpson JA (2020) Theoretical boundary conditions of partner buffering in romantic relationships. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 17:6880.
- Farrell L, Fry TRL, Risse L (2016) The significance of financial self-efficacy in explaining women's personal finance behaviour. *J Econ Psychol*, 54:85-99.
- Feeney BC, Thrusch RL (2010) Relationship influences on exploration in adulthood: the characteristics and function of a secure base. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 98:57-76.
- Fraley RC, Shaver PR (2000) Adult romantic attachment: theoretical developments, emerging controversies, and unanswered questions. *Rev Gen Psychol*, 4:132-154.
- Girme YU, Overall NC (2023) Greater average levels of relatedness need fulfilment across daily and monthly life predict lower attachment insecurities across time. *J Soc Pers Relat*, 42:1127-1148.
- Girme YU, Overall NC, Simpson JA (2013) When visibility matters: short-term versus long-term costs and benefits of visible and invisible support. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull*, 39:1441-1454.
- Johnson S (2019) Attachment in action-changing the face of 21st century couple therapy. *Curr Opin Psychol*, 25:101-104.
- Karpuz A, Çelik Özkan G (2024) Görünmez sınırlar: mikro aldatma ve romantik ilişkilerdeki ince çizgiler. *Turkish Academic Research Review*, 9:188-204.
- Kesibir S, Kavzoğlu SÖ, Üstündağ MF (2011) Bağlanma ve psikopatoloji. *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar*, 3:321-342.
- Kim KJ, Feeney BC, Jakubiak BK (2018) Touch reduces romantic jealousy in the anxiously attached. *J Soc Pers Relat*, 35:1019-1041.
- Le BM, Impett EA, Lemay EP Jr, Muise A, Tskhay KO (2018) Communal motivation and well-being in interpersonal relationships: an integrative review and meta-analysis. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull*, 144:1-25.
- Lemay EP Jr, Dudley KL (2011) Caution: fragile! regulating the interpersonal security of chronically insecure partners. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 100:681-702.
- Lemay EP Jr, Neal AM (2014) Accurate and biased perceptions of responsive support predict well-being. *Motiv Emot*, 38:270-286.
- Little KC, McNulty JK, Russell VM (2010) Sex buffers intimates against the negative implications of attachment insecurity. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull*, 36:484-498.
- Mikulincer M, Shaver PR (2003) The attachment behavioral system in adulthood: activation, psychodynamics, and interpersonal processes. *Adv Exp Soc Psychol*, 35:53-152.
- Mikulincer M, Shaver PR (2007) *Attachment in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics, and Change*. New York, Guilford Press.
- Mikulincer M, Gillath O, Shaver PR (2002) Activation of the attachment system in adulthood: threat-related primes increase the accessibility of mental representations of attachment figures. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 83:881-895.
- Mikulincer M, Shaver PR (2016) *Attachment in Adulthood*, 2nd ed. New York, Guilford Press.
- Mohr JJ, Fassinger RE (2003) Self-acceptance and self-disclosure of sexual orientation in lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults: an attachment perspective. *J Couns Psychol*, 50:482-495.
- Nakamura MS, Simpson JA, Overall NC (2020) Partner buffering in interdependent relationships: an attachment perspective. In *Interdependence, Interaction, and Close Relationships* (Eds LV Machia, CR Agnew, XB Arriaga): 144-159. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Overall NC, Simpson JA, Struthers H (2013) Buffering attachment-related avoidance: softening emotional and behavioral defenses during conflict discussions. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 104:854-871.
- Overall NC, Simpson JA (2015) Attachment and dyadic regulation processes. *Curr Opin Psychol*, 1:61-66.
- Overall NC, Pietromonaco PR, Simpson JA (2022) Buffering and spillover of adult attachment insecurity in couple and family relationships. *Nat Rev Psychol*, 1:101-111.
- Park Y, Impett EA, MacDonald G, Lemay EP Jr (2019) Saying "thank you": partners' expressions of gratitude protect relationship satisfaction and commitment from the harmful effects of attachment insecurity. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 117:773-806.
- Pepping CA, Davis PJ, O'Donovan A (2013) Individual differences in attachment and dispositional mindfulness: the mediating role of emotion regulation. *Pers Individ Dif*, 54:453-456.
- Pietromonaco PR, Carnelley KB (1994) Gender and working models of attachment: consequences for perceptions of self and romantic relationships. *Pers Relatsh*, 1:63-82.

- Raposo S, Muise A (2021) Perceived partner sexual responsiveness buffers anxiously attached individuals' relationship and sexual quality in daily life. *J Fam Psychol*, 35:500-509.
- Reis HT, Clark MS (2013) Responsiveness. In *The Oxford Handbook of Close Relationships* Eds JA Simpson, L Campbell):400-423. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Reis HT, Shaver P (1988) Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In *Handbook of Personal Relationships: Theory, Research and Interventions* (Eds S Duck, DF Hay, SE Hobfoll, W Ickes, BM Montgomery):367-389. Chichester, Wiley.
- Rholes WS, Simpson JA, Orina MM (1999) Attachment and anger in an anxiety-provoking situation. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 76:940-956.
- Salvatore JE, Kuo SI, Steele RD, Simpson JA, Collins WA (2011) Recovering from conflict in romantic relationships: a developmental perspective. *Psychol Sci*, 22:376-383.
- Schachner DA, Shaver PR (2004) Attachment dimensions and sexual motives. *Pers Relatsh*, 11:179-195.
- Shaver PR, Mikulincer M (2002) Attachment-related psychodynamics. *Attach Hum Dev*, 4:133-161.
- Simpson JA, Overall NC (2014) Partner buffering of attachment insecurity. *Curr Dir Psychol Sci*, 23:54-59.
- Simpson JA, Rholes WS, Nelligan JS (1992) Support seeking and support giving within couples in an anxiety-provoking situation: the role of attachment styles. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 62:434-446.
- Simpson JA, Rholes WS (2012) Adult attachment orientations, stress, and romantic relationships. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* Vol.45 (Eds P Devine, A Plant):279-328. San Diego, Academic Press.
- Sroufe LA, Waters E (1977) Attachment as an organizational construct. *Child Dev*, 48:1184-1199.
- Stanton SCE, Campbell L (2014) Psychological and physiological predictors of health in romantic relationships: an attachment perspective. *J Pers*, 82:528-538.
- Tracy JL, Shaver PR, Albino AW, Cooper ML (2003) Attachment styles and adolescent sexuality. In *Adolescent Romantic Relations and Sexual Behavior: Theory, Research, and Practical Implications* (Ed P Florsheim):137-159. Mahwah NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Tran S, Simpson JA (2009) Prerelationship maintenance behaviors: the joint roles of attachment and commitment. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 97:685-698.
- Ybema JF, Kuijter RG, Hagedoorn M, Buunk BP (2002) Caregiver burnout among intimate partners of patients with a severe illness: an equity perspective. *Pers Relatsh*, 9:73-88.

Authors Contributions: The author(s) have declared that they have made a significant scientific contribution to the study and have assisted in the preparation or revision of the manuscript

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Ethical Approval: This review study does not require ethical clearance.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was declared.

Financial Disclosure: No financial support was declared for this study.