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Spotlight on Emre Selcuk



Emre Selcuk is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Sabanci University, Turkey. He received his bachelor's degree from the Business School at Middle East Technical University, Turkey and his Ph.D. in Human Development from Cornell University, United States. In 2020, he received the Science Academy of Turkey's Young Scientist Award.

During his doctoral training at Cornell, Emre worked with Cindy Hazan, one of the pioneers of adult attachment research in social and personality psychology. To this day, Emre feels deeply indebted to Cindy for not only collaborating with him and nurturing his academic development, but also for encouraging him to become a scholar who is caring of students and colleagues.

Emre also met other exceptional scholars at Cornell. In one of his first projects in graduate school, he collaborated with Vivian Zayas examining emotion regulation functions of close relationships. They showed that even simple reminders of loved ones (e.g., looking at a photograph of a parent or romantic partner) were very helpful in recovering from negative emotions induced by recalling upsetting experiences (Selcuk et al., 2012). This study increased Emre's interest in the powerful influence close relationships exert on well-being.



Coffee breaks with Anthony Ong during graduate school also helped Emre to pursue this interest. Emre's office at Cornell was in the same hallway as Anthony's and they used to take occasional breaks from work (Anthony was the coffee drinker, Emre always drank tea). In one of these meetings, they talked about Anthony's work on the Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) data. Anthony was examining age-related changes in positive affect and health. Emre realized that the data could also be utilized to study long-term effects of perceived partner responsiveness (i.e., the extent to which we feel our partners understand, validate, and care for us). Over the years, other relationship researchers—including Rich Slatcher (University of Georgia, US), Gul Gunaydin (Sabanci University, Turkey), and Sarah Stanton (University of Edinburgh, Scotland) to name a few—joined the team. Together, they have demonstrated that having a responsive partner may help improve sleep quality (Selcuk et al., 2017), increase psychological well-being (Selcuk et al., 2016; Tasfiliz et al., 2018), regulate the body's primary stress hormone cortisol (Slatcher et al., 2015), and even enhance longevity (Selcuk & Ong, 2013; Stanton et al., 2019).

Recently, Emre initiated a second line of research, in collaboration with Gul Gunaydin, examining decision-making processes in mate selection. In one of the first studies in this research program, they teamed up with Cindy Hazan and Cansu Yilmaz (former Ph.D. student and currently an Assistant Professor at Anadolu University, Turkey) to investigate the role of status quo preference in relationship maintenance. They proposed that current romantic relationships represent the status quo and revealed, in a series of experiments, that the tendency to preserve the status quo is one reason why relationships persist (Gunaydin et al., 2018). The research team is currently examining whether individuals with stronger status quo preferences in daily life are more committed to their relationships and less likely to break up.

Although the majority of Emre's research has focused on romantic relationships, he recently had a chance to apply close relationship theories to the study of social networks. The project, in collaboration with Omri Gillath (University of Kansas, US) and Gery Karantzas (Deakin University, Australia), investigated friendship networks from an attachment perspective. The team came up with the idea when Emre spent a year in Omri's lab as a Fulbright Fellow. One recent paper from this research program (Gillath et al., 2017) revealed that avoidant individuals (i.e., who feel discomfort with closeness and intimacy) perceived their friendship network as loose, with friends feeling less close to each other. Moreover, avoidant individuals were also less likely to have friends fulfilling multiple roles (e.g., socializing, emotional support, instrumental support); rather, they relied on each friend for a limited number of roles. These findings suggest that theoretical perspectives traditionally employed in the study of intimate relationships can also be helpful in understanding the structure of broader social networks.



Writing this spotlight piece, Emre realized and appreciated how fortunate he is being surrounded by wonderful colleagues, some of whom he cited here. When he was a prospective graduate student, Emre had a chance to meet Art Aron (Stony Brook University, US). Art told him that the relationship science community is filled with supportive scholars who are fun to work with. So far, in his early career, Emre has witnessed repeatedly that Art was spot-on in his observation!

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