

REVIEW ARTICLE / DERLEME YAZISI

An Analysis of the TV Series Bahar in the Context of Gottman Couple Therapy

Bahar Dizisinin Gottman Çift Terapisi Bağlamında İncelenmesi

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Abstract:

The series Bahar centers on the main character, Bahar, who begins to re-evaluate her life, relationships, and especially her marriage after being suddenly diagnosed with a serious illness. Bahar's illness is portrayed not merely as a health problem but as a symbolic turning point that prompts her to question her self-perception, life priorities, and relational needs. At the heart of the series lies the theme of infidelity, which serves as a dramatic element revealing how trust, commitment, and communication dynamics in Bahar's relationship shift following this emotional violation. In this context, the series explores themes of loyalty, rebuilding trust, and repairing emotional intimacy in intimate relationships. Gottman Couple Therapy is based on Dr. John Gottman's scientific research, initiated in the 1970s and grounded in laboratory observations of couples. It has become one of the most frequently used approaches in contemporary couple therapy. This approach aims to systematically evaluate couples' communication patterns, conflict-resolution capacities, emotional interaction styles, and the strengths and weaknesses present in their relationships. This study aims to analyze the series Bahar using the Gottman Couple Therapy "Sound Relationship House" model. The Sound Relationship House, developed by John and Julie Gottman, consists of seven fundamental levels that support a healthy romantic relationship. These levels include building love maps, fostering admiration and appreciation, turning toward each other rather than away, managing conflict, sharing life dreams, creating shared meaning, and structuring the relationship on a foundation of trust and commitment. Thus, the present study seeks to interpret the relationship dynamics depicted in Bahar through the theoretical lens of Gottman Couple Therapy, offering therapists a new perspective for understanding patterns of communication, attachment, and emotional closeness in couples. By integrating the dramatic structure of the series with Gottman's evidence-based relational model, this study provides a comprehensive evaluation relevant to both theoretical and clinical practice.

Keywords: Gottman couples therapy, Strong relationship house, Series analysis, Spring series.

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Öz:

Bahar dizisi, baş karakter Bahar'ın ani ve ciddi bir hastalığa yakalanmasıyla birlikte yaşamını, ilişkilerini ve özellikle evliliğini yeniden gözden geçirmesini konu edinmektedir. Bahar'ın hastalık deneyimi yalnızca bir sağlık sorunu olarak değil, aynı zamanda karakterin benlik algısını, yaşam önceliklerini ve ilişkisel ihtiyaçlarını sorgulamasına zemin hazırlayan sembolik bir kırılma anı olarak ele alınmaktadır. Dizinin merkezinde yer alan aldatma olgusu ise, Bahar'ın yaşadığı duygusal ihlalin ardından ilişkisindeki güven, bağlılık ve iletişim dinamiklerinin nasıl değiştiğini ortaya koyan dramatik unsur görevi görmektedir. Bu bağlamda dizi, çift ilişkilerinde sadakat, güvenin yeniden oluşturmak ve duygusal yakınlığın onarılması gibi temaları işlemektedir. Gottman Çift Terapisi, Dr. John Gottman'ın 1970'li yıllarda başlattığı ve laboratuvar ortamında çiftlerin gözlemlerine dayanan bilimsel araştırmalarının bir ürünü olup günümüzde çift terapisi alanında en çok başvuru alan yöntemlerden biridir. Bu yaklaşım, çiftlerin iletişim biçimlerini, çatışma çözme kapasitelerini, duygusal etkileşim örüntülerini ve ilişkilerindeki güçlü/ zayıf yönleri sistematik olarak değerlendirmeyi amaçlar. Bu çalışma, Bahar dizisini Gottman Çift Terapisi'nin "Güçlü İlişki Evi" modeli temelinde ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Güçlü İlişki Evi, John ve Julie Gottman tarafından geliştirilmiş, sağlıklı bir romantik ilişkiyi destekleyen yedi temel katmandan oluşmaktadır. Bu katmanlar; sevgi haritaları oluşturma, hayranlık ve takdir sistemi geliştirme, birbirine yönelme yerine birbirinden uzaklaşmama, çatışma yönetimi, yaşam hedeflerinde ortaklık, anlam yaratma ve ilişkinin güven ile bağlılık çerçevesinde yapılandırılması gibi boyutları içerir. Dolayısıyla bu çalışma, Bahar dizisindeki ilişki dinamiklerinin Gottman Çift Terapisi'nin kuramsal yapısıyla ilişkilendirilerek çözümlenmesini hedeflemekte ve özellikle terapistlere, çiftlerin iletişim, bağlılık ve duygusal yakınlık örüntülerini anlamada yeni bir bakış açısı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda dizinin dramatik yapısı ile Gottman'ın bilimsel temelli ilişki modeli bir araya getirilerek hem kuramsal hem de klinik uygulamaya yönelik bütüncül bir değerlendirme sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gottman Çift Terapisi, Güçlü İlişki Evi, Dizi analizi, Bahar dizisi.

Introduction

Gottman Couple Therapy is a holistic therapeutic model developed by American psychologist Dr. John Gottman in collaboration with his wife, Dr. Julie Schwartz Gottman, based on scientific findings. In the early 1970s, John Gottman established a research laboratory with his colleague Robert Levenson to study the processes related to marriage and divorce. The studies conducted in this laboratory aimed to answer the question, 'Which couples are more prone to divorce, and which couples can sustain their marriage?' (Barnacle and Abbott, 2009). Unlike traditional couple's therapy practices, this approach involves observing couples in a laboratory setting engaging in interactions similar to their daily lives through video recordings; additionally, physiological data such as heart rate and blood pressure are monitored to evaluate the biological foundations of relational processes. These data have enabled the identification of the fundamental

principles that distinguish happy couples from unhappy ones (Gottman and Gottman, 2015).

The principles that underpin Gottman Couples Therapy are organized under the Strong Relationship House model. The Strong Relationship House, consisting of nine components, includes elements such as building trust, commitment, love maps, sharing fondness and appreciation, turning toward each other, developing a positive perspective, managing conflicts constructively, achieving life goals, and building shared meaning (Navarra and Gottman, 2018). Seven of these nine components are based on trust and commitment and form the building blocks of a healthy relationship. The Strong Relationship House is a systematic model that shows couples how to strengthen their relationship gradually and provides guidance on building a solid, well-founded relationship (Gottman and Gottman, 2017).



Figure 1. Strong Relationship House

The first three components of the house are Creating Love Maps, Sharing Fondness and Appreciation, and Turning Toward Each Other. These components define the elements of couples' friendship. The first three stages lead to the fourth stage, which is Building a Positive Perspective. The subsequent stages of the house are Managing Conflict, Realizing Dreams and Desires About Life, and Creating a Shared Meaning (Gottman and Gottman, 2015). As a result of the literature review, while studies examine the effectiveness and application of Gottman Couples Therapy, no research has been found that analyzes this therapeutic approach within the context of a film or TV series. In this regard, it is anticipated that this study, which examines the Bahar series in the context of Gottman Couples Therapy, will contribute to the literature. When reviewing film and series analyses conducted with family and couples therapies, studies in the context of Structural Family Therapy (Öztürk and Pak, 2019), Experiential and Solution-Focused Family Therapy (Alkan, Taşdelen, and Toprak, 2023), and Structural and Psychodynamic Family Counseling (Katmer, Demir Kul, and Özkamalı, 2021) have been encountered. The series combines individuals' perception of reality with imagination. Series create a process of identification between viewers and characters; viewers share the characters' emotions and focus on developing possible solutions to their own problems by drawing parallels between the issues presented in the series and their own life experiences (Bostancıoğlu and Kahraman, 2017). This study aims to examine the Bahar series in relation to the components of the Strong Relationship House in Gottman Couples Therapy. To this end, the Theory of the Strong Relationship House is exemplified through relevant scenes from the Bahar series.

Method

In this study, which analyzes the Bahar series within the context of Gottman couples therapy, a content analysis method was used. Content analysis involves organizing written, spoken, or visual materials so that the reader can understand them (Ültay, Akyurt, and Ültay, 2021). During

the analysis process, the Bahar series was watched twice by the researchers, and an analysis within the context of Gottman couples therapy was conducted. In the first viewing, general relationship dynamics, interactions between characters, and conflict patterns in the series were observed to create an overall framework. In the second viewing, scenes from the series were systematically coded according to the components of the Gottman Couple Therapy's Strong Relationship House, and each scene was matched with the relevant theoretical category.

Summary and Demographic Information of the TV Series Bahar

The series is an adaptation of the South Korean production 'Doctor Cha,' and it explores processes of personal transformation, relational rupture, and reconstruction through the life story of the main character, Bahar. Bahar, who married at a young age, left her medical studies after graduation and dedicated her life largely to her husband and children, faces a critical illness requiring a liver transplant due to a sudden emerging health problem. Although her husband, Timur, is a suitable donor, he refuses to donate, prompting Bahar to reevaluate the power dynamics in their marriage, his attitudes, and his long-standing neglectful behavior. During the post-illness period, the character Evren, who becomes part of Bahar's life, contributes to her psychological empowerment and supports her in returning to her medical profession and rebuilding her professional identity. A pivotal moment occurs when Bahar learns that her husband Timur, who works at the same hospital, is having an affair with Rengin, his girlfriend, leading to the breakdown of their marital bonds and Bahar's decision to divorce. Following the recurrence of her illness, it is determined that Bahar needs a second liver transplant. Timur, who initially refused to be a donor during the first surgery, agrees this time to donate his liver in an effort to make amends for his past behavior. The successful surgery not only facilitates Bahar's physical recovery but also leads her to maintain her decision to divorce and choose a new beginning in her life.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the TV Series Bahar (Wikipedia, 2024).

Director: Neslihan Yeşilyurt
Screenwriters: Ayça Üzüim ve Atasay Koç
Cast:
Demet Evgar (Bahar)
Buğra Gülsoy (Evren)
Mehmet Yılmazak (Timur)
Ecem Özkaya (Rengin)
Release Year: 2024
Genre: Drama, Comedy, Medical

Research and Publication Ethics

This review has been prepared in accordance with all the rules that must be followed in the 'Guideline on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics in Higher Education Institutions.'

Ethics Committee Approval

This research does not require ethics committee approval.

Findings

In this section, the nine steps of the Gottman Couple Therapy's Strong Relationship House model will be explained with appropriate scenes from the Spring series.

Trust

Trust is one of the fundamental pillars of a relationship. An individual not only considers their partner's needs but also consistently supports and stands by them in every situation, demonstrating that the relationship is built on mutual commitment, sensitivity, and empathy. In this context, trust contributes to the formation of predictability and emotional security in the relationship, reinforcing positive expectations between partners (Navarra and Gottman, 2018). The concept of trust in a couple's relationship is complemented by love and commitment, but is negatively affected by prejudice and doubt. Therefore, fluctuations in trust levels can directly affect the emotional stability of the relationship and partners' perceptions of each other (Keleş and Çakır, 2023). From the very first episode of the series, it is clear that the bonds of trust are being shaken. In the first episode, Timur's refusal to donate his liver to Bahar, despite their compatibility, is a significant event that damages one of the fundamental building blocks of the relationship—trust. In these scenes, Timur prioritizes his own needs and interests in a critical situation affecting his wife's life, undermining Bahar's trust in him both emotionally and behaviorally.

Another factor that erodes trust is doubt. In the eighth chapter, with Rengin's accident, Bahar begins to notice the first signs that there might be a relationship between Bahar, Timur, and Rengin. This situation shows that the doubts arising in Bahar's mind further erode trust in the relationship and negatively affect her perception of her partner (59'-90').

Commitment

Attachment is defined as the development of a belief within an individual that the relationship they are in will be long-lasting, and acting in accordance with this belief. This concept is closely related to emotional elements such as love, loyalty, and similar feelings, serving as a fundamental building block that supports the sustainability of the relationship. Additionally, attachment is considered an important factor that enhances relational resilience by enabling partners to share a will to protect and maintain the relationship in the face of difficulties. (Owen, Rhoades, and Stanley, 2013). Attachment is associated with feelings such as love and loyalty. It refers to a situation in which one highlights their partner's positive qualities, feels happy when with them, and shows attachment to them when encountering others (Gottman and Gottman, 2015). Attachment acts like glue in a relationship. If it is strong glue, it binds individuals together in the face of positive and negative situations encountered throughout the relationship, helping individuals remain loyal to each other and ensuring the relationship proceeds healthily (Larson, 2003). In the fourteenth episode of the series, Evren is seen trying to express romantic feelings toward Bahar. Bahar's attempt to stop Evren by saying "be quiet, don't tell" despite knowing that her spouse is cheating on her can be interpreted as a sign that she is still emotionally attached to her partner. This situation is significant in showing that emotional investment in long-term relationships does not easily fade, even after negative experiences. Furthermore,

Bahar's reaction demonstrates that attachment is not only a behavioral process but also a cognitive and emotional one. Moreover, this scene shows that in some cases, attachment can lead individuals to suppress their own emotional needs and maintain internal motivations toward the relationship.

Building Love Maps

The Love Map, which forms the foundation of the home, serves as a guide to individuals' inner world. This concept refers to partners deeply understanding each other's internal experiences, life stories, values, and emotional needs. Additionally, the strength of love maps contributes to increasing relationship satisfaction by helping couples better understand each other in the face of challenges (Gottman and Gottman, 2015). Creating love maps helps couples learn about their emotional and physical needs and get to know each other better. Moreover, having detailed, up-to-date knowledge of each other's inner worlds strengthens empathetic understanding in the relationship and contributes to building emotional closeness more sustainably (Deylami et al., 2021). Couples can use open-ended questions to get to know each other. Through these questions, they create their love maps. For example, asking questions like 'What is your favorite food?', 'Who is your best friend?' or 'What are the moments when you feel the happiest?' helps them get to know each other better (Barnacle and Abbott, 2009). In the second episode of the series, the initial meeting process of Timur and Bahar is discussed. This period, unlike the problems observed in the later stages of their marriage, is characterized by positive emotions and mutual love bonds. In these scenes, the couple begins to gather information about each other's emotional and physical needs by asking various questions, taking the first steps toward building the love maps that form the foundation of their relationship. (55'-65').

Sharing Fondness and Appreciation

This step, which is the second phase of the relationship, is the remedy for underestimation. At this stage, it is recommended that couples reevaluate their partner's positive qualities and try to ensure the ties progress positively by recalling experiences they are proud of with their partner. This process also contributes to strengthening the emotional resilience of the relationship by reducing negative interaction cycles (Gottman and Gottman, 2015). In the seventh episode, the character Bahar praises Timur, highlighting his positive qualities and expressing admiration for him to the children. However, overall, it is understood that scenes indicating the continuity of the interest and admiration phase, or its mutual expression, are limited in the series. This situation suggests that the couple's capacity to maintain positive emotional engagement in the relational context has weakened.

Turning Towards Each Other

The third stage of the relationship, called mutual orientation, focuses on strengthening emotional closeness between partners. In this stage, couples exhibit behaviors aimed at recognizing their partner's feelings and needs, offering support, and increasing emotional connection within the relationship, rather than focusing on negative interactions (Navarra and Gottman, 2018). Mutual orientation is also related to couples' capacity to notice small efforts, called 'offers of intimacy,' and respond positively to them. This process helps strengthen the

foundation of the relationship, increases mutual trust between partners, and lays the groundwork for a more constructive long-term handling of conflicts (Irvine et al., 2024). In the sixth episode of the series, Timur shares his problem with his son with Bahar, and Bahar listens attentively without criticism or an accusatory tone, exemplifying a meaningful instance of emotional alignment between partners. In this scene, Bahar develops an attitude of understanding and support for Timur by recognizing his emotional needs. Therefore, Bahar's empathetic approach both validates Timur's emotional experience and creates a trust-based space in their communication. In this regard, the interaction can be considered a concrete reflection of Gottman's 'turning toward each other' step in the series. '(2:13–2:17)'

Positive Outlook

A positive outlook focuses not only on resolving conflicts in a relationship but also on building it based on positive feelings, respect, compassion, shared meaning, and strong friendship. This gives the relationship a positive perspective and increases the couple's capacity to grow together, be resilient, and form a deep bond (Barnacle and Abbott, 2009). At this stage, the goal is to enhance couples' development of positive attitudes toward each other. It also aims to strengthen the partners' friendship to prevent positive messages from being misperceived (McNulty et al., 2021). When the first three stages of the Strong Relationship House are not functioning correctly, individuals begin to perceive even positive messages negatively. They see each other not as friends but as enemies. To improve this situation, the first three stages of the Strong Relationship House model are applied to help couples develop a solid foundation of friendship (Gottman and Gottman, 2015). Looking at the couple's memories in the series, it becomes clear that they formed a friendship. However, in the later years of their marriage, they are seen more as two people sharing the same house. Especially when they reach the divorce stage, it becomes clearer that hostility replaces friendship. In such cases, the goal is to rebuild positive feelings rather than negative ones by using the first three layers of the Strong Relationship House model within the framework of John and Julie Gottman's Couple Therapy (Irvine et al., 2024).

Conflict Management

The conflict management stage involves partners addressing disagreements constructively without making them destructive. The goal is not to eliminate conflicts; rather, it is to manage differences with understanding, respect, and empathy. This stage is a critical process that requires couples to manage their emotions healthily, thereby maintaining relational trust and mutual respect during disagreements (Gottman and Gottman, 2015). At this stage, couples can discuss issues by using skills such as making a soft start, active listening, taking responsibility, and showing flexibility (McNulty et al., 2021). In the conflict scene in the thirteenth episode of the series, tension rises when Timur, upon learning that Bahar has filed for divorce, objects. In this scene, both characters are seen reacting emotionally, using defensive and accusatory language rather than demonstrating a constructive attitude in their communication. Therefore, when examining the overall flow of the scene, it can be said that none of the Gottman-predicted conflict management strategies are implemented, and the conflict becomes even more damaging to the relationship. '(1:34:36)'.

Fulfilling Dreams and Desires About Life

At this stage of the Strong Relationship House, partners in successful relationships can easily express each other's dreams and desires. Partners are aware of each other's dreams and feel mutually supported. In this context, valuing individual goals and integrating these goals into the shared life significantly contributes to the long-term harmony of the relationship. (Gottman and Schwartz Gottman, 2017; 2020). When examining the series, it is evident that Bahar's desire to return to her medical career is clearly expressed. However, it is understood that Timur does not support this wish and even tries to prevent it. Indeed, in the second episode of the series, Timur's opinion that Bahar should not return to work at the hospital and his attempt to persuade her not to resume her profession indicate a lack of partner support. This situation contradicts the 'fulfilling dreams and desires about life' stage of the Strong Relationship House.

Creating a Shared Meaning

This stage refers to a level that encompasses the values individuals intentionally share in their lives, forming the roof of the house. It involves building a life together, one shaped by the couple's shared experiences, rituals, and memories. It is also where our thoughts about relationships, expectations, and visions for the future are shaped. In this context, the process of creating shared meaning significantly contributes to couples developing a sense of depth, purpose, and unity in their relationships (Gottman and Gottman, 2015). Healthy, progressing relationships are built on a shared life. To establish a shared life, couples need to share their expectations about life, what they expect from each other, set common goals, and discuss their responsibilities toward life. Building a shared life helps individuals strengthen their relationships and lead a happier life (Deylami et al., 2021). In the thirteenth episode, Bahar is anxious upon learning she is pregnant, fearing Timur will react negatively. However, Timur's response, marked by great joy, and his statement that he will take on the responsibilities of fatherhood mark an important turning point in the couple's relationship. This scene can be considered their first meaningful step toward building a shared life and demonstrates that they are developing a common vision for the future of their relationship.

Conclusion

This study examined the Bahar series within the context of the Gottman Couple Therapy (GCT) Strong Relationship House model, allowing for an evaluative analysis of the relationship dynamics portrayed in the series within a theoretical framework. As a result of the study, it was observed that the relationship patterns of the characters in the series exhibited notable differences and deficiencies in fundamental relationship components such as trust, commitment, love maps, interest and admiration, turning toward each other, positive outlook, conflict management, support of life goals, and creating shared meaning.

It was particularly identified that there were significant disruptions in the trust and commitment stages, which laid the groundwork for communication problems, lack of empathy, and the perpetuation of conflict cycles observed in later stages. The love maps, which are strong during the early stages of marriage, were not updated over time, leading to emotional distancing between the partners. Similarly, limited expression of interest and admiration,

along with missed opportunities to turn toward each other, weakened the positive outlook. In most conflict scenes, constructive strategies recommended by GCT, such as gentle start-up, active listening, and taking responsibility, were not used, leading to destructive discussions. Additionally, Timur's lack of support for Bahar's desire to return to her profession indicated that the phase of sharing and supporting life goals was not functioning healthily in the relationship. However, there were also limited positive examples related to the shared meaning-making phase, suggesting potential areas for improvement in the relationship.

Overall, it was concluded that the relationship dynamics in the series significantly contradict the indicators of healthy relationships according to GCT, with particular weaknesses observed in trust, commitment, friendship foundation, conflict management, and mutual support processes. In this context, the Bahar series serves as a meaningful example that sheds light on issues real couples may face and demonstrates how GCT's theoretical framework can reflect relationship patterns in everyday life. From this perspective, the series offers both academic

value and a relational, therapeutic reference point for couples seeking relationship awareness and support.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Participation Approval

Not applicable.

Publication Permission

Not applicable.

Availability of Data and Materials

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

SY prepared the introduction, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations sections of the article, while MK contributed to the identification of studies to be included in the research.

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