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STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF ALEVI-SUNNI MARRIAGES IN
TURKEY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Strengths And Challenges Of Alevi-Sunni Marriages
In Turkey: A Qualitative Study

Türkiye'deki Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerinin Güçlü Yanları Ve Zorlandıkları
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research, is to understand the effect of being an Alevi and Sunni on the relationships. In this direction, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 couples; 3 pairs of Alevi women-Sunni men, and 3 pairs of Sunni women-Alevi men. These 12 participants are between the ages of 33 and 53 and all have been married for at least 2 years and have at least 1 child. During the interview, the participants' relation with their sects and its reflection on their couple relations and other important people around them were evaluated. As a result of the investigation, it has been found that all couples have a distant relationship with their sects and that sect differences do not affect the relationships of the couples. In some cases, couples' families and close others initially had anxiety or prejudice, but it disappeared over time. There was a focus on why the difference of sect did not affect the couple's relationship, through an exploration of their resources and skills. As a result of the analysis, 5 main themes related to the couple's connection emerged. These are: “The Sect is not a Salient Issue”, “Everyone Can Live Their Faith As They Wish”, “Parents' Change in the Process”, “Different Groups not Influencing One Another”, “Difference of Sect As a Source of Richness”. It is hoped that the findings about the experience of cultural factors and belonging to different sects will benefit researchers and clinicians who work on this issue. The findings of this research will also contribute to helping change the prejudices of Alevi and Sunni sects in Turkey against one another, among individuals who are curious and interested about this subject.

Keywords: *Multicultural Couples, Interfaith Couples, Intersect Couples, Alevi Sunni Couples, Culture, Religion, Sect, Marriage*

ÖZET

Bu arařtırmada Türkiye’deki Alevi ve Sünni mezheplerinden olan çiftlerin farklı mezheplerden oluyor olmalarının ilişkilerine etkisini anlamak amaçlanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda görüşmeler 3 çift Alevi kadın-Sünni erkek, 3 çift ise Sünni kadın-Alevi erkek olacak şekilde toplamda 6 çift ve 12 katılımcıyla yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler şeklinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu 12 katılımcının yaşları 33 ve 53 arasındadır ve hepsi en az 2 senedir evli ve en az 1 çocuğa sahiptir. Görüşme içerisinde katılımcıların mezhepleriyle olan ilişkileri, bunun kendi çift ilişkilerine ve çevrelerindeki diğer önemli kimselere yansımaları değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmanın sonucunda bütün çiftlerin kendi mezheplerine çeşitli açılardan uzak oldukları ve mezhep farklılığının ilişkilerini etkilemediği ortaya çıkmıştır. Fakat bazı çiftlerin ailelerinin ve çevrelerinin ilk başta bir endişeye veya ön yargıya sahip oldukları, bunun da zaman içerisinde ortadan kalktığı bulunmuştur. Bunun dışında çift ilişkisinde bu konunun ilişkilerini neden etkilemediği kaynakları ve becerileri üzerinden anlaşılmaya çalışılmıştır. Yapılan analizin sonucunda çift ilişkisiyle ilgili 5 tane ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Bunlar: “Mezhep Önemli Bir Mesele Değil”, “Herkes İnancını İsteddiği Gibi Yaşayabilir”, “Ebeveynlerin Süreç İçerisinde Değişimi”, “Farklı Grupların Birbirlerini Etkilememeleri”, “Farklılık Zenginlik”tir. Araştırma, çift ilişkisinde kültürel unsurların ve farklı mezheplerden geliyor olmanın ilişki içerisinde nasıl deneyimlendiğini ortaya çıkarması açısından bu konuda çalışmak isteyen arařtırmacı ve klinisyenlere katkı sağlayacaktır. Aynı zamanda Türkiye’deki Alevi ve Sünni mezheplerinden olanların birbirlerine karşı oluşmuş ön yargıların değişmesi açısından da bu konuya ilgisi olan ve merak duyan birçok alan dışı kişiye de fayda sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Çok Kültürlü Çiftler, İnançlar Arası Çiftler, Mezhepler Arası Çiftler, Alevi Sünni Çiftler, Kültür, Din, Mezhep, Evlilik*

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, the relationships of Alevi-Sunni couples in Turkey are studied. A total of 12 participants, six of them participants of each sect- who defined themselves as Alevi and Sunni, are analyzed. The effects of being from different sects are investigated through semi-structured interviews with these couples. It is investigated whether difference of sect has an effect on their social life and friendships as well as the partners' relationships with one other and with their families. Their difficulties and their mechanisms to cope with these difficulties are also explored. The study includes several questions regarding what it means to be a couple and what a family means, the effect of sect discrimination on their relations in the past or present, the impact of families and social networks (friends, workplace environment) on their relations and how they raise their children. This study aims to be a fruitful resource for clinicians and researchers who want to work in this field. In this section, the existing literature and the studies that have been done will be described.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. DEFINITION OF CULTURE

There are many explanations for the definition of culture. Initially, Kroeber et al. (1952) defined culture as the structure that creates the achievements, explicit and implicit behaviors of groups of people, including artifacts, obtained and transferred through symbols (as cited in Spencer- Oatey, 2012, p. 2). Falicov defines culture as a world view formed as a result of interactions in some areas where people simultaneously partake. She exemplifies these areas as religion, ethnic identity, social class, gender, occupation, immigration, political stances (1988). Cohen has identified different categories such as the interaction of people and the environment in his definition of culture (2009). Gielen et al. (2008) argued that modern social sciences defines culture as an environment made by human beings. Similarly, Whiten et al. (2011) articulate that culture is a human product and that this puts us in a position that distinguishes us from other living things and can shape nature. According to the review of Edel, Kroeber et al. (1952) note that although there are 165 different definitions of culture in the review of their article, they find all these definitions insufficient (1954). The variety of definitions above seem to support this view.

Considering the mutual interaction of culture and people, not only does human culture create, but also the cultural environment created affects people (Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). The theory of social constructionism states that the interpretation of the world by individuals is determined in the cultural context (Nichols, 2013; Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). Similarly, Veroff and Goldberger mention that our cultural positions shape our perception of our ideas (1995). These cultural locations are made up of many functional yet complex elements (Gielen et al., 2008). Falicov (2003) categorizes them as gender, race, class, region and

nationality. Besides these; social expectations, social roles, romantic or historical stories, verbal and non-verbal communication styles, common values, traditions, rules, behaviors and attitudes are also included in cultural elements (Gielen et al., 2008). The commonality of these elements is another category of culture according to Cohen. The last category is that culture changes temporally and regionally (2009). Triandis gives voices to that this commonality is transmitted from generation to generation by being modified (1996). As an example of the regional variation of culture, Cottrell states that people of the Christian faith in India and America will not have the same culture (1990).

1.1.1. Cultural Identity and Interpersonal Relationships

Cultural identity is related to how much an individual identifies with the elements of that culture (Gudykunst, 2004). As a result of the mentioned cultural locations, people reflect their affected emotions, thoughts, and behaviors into psychological, sociocultural, and biological fields (Gielen et al., 2008). Considering that individuals have been affected by the culture in which they have been living since the very beginning of their lives, making the culture a part of their own experiences and creating meanings based on all these experiences, it can clearly be seen that the culture itself constitutes a part of individuals' selves (Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). Addition to this, Matsumoto (2000) states that the beliefs, attitudes, and values of a culture shaped within the group have a differentiating side among individuals and this is transferred from generation to generation. This means that the cultural identity of the individual is not fixed, but may vary within the group (Bystydzienski, 2011).

In addition, socio-cultural factors, historical events, and economic conditions affect the individual indirectly, although they do not come into direct contact with the individual in the formation of identity (Arredondo et al., 1996). For instance, children from marriages of different cultures are more likely to feel the contrariness

in their identities in their social sphere; for example, being a child of an Asian family in an English-speaking area feels more of a cross-cultural difference. (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010).

Moreover, cultural influence does not remain as a factor only within an individual, but also reflects upon the relationships established by an individual. It can be understood how the culture affects the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals in their communication with other people. Context Dimensions accounts for this issue in cultural communication. There are two contexts here, called High-Context and Low-Context Dimensions. In Low-Context culture thoughts and feelings are expressed more clearly and directly, and concepts such as freedom, justice, and happiness add meaning to the individual, while they are monotonous as if they came out of a factory. In a High-Context culture, there are situations where there are more indirect ways of communication, implicit, and what is not spoken is understood. Homogenous groups have High-Context forms of communication, while Heterogenous groups have more Low-context forms of communication. A high-context communication format will not be very useful in a heterogenous group (Gielen et al., 2008; Gudykunst, 2004). For instance, while Japanese express themselves more indirectly, Americans express themselves more directly (Gudykunst, 2004). Another dimension of communication with other people that affects behavior is the issue of boundaries. Boundaries show where the individual stands in their relationships, so whether these boundaries are clear, by whom, for whom, and where they are created can be evaluated from different perspectives in different cultures (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010).

1.1.2. Definition of Religion

Just like the difficulty in defining culture, it is difficult to make a comprehensive definition of religion. At its most basic, religion is the situation in which the behaviors, practices, experiences, accepted and forbidden ones are

determined in a single moral community called the Church (James, 1902/2008; Durkheim, 1912/1995). Geertz takes religion from a cultural and critical point of view. He defines it as a system of certain symbols so that moral choices are lived in and imposed in an implicit way (1973). Durkheim (1912/1995) argues that religion is an element that shapes people's lives by certain groups and history. According to Cohen (2009), religion realizes the interaction between people and the environment through the sharing of the meaning, knowledge, and values produced and transferring them from generation to generation.

From another perspective, the fact that the differentiation of certain values in religions affects people's perspectives on life is also a factor that shapes human life. For instance, while immoral behavior is more acceptable as thought in Judaism, just like in Islam, it is the opposite in Christianity. The reason this is more acceptable is to allow people to see and overcome their more sinister side. Points like these encourage greater Jewish devotion to their religion. In addition, it was revealed that Christians, on the other hand, tended to immoral behaviors more, although moral thought was more prominent (Cohen, 2009). In the opposite direction, when looking at history, it is also seen that groups have different experiences of the same faith (Johnson et al., 2011). Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean are much different from people of the same faith in Western Europe (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011).

It has been stated before that culture is a common element according to a certain time and region. In addition, religion, like culture, is a structure that can be shared according to a certain time and region. For example, Judaism in Israel, Orthodox-Christianity in Balkan and European countries, and Islam in Arab countries. (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011). In addition to the differentiating aspects of religion, Okumuş (2009) mentions another feature of religion which is that it stabilizes the present conventions and ensures that life goes on as it is. In particular, people who affiliate to a common dominant religion in an area may have some extra power politically and economically which means that they can use their religions to maintain their privileges.

1.1.2.1. Sect

Sects can be defined as the movements of religious thought that emerged in various periods (Aslan, 2017). Wilson, in his book "Religious Sects: A Sociological Study", defines sects of Christianity expressing them as a social reality developed in line with the opinions of several important people (prophets, saints etc.) and upon which no one questions (Ertoy, 2004). While, on one hand, religion brings people closer; on the other hand, sects have led to the separation of people (Çatak, 2015). Ertoy, in the review of Wilson's book, mentions that according to Wilson, sects have a very fragmented structure; then he also notes: Wilson deals with sect in a political manner and attributes the emergence and development of them to certain causes (2004). He also remarks that for Wilson sects emerge with social transformations; they are affected by cultural interactions (which started with the industrial development and immigration); local cultural and religious traditions promote sects; social deprivation and marginalization contributes the emergence of sects; and they protect social integrity.

Religions and sects are born as a result of social changes. For the history of Christianity, the emergence of the Protestantism is an example of this fact since it was evolved out of certain social conflicts as from the Renaissance period. In the history of Islam, the emergence of sects as a result of the social transformations that took place during the caliphate of Osman can be given as an example (Ertoy, 2004; Okumuş, 2009).

It is easier to see the sides that the individual is affected by in the relationship between religion and culture over sects. For instance, because Calvinist Protestants place less emphasis on relationality, they are more concerned with the direct meaning of words than with the emotional side (Cohen, 2009).

1.1.3. Culture and Religion

Religion can affect societies and direct them positively or negatively (Okumuş, 2009). The fact that culture also affects society in various ways were also mentioned before. Also, since traditional and moral values are an element of religion as well as culture, culture and religion are concepts that can be dealt with in each other (Vergote, 1984/1997 as cited in Saroglou & Cohen, 2011, p. 1310). Therefore, religion and culture interact and influence each other at both the societal and individual levels (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010). Correspondingly, religion can be a part of the culture, take place in it, create it, go beyond it, be influenced, shape it, and in this way interact with people's feelings, thoughts and behaviors. However, it should not be forgotten that the interaction of these two is evaluated within the context of psychology (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011). In other words, if religion is considered to be included in culture, it can also be considered as a sub-category of culture (Gudykunst, 2004).

1.2. MULTICULTURISM AND INTERCULTURISM

1.2.1. Definition of Multiculturalism

“The interconnectedness of the fate of all people is increasingly difficult to ignore” (Veroff & Goldberger, 1995, p. 8). Many people live together in societies with different cultures although they don't accept it. Especially with technology, migration, and globalization, the interaction of people from different cultures has increased (Whiten et al., 2011). Similarly, Bystydzienski (2011) claims that people's cultural identity is affected by globalization and migration from each other, whether they want it or not. For instance, in countries such as America, political policies that bring people closer are implemented in order to reduce the grudge and hatred of individuals against each other, so different cultural, ethnic, and religious

groups can live together. (Kalmijn & Tubergen, 2010). In multiculturalism, equality and harmony between individuals from different communities are taken into account (Yogeeswaran et al., 2021).

1.2.2. Definition of Interculturism

The concept of interculturalism has a much more comprehensive structure when it is considered according to the concept of multiculturalism. In interculturalism, it is seen that the interweaving of cultures is intense and identities are more complicated, and also there is an intense focus on similarity rather than difference (Yogeeswaran et al., 2021). Over and above this, the word Multicultural; words such as Intercultural, Interracial, Inter-ethnic are used interchangeably (Reiter & Gee, 2008).

1.2.3. Different Perspectives on Multiculturalism and Interculturism

In addition to current definitions, as different cultures begin to live together, traditions, material elements, food, art, technology, and so on, they begin to influence each other. As a result, both sides are enriched or new cultural forms may emerge. The subject of the field Multicultural Psychology is to examine this interaction and the broader social context that results from it. The science of psychology has started to work on this subject much more recently (Veroff & Goldberger, 1995).

Also, religion, like culture, consists of certain values, beliefs, practices, moral codes, symbols, etc. formed (Cohen, 2009). When looking at the relationship between religion and culture before, it has been stated that religion and culture are in an intermediary position in shaping human behavior. The field in which this topic is studied is Intercultural Psychology. Interestingly, however, culture and religion

are influenced by each other, there is very little research on this. In a review study, it was examined intercultural psychology journals 34 years before that period and stated that the proportion of published articles about religion among them was on average 2-3% and that very few of them examined the relationship between culture and religion. For example, some of the researches show that the cultural difference of religion is related to the individual's depression, loss, grief, stressful events, etc. They emphasized that it has an important role in how they behave in situations. (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003). Likewise, Johnson et al. (2011) refer to the study of how culture and religion affect each other.

It has been stated before that cultural identity can be affected by the environment of the individual. It is also important for people to feel a sense of belonging to an identity (Bystydzienski, 2011). One of the important points here is how open and flexible individuals, especially those who are multicultural, are in this regard. For example, Alweck and Nebitt explain that a child whose mother is French and whose father is Indian can adapt to both in terms of language, food, and social areas when he is in both cultures, and that he has the ability to define himself in a place different from these ethnic identities and beliefs (2010). Similarly, Sue et al. (1992) states that being multicultural is not a defect and this would enrich one's potential.

In the Theory of Intergroup Contact developed by Allport, it is mentioned that groups will be able to form close relationships only under four conditions. These are stated as groups have equal conditions in the situation, common goals, cooperation between groups and, authority and supporting the rules (Pettigrew, 1998). According to this theory, Ülkücan et al. (2019) stated that the intergroup relationship might develop when the contact of individuals who have different identities increases. This theory supports that Multiculturalism aims for a similar gain. In this modern multicultural world, most individuals continue to live according to only one culture. But in fact, we see that people are part of many cultural elements (Gielen et al., 2008).

1.3. MULTICULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

1.3.1. Definition of Multicultural Relationships

Many individuals may feel as if they are acquainted with a different culture when in a relationship because they are two different individuals. But in intercultural or multicultural couples this is indeed the case. Couples coming from different perspectives and cultural expectations form multicultural couples (Bystydzienski, 2011).

Before the concept of multicultural marriage or intercultural marriage, marrying someone from a different ethnic identity was defined as exogamy. Before the 60s, such marriages were seen as a reason for assimilation (Ryder, 1955 as cited in Parsonson, 1987, p. 363). At that time, Barron imported that these marriages were not desired and that children would gradually lose their cultural values due to this difference, and that this would pose a survival risk for cultural values (1951). When married to someone of the same culture or faith, the relations of the couples with their families will be stronger, thus ensuring intergenerational stability. However, over time, with the secularization, the decrease in the interference of third parties, and urbanization, people were able to meet people from different cultures and start relationships (Kalmijn, 1991).

According to Landis (1949), marriages of individuals who are different from each other in any respect other than gender refer to intergroup marriages or mixed marriages. This includes belief, identity, race, nationality, and sometimes even socioeconomic status, education, or physical differences. One of the areas in which these socioeconomic marriages are examined is the relationship between gender and power. People may marry someone from a different back ground with a view to "raise" their ethnically "low" position. Education is also an important point in marrying someone from a different culture. If the person has a higher education level than the people in the same group, they can marry someone from a different culture (Kalmijn, 1998).

Beginning with the rise of the human rights movement in the 1960s in the USA, being with different people in terms of ethnicity and origin has become widespread with the continuation of the popular media today (Lewis Jr & Ford-Robertson, 2010). However, this situation is not that developed in Asian countries yet. Studies conducted in the same period indicate that the ethnic and religious characteristics of the family, especially in terms of traditions and social norms, have an important effect on the choice of spouse (Jo-Pei et al., 2008).

Today, Gudykunst (2004) defines intercultural marriage as the marriage of individuals from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Together with, when looking at the literature, international marriages can also be named as intercultural, interracial, or interfaith, or any different element independent of the couple (Cottrell, 1990). In addition, when looked at, when a person is in a relationship with a person from a different culture, the individual must accept that the cultural identity he has formed so far may become more fluid at certain points and its boundaries may become blurred (Bystydzienski, 2011).

To be able to realize intergroup marriage, certain elements must exist, including whether the individual can live with his or her personal preferences, the effect of external factors on marriage habits, and education level (Kalmijn, 1998). Barron also gives voice out from a similar point that a situation where you can choose the person you love will increase intercultural marriage (1951). Barron (1951) describes intercultural marriages as an important field of study about the subject of assimilation and allows seeing the capacity and distance of harmony between racial, religious, and ethnic groups.

1.3.1.1. Theories about Multicultural Couples

Kalmijn (1998) stated that the individual pays attention to many factors in choosing a spouse. As a result of the multidimensional analyzes made so far, Kalmijn (1998) reduced them to two dimensions and formed two hypotheses. In the

selection of a spouse, many areas such as cultural norms, education, religion, socioeconomic status come into contact with each other and pass into each other. Therefore, it is not clear exactly what the main source and side sources are in the selection of a spouse. In other words, even if we think that the couple prefers according to one point, this may be more than one similar or differentiating side. Kalmijn named this as the “By-Product Hypothesis”. He states the other effective concept as "Exchange Hypothesis". According to Exchange Hypothesis, when choosing a partner, people tend towards those features because certain points are more important to them. For example, marrying a Black person may be easier if the person's educational level or socioeconomic status is higher than one's own.

Furthermore, social scientists researching why people marry interculturally have developed two theories on this subject: Theory of Homogeneity and Structural Theory. The Theory of Homogeneity states that people's similarity in terms of familial, social, or socioeconomic status is effective in mate selection. In other words, it is considered that individuals are not only ethnically, religiously, or racially similar, but also similar in areas such as education, age, interests, and occupation. Structural Theory states that intercultural marriage is possible at the point where the social structure approves. The socioeconomic factors mentioned earlier are also included in this social structure (Jo-Pei et al., 2008).

Lastly, in the research conducted by Kalmijn and Tubergen (2010), two groups were formed as "Cultural Elements" and "Structural Elements" in the choice of spouses of people. They placed concepts such as the perspective of families, religion, and language into Cultural Items, and criteria such as the size of the group and similarity of the group members into Structural Items, and found that Cultural Items were more prominent in choosing a spouse. However, in his previous research, Kalmijn (1998) stated that because of the low number of Jews in America as a group, they tended to endogamy marriages.

To sum up, researching intergroup marriages is difficult as it is a multifactorial subject, but it is an important area to understand the factors that affect marriage, to see the proportions of mate choices, to understand the impact of

marriage both on the relationship and on raising children, and to see what it aims to change (Barron, 1951).

1.3.2. Interreligious and Intersect Relationships

With the decrease in the effectiveness of religious institutions, the increase in social connections, and the common denominator of cultures, the marriage of couples from different faiths have become increasingly common (Barron, 1951). Families of different faiths make up for the lack of multicultural and multi-faith part of society because they diversify areas such as religion, identity, and gender. Generally, many researchers have investigated these marriages within religiously mixed groups and these marriages have been evaluated mostly based on the person's sense of religious belonging and the religion in which they were brought up (Kalmijn, 1998). However, one of the biggest problems with marriages that are religiously homogamous/heterogamous is which one is religious homogamy and which one is religious heterogamy. In general, researchers define it as homogamous marriage, even if they are the same religion but belong to different sects. (Williams & Lawler, 2003).

When we look at the marriages of religious groups in Europe and America, these marriages have increased thanks to points such as the reduction of borders between countries, the decrease in control of third-party situations, and secularization. For example, it has been stated that Jewish-non-Jewish marriages have increased in the United States in the last decade (Kalmijn, 1998). This situation revealed that belief is not the only criterion in marriage with someone from a different culture, and it also emphasized the evaluation of areas such as socioeconomic, education, place of residence (Jo-Pei et al., 2008).

On the other hand, when looking at interfaith and intersect marriages, when similarities and differences are considered, interfaith marriages are more problematic than intersect marriages (Williams & Lawler, 2003). It is not common

to marry people belonging to religions such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism in countries where discrimination in terms of religious values, beliefs and practices is evident, for example in the USA where Catholicism and Protestantism are widespread (Kalmijn & Tubergen, 2010). Also, when we look at the marriages between Catholic and Protestant sects, it is seen that there is an increase between 1920 and 1980 (Kalmijn, 1991).

There is a relationship between couples' differences in beliefs and relationship satisfaction. Many factors need to be evaluated in this relationship. For instance, investigating how intensely people live their beliefs and couples' marital satisfaction can be examined through the relationships between religious commitment, marriage from the same religion, and relationship satisfaction (Heaton, 1984). In this context, Dudley and Kosinski (1990) state that being of the same belief and fulfilling the information and worship of the individual have a positive effect on the relationship satisfaction of the couples. From the opposite point of view, Williams and Lawler (2003) found no significant finding of relationship satisfaction or happiness in the relationship of couples who belong to the same religious sect. Moreover, they found that difference reflects positively on their relationships among those who belong to different sects.

Finally, in mixed-faith families, many situations force them. While parents maintain their own beliefs within their families, they are also concerned with the religious and social identity of their children in the social sphere, education field, and in their own families (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010).

1.3.3. Challenges

In this section, the issues that multicultural couples have difficulty with in general terms will be discussed.

1.3.3.1. Internalized Discrimination

When looking at the intercultural relationships, Parsonson, in his research (1987), revealed that the relationship between children's ethnic identity and their parents' endogamy was not strongly related to marriage, but that children still preferred endogamy in their relationships. In other words, children prefer an endogamy union, not because their parents have an endogamy marriage, but because they are far from an exogamy marriage. This situation led to the conclusion that marriages from different cultures were still a distant thought for individuals in the 80s.

Couples might be exposed to various discriminations within the family due to their ethnic differences (Biever et al., 1998). In the study by Lewis Jr and Ford-Robertson (2010), Whites were more likely to marry Native Americans and Hispanic or Asian people than were married to Black people. Although this shows that interracial marriages have increased, it shows that Black and White's marriage still stands at a less acceptable point.

Besides, children of couples from different faiths or ethnic backgrounds are more exposed to discrimination when this distinction is visible from the outside. For example, the boy who got the black eyes of his Indian mother was bullied in that environment because he did not resemble his English father (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010).

1.3.3.2. Communication Problems

According to Gudykunst, whether we realize it or not, the culture we live in affects the way we communicate (2004). When looked at the multicultural marriages for instance, in a case conducted with Korean women married to American people, participants stated that they could not share exactly what they thought or felt due to language (Kim et al., 2007). What's more, Bustamante et al.

stated that the problems between couples are the inability to communicate and not being understood or misunderstood (2011). This problem has become a situation experienced not only between couples but also with families. In the investigation, they discussed that because the couples are not from the same culture as their spouses, they have difficulty in communicating with each other's families and they are excluded.

Moreover, Waldman and Rubalcava (2005) state that the development of the individual's world of emotions is very related to the culture in which he or she exists, so there would be several misunderstandings and problems in the communication of couples from different cultures due to the fact that they experience the emotions differently.

1.3.3.3. Cultural Differences

Some other difficulties of multicultural couples are that they come from different religious and/or ethnic backgrounds, and accordingly, thoughts about marriage, sexuality, gender roles, family order, and child-rearing are reflected in their relationships (Çatak, 2015). Similarly, Biever et al. (1998) state that couples experience the difficulty at most in the areas of cultural differences. For instance, in the research conducted, people who marry individuals from some societies, such as Morocco and Mexico, where male and female roles are in a patriarchal order, experience certain difficulties with their partners in terms of gender roles (Bustamante et al., 2011). Curtis and Ellison explained the negative reflection of gender roles on the couple's relationship through housework (2002). For example, people who live the Christian faith are influenced by the ideas in the Bible that the man is the one who works and is strong, and that the work of the woman will add freedom and disrupt the harmony in the home. From a similar point, Daneshpour, in his research on the marriage of Muslim men and non-Muslim women, revealed that the patriarchal perspective of Islam prevents women from establishing equal power relations in a relationship (2003).

In this regard, Reid emphasizes that gender studies in psychology research is lacking and the importance of looking at the differences in the relationships of couples from different ethnic identities from a gender perspective apart from the ethnic context (2002). She stated that especially women are subject to discrimination and suppression by the patriarchal mentality, under the perspective of ethnic differences. She discussed that gender should be evaluated not only in gender studies but also within the culture. For example, she pointed out that in the traditions that make up the culture, a style of dress, marriage styles, and raising children cannot be handled independently of gender. Also, Gudykunst (2004) talked about the evaluation of gender in culture in his book about the variability of cultures. He noted that some cultures are more masculine (gender norms are more pronounced), while others are more (gender norms less pronounced).

Bystdzienski (2011) researching the experiences of couples from different cultures, stated that most of the couples are aware that they come from different cultures and they pay attention to this especially in the relational field. But in spite of that, when Korean women adopted the culture of their American spouses as well as their own culture, they had to cope with certain differences in cultural values and beliefs. Accordingly, the uncertainty of her/his cultural identity aroused feelings of not belonging and loneliness (Kim et al., 2007). In a similar case, the inability of couples to adapt to each other in a temporal sense was explained by the differences in cultures (Bustamante et al., 2011).

1.3.3.4. Experiencing Indirect Religious Suppression

Cultural variables are of great importance in the communication of different cultures with each other. Gudykunst (2004) talks about the concept of “Power Distance” as a variable in understanding cultural differences in his book. Some cultural groups have high power distance and some have low power distance. In Low Power Distance, individuals see each other more equally, hierarchy and

dominance are less within the group. In High Power Distance, on the contrary, individuals are not seen as equal, there is a power and hierarchy relationship between them and subordinates are dependent on their superiors and superiors put pressure on their subordinates.

In line with this, Curtis and Ellison (2002), stated that in couples with different religious beliefs, when one of the spouses lives their faith more intensely and how often one partner attends the other's worship, there is more conflict than in couples with the same belief. Daneshpour (2003) also stated in his research on Muslim and non-Muslim couples that non-Muslims have difficulty in understanding the demands of their spouses, while Muslim people insist that their spouses turn to Islam. In this context, non-Muslim female participants had difficulties in more basic areas such as socializing with their friends, clothing, and eating and drinking. Women stated that they fulfill their Muslim spouses' religious expectations for the order of their marriage, such as clothing, alcohol consumption, consumption of halal food. Although the participants understood the wishes of their spouses, they had problems in their relationships because they felt that they were limited in this regard.

Çatak puts forward that the problems of the couples increase if the sect of one of them is more strict and intense in terms of their religious beliefs and rituals (2015). In Landis' research on Catholic and Protestant marriages, Catholics because of the fact that they are dominant sect, they have a greater say than Protestants about which sect their spouse should worship in their marriage (1949). Catholic people, especially women, have a harder time getting divorced than Protestant people. Two-thirds of the couples did not change their sect during their marriage. Among the remaining one-third, Protestants turned to the Catholic sect. As a result of these changes, divorce rates have also increased. In addition, when individuals from both sects live their faith intensely, divorce rates are higher than those who practice their faith.

In a study conducted with couples from different sects of Christianity, when the problems between couples are examined, liberal Protestant-Catholic couples

have the least conflict, since liberal Protestants can look at other faiths from a more open-minded point of view, while conservative Protestants see their own beliefs as the most correct compared to the other sects (Petersen, 1986).

According to Curtis and Ellison's study, one of the most conflicted areas in the couples who are from different sects is related to the inequalities between religious beliefs, for example, the infallibility of the holy book or the difference in the frequency of worship (2002).

1.3.3.5. Anxiety

It has been revealed that the research about the marriages of Asian-Indian and White people, their families are concerned about the social status of the participants, their future children, or their cultural identity is affected. Participants, on the other hand, stated that they had concerns about how their families and circles would react to their partners and whether their families could get along (Inman et al., 2011).

Besides, in marriages between Muslim and non-Muslim people, they were concerned that the families of especially non-Muslim women would move away from the traditions of Christianity and turn to the Muslim faith (Daneshpour, 2003).

1.3.3.6. Encountering Negative Reactions

In a case on the marriages of Asian-Indian and White people, some participants emphasized that they received negative reactions from people living in small and conservative groups (Inman et al., 2011). Similarly, Bystydzienski emphasized that the acceptance of the couple as an individual or couple by the society they live in or the exclusion of the couple can affect the couple's relationship positively or negatively (2011). Biever et al. (1998) also remark that exclusion from

the social group is one of the factors that creates stress for the couples. In this study, it is also mentioned that as well as the exclusion in the social sense, the family and friends of such couples will not approve of their marriages and they could even take certain steps to prevent such marriages.

1.3.3.7. Difficulty in Raising Children

Incredible differences can arise when raising children in intercultural marriages. In the study conducted by Bustamante et al. (2011), it was claimed that the biggest source of stress experienced by couples from different cultures was related to raising children. Petersen stated (1986) that the children of people from different religious groups have weak religious feelings and religious affiliations due to religious incompatibility and that they sometimes have language difficulties in their relationship with their extended families.

When we look at the shaping of all this incompatibility, the beliefs that they adhere to, which religions they are attached to, the parent-child relationship styles, the gender of the child, and the relationship between parental roles and religion can all be factors (Salisbury, 1970). In the only case that Arweck and Nesbitt researched, they found that children were affected by culturally specific differences of religion, like certain religious rituals, rather than differences in religion's perspective (2010).

The relationship of parents with their beliefs also plays an important role in the development of their children's religious identity. In a study investigating the relationships of couples with Catholic-conservative Protestant, Catholic-Catholic, and Catholic-liberal Protestant sects, the children of Catholic-conservative Protestant couples were the most common, the children of Catholic mixed couples were moderate, and lastly, the children of Catholic-liberal Protestant couples had low levels of faith they have ties. This is because, among parents, conservative Protestants have the most intense faith, Catholics have moderate levels, and liberal

Protestants have low levels of faith (Petersen, 1986). In another study on the effect of Catholic and Protestant couples on the development of their children's religious identity, the children of these couples generally tended towards the Catholic sect, since Catholics generally lived their faith more intensely than Protestants (Salisbury, 1970). Children born from Protestant-Catholic marriages, in contrast to Salisbury's research, concentrated on the Protestant sect when they were growing up (Landis, 1949).

1.3.3.8. The Influence of Other Systems

The problem experienced by couples of different faiths is not only related to the relationships within the family, but also other systems. For example, it has been understood that the religious education that children of couples from different faiths receive at school is an important element in their identity development and affects their relationships with their families' beliefs (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010).

Another factor affecting the couple's relationship is financial issues. Curtis and Ellison stated in their study that couples have disagreements on financial issues (2002). Because, apart from culture or sect, marriages also take place depending on socioeconomic conditions (Biever et al., 1998).

1.3.4. Coping Mechanisms

In this section, how multicultural couples deal with the problems mentioned above will be described.

1.3.4.1. Recognizing or Adopting the Culture of the Other

One of the reasons why an individual may be interested in someone from a different culture may be the curiosity of the other's culture due to the fact that the person does not feel belonging to his own culture (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993). Adopting a certain group identity together makes people's perspectives on life and events similar. (Karairmak, 2008). Bustamante et al. (2011), stated that as a way of coping, espousing the culture of the couple's spouses and being open to the values of other cultures. Tseng (1997) also talks about a way of attunement similar to Bustamante et al. The alternative way is for one partner to change into the culture of the other (as cited in Matsumoto & Juang 2008, p. 368). Seshadri and Knudson-Martin define this path as Singularly Assimilated (2013). Supporting previous concepts, Inman et al. (2011) stated in his research on Asian-Indian and White marriages that many couples are integrated into the cultural life of their partners. In this direction, the couples participated in each other's cultural traditions, respected, and acted sensitively. Trying to understand the other culture and respecting the other culture turns into a factor that strengthens the bond in their marriages and relationships with their children (Kim et al., 2007).

1.3.4.2. Similarities

Bystydzienski (2011) claimed that although couples from different cultures are aware of their differences in a relationship, they also pay attention to their similarities. Kouri and Lasswell (1993) investigated the reason for Black and White marriages and revealed that it is important for couples to meet on the same sect in certain values, interests and to be the same in socioeconomic terms. Furthermore, Inman et al. (2011) found that the fact that couples have similar characteristics at certain points, for example, education, socioeconomic status, being open to distinction, strong family ties, and areas of interest bring the couples closer to each other. Also, Jo-Pei et al. (2008) found that it is more important for couples to be

close to each other in terms of education level than to be similar in terms of ethnicity or class. Correspondingly, Kalmijn and Tubergen (2010) gave voice out that couples can marry someone from a different group depending on the degree of similarity to the people in their group. They also stated that not only socioeconomic factors but also the fact that the couples speak similar languages facilitates the interaction between the couples and their communication with the extended family.

Apart from these, Jo-Pei et al. (2008) investigated the marriage of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous peoples from different ethnic groups in Malaysia, and having similar marriages in their families was an important factor in the marriage of these couples.

1.3.4.3. Common Values

Bustamante et al. (2011), in their research, stated that the ways of coping since couples come from different cultures are to think about the common values rather than the differences and to create new common values in their relationships as a couple. According to Daneshpour (2003), having common values in different beliefs is positive for couples. These values are respect, honesty, trust, loyalty, and appreciation. Thus, people become more curious about their partner's cultural backgrounds, customs, and rituals and do not manipulate the other.

Couples from the same faith but different sects state that they have fewer conflicts because they look at each other more similarly than couples from different faiths. For example, in the study, couples from Methodist and Lutheran sects stated that they believed in the same God, that they were both Christians and believed in this (Williams & Lawler, 2003). Couples with different religious beliefs found it more appropriate to raise their children with moral values such as tolerance, empathy, respect, thought, and selflessness, which is valid in all beliefs (Aswet & Nebitt, 2010).

1.3.4.4. The Difference as a Source of Richness

Cottrell (1990), argues that the main difficulty of couples is not cultural differences, and the attitudes and behaviors they take against these differences determine the difficulty of the relationship. The definition of difference as learning something new is an important awareness for their own mental health (Kim et al., 2007). In the project conducted with Asian-Indian and White couples, the participants defined coming from a different culture with their spouses as a richness and colour, thus questioning their own culture and beliefs or even more attached to their own beliefs (Inman, et al., 2011). In due course, in the research conducted on how couples from different races deal with the problems they experience, it has been found that couples see cultural variance as more attractive and an area where they learn (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013).

1.3.4.5. Other Positive Meanings of Differences

Couples can approach their differences from various perspectives. For example, people who choose their spouses from other groups can ignore their differences and live their lives without suppressing each other. In the study by Seshadri and Knudson-Martin, it was stated that some couples perform their rituals in a relationship without affecting the other “Coexisting”, while others “Integrated” the customs of both cultures together (2013). Similarly, Kim et al. (2007) stated in their study that Korean women's maintenance of any situation belonging to their own culture in marriage is both good for them and good for their relationships as it contributes to their spouses getting to know their own culture better.

Couples may also just prefer to avoid these differences completely and choose another way. For example, Tseng (1997) mentioned, “Creative Adjustment”. It means that individuals move away from their own cultural norms and create a new independent culture for themselves (as cited in Matsumoto &

Juang, 2008, p. 368). According to the context constructionist way (Tseng, 1997), cultural differences within the partners themselves are put into context. And through this context, couples try to understand where they conflict and have differences. As a result, they can either try to explain this situation with the method of a culture or create a perspective of their own. Thus, the subject they call a problem can take on a very different form (as cited in Matsumoto & Juang, 2008, p. 368). In this regard, Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) state that couples do not put their differences at the center of their relationships, and that contextualizing the differences and creating a sense of "us" is one of the most important ways of coping.

Differences can also be shared. For instance, Tseng (1997) described it as the "Mixing way", that is, taking certain points from both cultures and feeding them into their marriages (as cited in Matsumoto & Juang, 2008, p. 368). On a similar point, Inman et al. (2011) found that couples from different cultures cope with problems by acting as a team and trying to find a middle way. Bystydzienski (2011) suggests that perceived differences can be transformed in intergroup marriages, boundaries can become permeable, and partnerships can be established. Lastly, Bustamante et al. (2011), in their research also stated that using humor to establish a relationship between the couple and to reduce the importance of differences in their relationships.

1.3.4.6. Distance From Religion

In the study conducted by Arweck and Nesbitt, it was stated that children with two different beliefs do not have any conflicts about religion or culture, and the reason for this is that religion is not an important element in the family because people in the family are distant from religion (2010). Similarly, in their study, William and Lawler (2003) stated that the participation in worship of the couples was low. They stated in their research on couples whose sects are the same or

different, that even if they belong to the same sect, the difference in religious perspectives can affect the couple's relationship. Apart from being similar or not, how intense they are in the religious sense affects the form of conflicts between them in their research, even if couples belong to different sects and belong to the same sect, heterogamy took place in marriages, but this difference was not attributed to relationship satisfaction, parents or lack of communication. Moreover, it kept heterogamy only in an intersect position and kept all other socioeconomic, demographic, and educational conditions equal. This makes us more certain that sect differences do not affect the relationship.

1.3.4.7. Communication of the Partners with Each Other

It is a fundamental coping mechanism for couples from particular cultures to be in constant communication, talk about each other's feelings, support each other, and feel the presence of a partner they can trust in the face of difficulties (Seshardi & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Correspondingly, Reiter and Gee (2008), revealed that being in open communication and partners supporting each other's culture and religion reduces the problems in their relationships, and being able to talk and discuss is a factor that enhances their relationship.

Williams and Lawler (2003) state that open communication about religious issues is the way to ensure marital satisfaction for couples who have both the same sect and intersect marriages. They also stated that the important part of this communication is to respect each other for differences.

1.3.4.8. Other Coping Mechanism

It is an important coping mechanism for the couple to stand together against discriminatory thoughts or prejudices against them outside (Seshardi & Knudson-

Martin, 2013). Also, living in places where marriages from different cultures are accepted in society enables couples to cope with the difficulties they may experience in this regard more easily. In the research conducted on why black and white marriages are more common in Los Angeles, it is explained that society looks at such marriages from an acceptable point of view. From the perspective of acceptance, the fact that not only the society but also family members accept the marriage of the couple makes the process easier for the couple. (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993).

1.3.5. Gains

In this section, the gains that multicultural couples make by realizing their marriages will be mentioned. First of all, Bystydzienski (2011) mentioned that the relationships of couples from different cultures create a hybrid relational identity of their own in the process. Not only couples but also younger generations have more complicated and fused Ethno-religious-linguistic identities with the increase of intermarriage, that is, the marriage of people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds (Gielen et al., 2008). Also, parents with different beliefs emphasized that their children are more open-minded, flexible, and tolerant (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010). Daneshpour (2003) also stated that in the parents of the Muslim and Christian participants, their children learn the traditions, values, languages, roles, and behaviors of both faiths equally and this gives their children a richer identity. In a study of Asian-Indian and White people's marriages, some participants encountered positive reactions from their relatives, work and social friends, and also their families as a reaction to their marriage (Inman et al., 2011).

Ülkücan et al. (2011) stated that being with someone from a different sect has a positive effect on overcoming prejudices, attitudes, and values. Moreover, the increase in the marriage of people from different cultures ensures that the prejudices

that these marriages are not accepted in society are prevented (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993).

Finally, obtaining information about another culture is one of the most important gains of being married to someone from a different sect (Ülkücan et al., 2019).

1.3.6. Multicultural Relationships From the Systemic Point of View

The primary approach used in couples and family therapy is the "System Theory" (Gurman, 2008). Initially, Bertalanffy, with his studies in the field of biology, became the pioneer of the system theory, which is now used by family therapists. System Theory is the evaluation of individual behaviors through their involvement within the existing system. General System Theory, on the other hand, expresses the idea that each system is part of a larger system (Nichols, 2013). To understand couples and families, Systemic Theory does not only examine the "family system", but also deals with other larger systems and subsystems that affect the family. Subsystems are more specific, referring to each family member, siblings, partners or both the parent and the child. On the other hand, larger systems refer to the environment, socio-cultural structures and/or interpersonal dynamics (Ünal, 2013).

For many years, the cases of white-middle-class families have been a focus for the studies conducted in the field of family therapy by white-middle-class therapists; but together with sociocultural awareness, marriages of different groups have also begun to be investigated (Falicov, 1988). In 1991, the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) approved that there should be a directive regarding the multicultural perspective within the consulting process (Sue et al., 1992).

For systemic theory, the issues regarding boundaries are a main concern. Minuchin notes that the ways of setting boundaries range from enmeshment to

disengagement. According to Minuchin, the problems arise from these boundaries being too rigid or too flexible. If these boundaries are vulnerable, other systems would have more interference with them. On the contrary, if they are too rigid, there would be less interference from other systems (Nichols, 2013). "Hierarchy" is another main concept in systemic theory. It is noted that the subsystems within the families are in a certain hierarchical position against each other. The subsystems of parents or the subsystems of children are examples of these subsystems (Nichols, 2013). For example, if gender roles have a big impact on the relationships of couples, only one person will be hierarchically superior in the system consisting of the parents, and this may negatively affect the communication between the couple and their children. In addition, since the unity of the couple will be damaged consequently, the couple would become more vulnerable to the interference of other systems (Nichols, 2013).

It is extremely important that the partners act together against external issues and that they recognize and regard each other's cultural differences in conflicts within themselves (Biever et al., 1998). According to the PACT (Psychobiological Approach to Couple Therapy) theory of Stan Tatkin, the fact that the partners act together against external issues is an important indicator that the couples have a decent relationship. Tatkin call this as "being a couple bubble and managing third parties" (Mazzei, 2021; Tatkin, 2020). When couples couldn't manage the third parties, this situation may evolve into the triangulation that Bowen mentioned in his theory, which means that the conflicts between the partners may grow. The term triangulation refers to the cases when couples involve another person in their private sphere to avoid the stress at times when their anxiety level increases. In the long run, the third parties they cling to in order to get away from the tension among themselves also become problematic (Nichols, 2013).

Different from other couples, in the cases of multicultural couples, the cultural differences regarding gender roles, business mentalities and vacation habits, expressing feelings, parenting and so forth; as well as various external factors such as social exclusion they experience or their families and friends who

are against their marriage may lead to many conflicts in the relationships and make them blame each other over many issues (Biever et al., 1998). also draws attention to the effects of socioeconomic status, couples' relations with each other's social networks, matters about setting boundaries in relationships, social hierarchy they are involved in, the styles of communication and life norms (1998; 2003).

Recognizing each other's cultural differences is more challenging for these couples. Understanding the emotions of their partners and meeting their needs is one of the most challenging issues for couples from different cultures (Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). At this juncture, it is crucial to consider certain perspectives in systemic therapy. Regardless of whether they are multicultural or not, every couple must have certain characteristics in order to cope with the problems they experience. Avoiding criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling, being able to be friends, and creating a shared meaning system are examples of these characteristics. If they have enough of these characteristics, they can maintain their relationship in this way (J. M. Gottman & J. S. Gottman, 2008). Besides, if both partners can make conversation about their differences and come to a mutual understanding with each other on these issues and want to stay together, being from different cultures does not affect their relationship much (Matsumoto & Juang, 2008).

1.4. THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION AND INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGES IN TURKEY

Turkey has not officially stated the Islam as its religion, yet still there is an administration mainly affiliated with the Sunni-Hanafi sect within the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Aslan, 2017; S. Yakar & E. Yakar, 2021). Under the leadership of Muhammad, Islam is considered as the last major existing religion. It generated an innovative nature completely changing the existing order at that time in Medina and opposed the paganism (Okumuş, 2009).

The concept of religion inherited by the Republic of Turkey today, although Anatolia is far from the Arabian geography, came into existence with the acceptance of Islam by the Turks as a result of various contacts at that time such as wars, and has been transferred until today. The Turks had met Islam through the Ehlibleyt; and during the Abbasid period, their attention to Islam had increased by far and then they had slightly abandoned their old beliefs as getting closer to Sunni Islamic traditions (Aslan, 2017).

Arguing for the importance of religion in the social sphere, Okumuş (2009) underlines that religion has a function of regulating society, and that this function stems from the belief in hereafter, and thus individuals cannot act according to their own desires in society. He reflects on the Islamic case by noting that the generations following Muhammad developed a very traditional and stagnant social practice, and it may be a factor decelerating the social transformation. He supports his idea arguing that in the societies governed by Islam, the ruler is not opposed anyhow. Associatively, Markussen remarks that Islam generally does not regard any diversity or ethnic differences within itself (2000). Then it can be said that thanks to sects, traditionalism and stagnation are kept off.

1.4.1. The Concept of Sect in Turkey

Before looking at the history of sects and how they are perceived in Turkey, it is necessary to take a look at when and how sects first emerged in Islam. Sects in Islam emerged after the death of Muhammad (Aslan, 2017). Kutlu, in his book *Mezhepler Tarihine Giriş* (Introduction to the History of Sects), mentions that people, social structure, political events, religious texts, culture and civilizations play a role in the emergence of sects (Kocadağ, 2009). One of the reasons for the diversification of sects is the differences of opinion that have arisen due to the formation of the Qur'an over the course of time and not at once (Ağaoğlu, 2018).

In Turkey, apart from Sunnism (Hanefism), sects are generally divided into Alevism in terms of belief and Caferism and Shafiism in terms of worship (S. Yakar & E. Yakar, 2021). According to the Caferilik.com Website of Turkish Caferis, being involved in the way of Imam Cafer Sadik, Caferis have the love of Ahl al-Bayt and believe that the leadership of Islam belongs to Ali and Twelve Imams after Allah. In Turkey, Caferis are also known as Shiites (n.d). Aybakan (2010) in his article on Shafiism refers to it as a sect acting in line with the words of Imam Shafi who is a religious leader based in Medina and Iraq. Although Shafiism is considered as a separate sect, it is actually included in Sunnism (Bilmen, 2003). Alevism and Sunnism sects will be explained in more detail below.

Alevism and Sunnism are the most common sects in Turkey, yet they have serious prejudices against each other due to several conflicts throughout the history. In fact, the most important reason for these prejudices, apart from several conflicts, is the lack of mutual trust and communication (Ağaoğlu, 2018). The distinction between Alevis and Sunnis, which continues today, has emerged long ago. The first conflicts were experienced during the election of caliphate. In the following periods, Turkish societies met Islam through Ehlilbeyt. With the influence of the Shiite society, a Shiite-Alevi culture has also emerged in Anatolia over time. In the period when pre-Islamic customs were lived as if they belong to Islam, these traditional practices affected Shiite Alevis' religious beliefs more than the religious beliefs of Sunni Muslims. Among the Turks, the Shiite-Alevi culture has taken place mostly as a part of the oral culture. On the other hand, the states founded by Turks were run according to Sunni Islamic traditions. In the Ottoman period, the conflict between Shah Ismail and Yavuz Sultan Selim further strengthened this distinction. The Turks retained to stay within the Sunni Islamic perspective in the following historical periods (Aslan, 2017; Ağaoğlu, 2018).

As in the review of Wilson's texts (Ertoý, 2004); Kutlu, in his review, mentions the facts that sects do not fully represent religions and that somehow they have become a kind of anti-religious matter with the changes and transformations they have gone through within the course of time (Kocadağ, 2009). Aslan also said

something similar, emphasizing that the sects that emerged from Islam moved away from the main axis of religion over time (2017). The actual states of above-mentioned different sects support these views.

1.4.2. Alevism

1.4.2.1. Definition of Alevism

It is stated that the origin of Alevism dates back to the period when the Islam had not accepted by Turkmens yet (Aktaş, 1999). The definition of Alevism is not entirely clear. According to some people, it is seen as a type of Islam, even if Alevism is different from the Orthodox methods, while other people view it as an ethnic identity rather than a sect because it incorporates heterodox customs and cultural elements (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). In a similar way, Shindeldecker (1998) speaks of several definitions of Alevism. In addition to the above-mentioned point, he suggests that Alevism is seen as a purer form of Shiism and Sufism as well as being a perspective based on human rights regardless of the religious belief. As a matter of fact, Anatolian Alevism is exactly similar to neither Iranian Shiism nor Syrian Nusayrism and has a unique perspective (Aslan, 2017). According to Aktaş, "Alevism is a heterodox folk doctrine with many contradictory elements and the language of which is Turkish (1999, p. 65)." Instead of Alevism (Alevilik), the words Alawi, Alawite, Alouite, Nusayri or Alevi-Bektashi could also be encountered in English (Shindeldecker, 1998).

1.4.2.2. Demographic Information about Alevism

The population of Alevis in Turkey is a debated issue. The reason why the exact number of Alevi population is not known is that Alevi individuals had to hide their identities due to the conflicts between Alevis and Sunnis in the 70s and 80s,

and this situation spread out further with the migration (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). According to some, Alevi Muslims are the second most common sect group in Turkey (Erman & Göker, 2000). In the Shankland's book, it is stated that at the end of the 1980s, their population is comprised between 10% and 25% of Turkey (Irlenkäuser, 2011). Shindeldecker, on the other hand, states that researches notes that they are comprised of one-third of Turkey's population and their numbers are approximately between 10 to 20 million (1998).

While the Alevi population spreads especially in several cities located in Central Anatolia and Eastern Anatolia, such as Amasya, Çorum, Erzincan, Tunceli, Malatya, Elazığ, Sivas, Adıyaman, Tokat; it also spreads in countries such as Iran, Syria, Bulgaria, Romania, Iraq, Greece and Albania (Shindeldecker, 1998). In Turkey, Alevis generally live in rural or urban areas such as Istanbul, Ankara, Adana; and outside of Turkey they spread over several European countries, mostly in Germany. While those in the countryside practices the doctrines of Alevism both in secular and traditional manner; the Alevis living in the city became more politically active by associating these doctrines with urban life. Those who lived abroad for a while and then returned were more interested and loyal in their Alevi identity (Markussen, 2000).

1.4.2.3. Oppressions Experienced by Alevis

After the Ottomans were victorious in the war between the Sufi-Shia Safavids and the Ottoman Sunnis, the Alevis moved towards the east of Anatolia, which was closer to the lands of Shah Ismail (Safavi ruler), whom they supported in the war (Markussen, 2000; Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). Besides several clashes of idea in the more distant past, they have been subjected to various oppression and discrimination in the Ottoman times (Erman & Göker, 2000). At that time, the rights given even to non-Muslims were not given to heterodox Muslims such as Qizilbashes and Nusayris; and they were systematically oppressed. They were also

addressed with discriminatory discourses, such as "Mulhid" and "Rafizi", which mean "deviated" (Akbaş, 2010).

Traditionally they were called as Kizilbash (Kızılbaş) or Turkmen (Türkmen) in some places. However, once these words gained new connotations stigmatizing them, they decided to get rid of these names and call themselves as Alevi. Now, the word Qizilbash has been using for insulting Alevis (Shindeldecker, 1998). In the Ottoman Empire, the word "Qizilbash" is used in the sense of "infidel" indicates that they are Shiites (Markussen, 2000). Today, many racist attacks against Alevis continue to happen, as well. The 1978 Maraş, 1980 Çorum and 1993 Sivas Madımak Massacres can be given as examples of these attacks (Akbaş, 2010). Beyond these, being accused of practicing certain incestuous orgies called "the candle went out" or the frequently mentioned discourse, which is "Alevis are not Muslims", in schools can be another examples of discrimination against Alevis (Shindeldecker, 1998). Sunnis accuse them of changing the doctrines in the Qur'an and refers this as a reason for the persecution of the Alevis. They think that Ali's supporters are changing the doctrines or practices in the Qur'an and leads to a false understanding of Islam and that it is necessary to turn them into truth (Erman & Göker, 2000; Markussen, 2000).

1.4.2.4. Alevism as a Religious Belief and as a Culture

When Alevism is approached as a religious belief, similar aspects of Alevism and Sunnism draw attention. Both sects believe in the prophethood of Muhammad and that Ali is descended from his family (Ahl al-Bayt), and also both consider the Qur'an as the last book and believe in the same god, which is Allah. (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). However, since for Alevis the aim of human is to reach a consistent wholeness by using religion as an instrument. They believe god, through this way, they control themselves. Alevis believe in Qur'an, but unlike

Sunnis, they give more importance to the perspective in it and the moral values it advises (Ağaoğlu, 2018).

Moreover, there are certain differences in terms of religious rituals among Alevis and Sunnis. Alevis follow the path of 12 imams. They visit monumental places where the graves of important people such as Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli are located. They listen to certain mystical poems and musical ballads (deyişler, nefesler) of poets such as Pir Sultan Abdal and Kaygusuz Abdal. In memory of Hasan and Hussein, they perform a mourning fast for ten, twelve or fourteen days in the month of Muharram and after fasting, they prepare Ashura. With the coming of spring, they celebrate Newroz and the coming of Hıdırellez and perform a kind of worship called Semah in cemelis. Semah ritual is led by a Dede -a descendant of Ali. (Shindeldecker, 1998). Dede is also the mediator for any interpersonal conflicts (Markussen, 2000; Irlenkäuser, 2011). Alevis give more importance to human values and behaviors rather than religious concepts such as heaven and hell (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). Many Alevis have stated that being a human is more essential than one's religious affiliation. It can be well-understood from these expressions such as "If you hurt another person, the ritual prayers you have done are counted worthless" or "My Kaaba is a human being" (Shindeldecker, 1998). Concordantly, Markussen asserts that according to Alevism-Bektashism, the sacredness lies down in the heart of a human being itself and that it is expressed and thusly become visible through the agency of poetry and music (2000). Alevism passes down from generations through blood lines. They preserve their existence in this way (Ağaoğlu, 2018).

Alevism is sometimes defined as a religious culture rather than its essence as a religion. The main reasons that cause Alevism to be considered as a culture are their baglama culture, mystical poems and musical ballads through which it can be observed that their rituals is kind of an archaic ritual as they still have an oral narrative tradition (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). Various moral values are also included in this culture. The concepts such as "Four Doors, Forty Levels", "The Perfect Human Being" and "I'm reality" are examples of these values. All of them

are related to the effort to reach the highest point within oneself (Shindeldecker, 1998).

The family has a great role in transferring the values of Alevism to new generations. The family ensures the children's adoption of the existing rules, values and beliefs that have been transferred from the past to the present in the society. In particular, certain cultural values related to Alevism are taught within the family. Certain religious doctrines are also in the scope of these cultural values. Children take religious education at a young age in the family. Thus, the family shapes the way of worship of the children just like a religious organization. Since Alevis are not much regarded by the state, this situation is more common among them and most of the religious practices have to be taught within the family. When children reach a certain age, they are taken to several places to which Alevis attach sacred importance (the tombs or turbes of Hacı Bektashi Veli, Karacaahmet Sultan or Shah Kulu Sultan, etc.), and religious knowledge such as narratives about water, earth and sky, the Karbala incident, the cult of Twelve Imams are thought to them. Afterwards, the instructive person called "pir" from outside the family informs the children about the "Semah" and teaches them how the circle in the cem is formed (Aktaş, 1999). Another important value of Alevis is the equality of men and women. Families pay attention to raising their daughters by providing them all necessary social, educational and professional support for them to carve out a niche for themselves (Shindeldecker, 1998). Because for Alevis and Bektashis, giving value to people is essential (Markussen, 2000).

1.4.2.5. Alevism in the Current Society

Alevis living under pressure in the Ottoman Empire supported Atatürk with the hope of a more liberal administration with the establishment of the republic after the collapse of the empire (Markussen, 2000). However, they could not find what they expected from the new republic because their beliefs were regarded enough

(Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). Because, in fact, after Islamic monasteries and zawiya were closed by the government headed by Atatürk, Alevis were again exposed to oppression just as in the Ottoman period (Markussen, 2000). Nevertheless, Alevis kept supporting Atatürk. Because, according to Shakland's review Alevis, the idea that would prevent them from being under religious pressure is the idea of secularism brought by Atatürk (Irlenkäuser, 2011).

The biggest problem of Alevis in Turkey at present is that Alevism is not regarded as a branch of Islam by the state and they have not been able to gain the social rights related to it. For instance, cemevis are not considered as a respected place of worship under the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs and their sacred places of worship are not even presented in the religion classes given at the public schools (Shindeldecker, 1998). Aslan (2017) states that Alevi dedes or people working in cemevis are not considered permanent employees. They also cannot acquire governmental positions actively. Migration and discrimination further reinforced Alevis and minimized their visibility (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). As one of the biggest internal reasons for this situation, Shakland states that although Alevis consider themselves as "modern" people, they actually started to participate in the urban life a bit late and migrate to more rural parts of the cities they moved to. (Irlenkäuser, 2011). As a result, the participation of Alevis in business life became more difficult. Thus, due to the prejudices of the Sunnis, they could not find a chance to properly prove their adequacies in these areas. Therefore, the Alevis who have difficulties in business life have begun to express themselves through media tools. They have given various speeches, prepared manifestos and begun to write articles and books about their own culture and existence. In this way, it is both aimed to give an opportunity to Alevis to learn more about Alevism and their Alevi identity and to break the prejudices of Sunnis about Alevis (Erman & Göker, 2000). In order to avoid discrimination in terms of religious belief and to be more respected by the whole society, they stand with the Bektashis and express their sect as a branch of Islam (Markussen, 2000).

It can be briefly stated that in Turkey, various groups who have different religious beliefs and ethnic roots were systematically ignored by the state during the Republican period. As a kind of historical legacy, a hegemonic structure has developed that prevents minority groups from expressing themselves and being visible. Therefore, Alevis prefer alternative political and academic options that stand against the regime created by Islamist parties (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012; Erman & Göker, 2000; Markussen, 2000).

1.4.3. Sunnism

For a Muslim, it is a must to obey Allah as the god, regard Muhammad as the prophet, believe in the Quran as the sacred book and accept the other religious books and other prophets' existence and blessedness. (Ağaoğlu, 2018). In addition to these musts, a Muslim must also believe in angels, the after life, faith and predestination (Bilmen, 2003).

Sunnism is the most authentic sect, where adherence to the doctrines of Muhammad is at the highest level and there has been almost no change since from the time of Muhammad to this date (Okumuş, 2009). Sunnism is also the most common sect of Islam. Also, Sunnis are strictly bound by certain fards in Islam. Prayer, performing an ablution, the declaration of faith, alms-giving, fasting and pilgrimage constitute the basic norms of Islamic practice. Failure to comply with them is considered a sin. In addition, there are some non-obligatory yet highly recommended acts such as sacrificing at the time of Eid Qurban - this type of optional worship is called "wajib". Another type of practices in Islam is the tradition and the practices of Muhammad, which is "sunnah". "Umrah" is an example of this kind of practices. Also, when the call to prayer is recited, people gather in places of worship called mosques. Besides not fulfilling the fards is a sin; to commit shirk, to kill someone, to lie, to insult someone, to consume pork, to drink something containing alcohol, to gain an unfair income through gambling or interest, and to

slander are also considered as sin (Bilmen, 2003). As Sunnis believe in Allah, they employ a kind of fear and hope (Ağaoğlu, 2018).

Among the Sunnis in Turkey, there are two separate groups which are pro-Shariah and non-Shariah, and this is a very controversial issue. (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). Islam encourages people to choose their religions by their own will through reading and questioning. Therefore, Sunnism is a sect that a person can affiliate to later on (Ağaoğlu, 2018).

Sunnism in Anatolia is also different from Sunnism in other regions. Just like Alevism in Anatolia, it has its own unique characteristics (Aslan, 2017). However, Ağaoğlu states that despite their differences, both sects are a branch of Islam and are affiliated with the Hanafi sect. Additionally, she states that, religious festivals, weddings, deaths, birth customs, and the daily life are similar to each other (2018). The name of the Hanafi sect comes from its founder, Abu-Hanefi. On the other hand, in Aslan's text and S. Yakar's and E. Yakar's text, it can be seen that only Sunnism are consider as included in Hanefism (2017; 2021).

Sunnis have been respected by official states since the Seljuk and Ottoman periods. They are still under the protection of the Directorate of Religious Affairs today in Turkey (Ağaoğlu, 2018). At the same time, since their religious perspective is associated with being loyal to the strong, they could maintain the existing political system more easily. Meanwhile, Alevis, on the contrary, have difficulty in expressing their beliefs freely because they have not been politically supported for years (Markussen, 2000).

1.4.4. Intermarriages in Turkey

The findings regarding the marriage of people from different cultures in Turkey are quite limited. As can be seen in the texts mentioned earlier on this subject, it is stated in the collected works of Altuntek (2001) that exogamous marriages were more common in Turkish society before Islam, and this tendency

decreased with Islam and turned into endogamy. It is also noted that this tendency to exogamous marriages still continues in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, but with certain different parameters such as education and economic levels in the cities, an increase in the exogamous marriages is observed. The restrictive approach of Islam on this matter that is, the fact that it is haram (forbidden by religion) to marry a non-Muslim lies behind the fact that marriage with someone from a different ethnic identity has not been common among Turks since the adoption of Islam (Bilmen, 2003). Although the number of studies on different cultures and ethnicities is very limited, there are various findings on this subject in studies conducted in various fields. For instance, it is revealed that there is a group of Russian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Georgian or Turkmenistanis women who marry with Turkish men to become a citizen of Turkey (Gökmen, 2011). Similarly, there is another study regarding this issue in which the Russian women's marriages in Turkey are analyzed. This study is a sociological research that mainly focusses on migration and the eventual transformation at the place where the subjects live. Additionally, one other sociological study aims to investigate the assimilation in Turkish-Kurdish marriages (Gültekin, 2012). Similarly, in a research conducted by Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits on the marriages of Turkish-Kurdish couples, it is stated that the rate of Kurdish-Turkish marriages is increasing gradually, yet still this rate is low in Turkey (2002).

This phenomenon is not much studied, especially in the field of psychology. One of the examples with this regard in the field of psychology is Boratav et al. (2021). This study is about the relations between Turkish women and their spouses with different nationalities in Turkey. In this study, it is revealed that the similarity of certain common values and perspectives is important for the couples rather than cultural differences, and that it is not a must for participants to be based on their own cultural identity in all their actions; and even if they fully comply with their own cultural identity, still it does not affect the relationship between the partners, since the problems just originated from several unextraordinary cultural differences. In addition, it is stated that couples overcome cultural differences by

learning about each other's cultures. Finally, it is shown that open-communication, empathy and self-disclosure improve the partners' relationships in their marriages.

1.4.4.1. Alevi-Sunni Marriages in Turkey

These prejudices between Alevis and Sunnis have affected both groups in many ways socially. One of these social issues affected by the above-mentioned prejudices is the marriage of Alevis and Sunnis. While some do not see these marriages as a problem, some people and families are prejudiced because they think that there would be several conflicts in these marriages (Çatak, 2015; Ağaoğlu, 2018). Both groups oppose these marriages. Sunnis do not see Alevis as true Muslims; Alevis, on the other hand, worry about that their daughters would be oppressed if they marry with a Sunni man (Markussen, 2000; Ağaoğlu, 2018). Alevis are in particular more hesitant as they think that they would be suppressed in these marriages. Sunnis, on the other hand, do not think that they would experience much oppression since they can already live without trouble (Markussen, 2000; Ağaoğlu, 2018). Various studies on this subject conducted in Turkey will be described in detail below.

One of the first studies on this subject is Balkanlıoğlu's thesis study conducted in Nevşehir (2012). In the study, it is noted that the people who make the life of Alevi-Sunni couples most troubled are their parents, relatives and friends. Thus, it is concluded that the difference of sect in itself does not actually have a significant negative effect on their own relationships. Similarly, it is also revealed that being an Alevi-Sunni couple has no specific impact on raising a child. For the parents, it is more important to have children well-educated and well-behaved. Being Alevi or Sunni is not a matter of importance. However, in the study, it can be seen that Alevi-Sunni marriages often leads to many problems for the families and relatives of both partners. Balkanlıoğlu notes that as a result of these marriages, the couples are exposed to certain discriminatory and stigmatizing attitudes such as social isolation or resentment with regard to being accused of committing crimes or

corrupting the family blood. Balkanlıoğlu says that this social stigma may stem from the prejudices of both sides towards each other (Balkanlıoğlu, 2012).

In another study on the same issue conducted, Çatak (2015) points out that couples did not have a problem with each other when they decide to be married because most of them feel distant from their religions. Few of the participants considered their partners being of a different sect as positive or negative. They were generally neutral towards their partners' sect. Also there were a few people who had several problems over time because their partners and partners' families were very fundamentalist. Mostly, women and Alevi were worried about having a relationship with someone of a different sect. They thought that they would be forced to comply with the doctrines of their dominant partners' sect, if they married a Sunni partner. Sunnis, on the other hand, thought that differences in worship would cause problems. When we look at the families, it is revealed that the families of the female participants mostly did not want these marriages, because they were worried that their children would change if the marriage took place. There are also concerns about that this marriage would not comply with Alevi traditions and that their grandchildren will not be Alevi because they will not grow up with the Alevi tradition. But over time, this prejudice in families has gradually minimized. As these prejudices and the impact of the partners' families on the couples weakened, the problems between the couples have also minimized. When raising a child, the conflict between the partners increased if the doctrines of only one side's sect was intensely practiced or the other side was completely ignored.

Lastly, in the study of Ülkücan et al. (2019), the participation of Alevi-Sunni couples in the activities of each other's cultures, their level of being affected by each other, their cultural contributions to each other, and the frequency of their meeting with both their own and their partners' relatives are evaluated. In the study, it is aimed to prevent the prejudices and discriminatory attitudes among these social groups. One of the important aspects of this study is that it considers Alevism and Sunnism not only as a sect but also as a social identity.

When we look at the interaction of couples with each other's cultures, it is seen that people mostly participate in the activities of their own culture or do not participate in any of the activities of any side. The level of their participation in each other's cultural activities is also very low. Although they do not participate in each other's cultural or religious activities, Sunnis declared that they found partners' activities or rituals very interesting, influenced and researched them. In marriage, Alevis are a bit more experienced than their Sunni partners, regarding their partners' religious beliefs and practices, since Alevis are more familiar with the activities of Sunnis, as Sunnis are the majority (Ülkücan et al., 2019).

It can be said there are not so many studies with regard to children of Alev-Sunni marriages. Aşlamacı's study (2013) can be shown as an example of this limited number of studies. In this study, it was investigated how the children of Alevi-Sunni couples were affected by sect discrimination. While some of the parents would like their children to receive religious education based on common religious values, some other just want to raise their children only with commonly shared moral values. It is revealed that the participants have not thought about this issue before getting married. On the other hand, it is also revealed that many do not want their children to be in areas such as mosques or cemevis, where they can directly get any information related to the religion, and they do not let their children read books about religion. It is also stated that the children are not exposed to any religious pressure and have a fair learning space within the family.

Alevi-Sunni marriages contribute to the lessening of the distances and borders between the groups in Turkey as well as helping to improve the relations and come together. (Ülkücan et al., 2019).

As can be seen, the case of marriages of couples from different cultures and sects are very limited in Turkey. This study aims to reveal the dynamics underlying the marriages of individuals in Turkey, who are involved in different sects. Their problems and their skills with regard to facing their problems will be discussed, besides their achievements in coping with the problems within these marriages. At

this juncture, it is aimed that this study will contribute to the forthcoming studies in the future.

1.5. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research aims to understand the problems that couples in Turkey from Alevi-Sunni sects experience and how they deal with these problems from a relational perspective. In addition, it is hoped that the study can contribute to changing the prejudices about sects.

In Turkey, this issue has mostly been dealt with in the fields of sociology and religious studies. Considering that sect is also a cultural element in the broadest framework, it is thought that culture can affect a person's individual and connection world in numerous ways, and this is one of the subjects that should be studied in the field of mental health. Concordantly, considering this issue in a relational structure will provide a different perspective than the studies done so far. Over and above, it is targeted to contribute to clinicians and researchers who want to work on this subject.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

2.1. PARTICIPANTS

Participants consisted of 6 couples that define themselves as Alevi and Sunni, with 3 being Alevi men-Sunni women couples and the other being Sunni men and Alevi women couples. These couples were expected to be heterosexual, have married once, have been married for at least 2 years and having at least one child. Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling methods.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic 10 of the participants were interviewed via online platforms and 2 were interviewed face to face. All of the couples have participated from İstanbul.

2.2. Demographic Information about the Participants

This section contains the demographic information of 12 participants. The couples that participated in the study were asked questions about their gender, age, profession, economic status and level of education. Apart from these questions, one of the spouses was asked about the province that they lived in, the district, the duration of their relationship, the length of their marriage, how many children they had, and the age and gender of their children (See Appendix A).

The participant IDs were constructed to ensure confidentiality, and were based on their gender, and whether they were Alevi or Sunni. For instance, C3FS refers to the Sunni female participant of the 3rd couple. Table 2.2 and the following contains detailed demographic information about the participants.

Table 2.2.*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

ID	Age	Occupation	Socio-economic Status	Education Status	Duration of Partnership	Duration of Marriage	Number of Children	Gender of Children	Age of the Children	Sect
C1FA	33	Manager	Middle High	Bachelor Degree	7	6	1	Female	4	Alevi
C1MS	33	Litigation Officer	Middle	Bachelor Degree	7	6	1	Female	4	Sunni
C2FS	39	Small Business Owner	Middle High	High school Graduate	20	15	2	Female/ Male	12/9	Sunni
C2MA	46	Leather Work	Middle Low	High school Graduate	20	15	2	Female/ Male	12/9	Alevi
C3FS	41	Nurse	Middle	Master's Degree	17	14	2	Male/ Female	11/6	Sunni

C3MA	43	Tailor	Middle	Secondary School Graduate	17	14	2	Male/ Female	11/6	Alevi
C4MA	53	Retired/ Store Worker	Middle	Primary School Graduate	24	23	2	Female/ Male	22/10	Alevi
C4FS	45	Housewife	Middle High	Highschool Graduate	24	23	2	Female/ Male	22/10	Sunni
C5FA	38	Pharmacist	Middle Low	Master's Degree	8	6	1	Male	1.5	Alevi
C5MS	42	Trade	Middle Low	Associate Degree	8	6	1	Male	1.5	Sunni
C6FA	45	Engineer	Middle	Master's Degree	20	18	1	Male	15	Alevi
C6MS	44	Computer Engineer	Middle	Bachelor's Degree	20	18	1	Male	15	Sunni

2.2.1. Couple-1

Female partner (C1FS) is 33 years old, a graduate of aquaculture engineering, but currently works as a manager in a law firm. She is a graduate. She belongs to the Alevi sect. They live in Kagithane with his husband and daughter. They met as colleagues. During the interview, she stated that she was born in Malatya and after a certain age they migrated to Istanbul. She continued university in Malatya for two years and then in Adana. Since she was indifferent to the dominant sect in her youth, her biggest worry is that her daughter, like herself, will turn to the dominant sect without realizing it.

The male partner (C1MS) is 33 years old and works as an enforcement officer in the courthouse. He is a graduate. He believes the Sunni sect. They work in the same company as his wife. His wife works in the office and he works in the courthouse and that they were colleagues in their previous jobs. He lives in Kagithane with his wife and daughter. During the interview, he stated that they went through a process where they changed districts due to the fact that they went to their extended families to get support while raising their children. In addition, he stated that he and his wife were struggling financially, not because of sect discrimination, but this did not affect their relationship.

2.2.2. Couple-2

Female partner (C2FS), 39 years old, runs a beauty salon. She is a high school graduate. She is of the Sunni sect. She lives in Sultangazi with her husband and children. They met living in the same neighborhood and started their relationship. During the interview, she mentioned that she used to think about everything and was sad about it, but later on, she overcame this situation with her husband. Since she had difficulty expressing their marriage with her husband to her own family,

they had a long and long dating period. She stated that she is from Ardahan in order to emphasize the similarity of the families in terms of eastern culture.

Male partner (C2MA), 46 years old, he is in the leather business. He is a high school graduate. He is from the Alevi sect. He lives in Sultangazi with his wife and children. They met living in the same neighborhood and started their relationship. During the research, even when the researcher made comments confirming him, he generally answered the questions in an aggressive manner and as if he did not want to take part in the research. During the interview he stated that they had a long dating period. He stated that he was from Sivas in order to emphasize the similarity of the eastern culture among the families. He also stated that sect discrimination did not affect the relationship between the two, and that they overcame certain difficulties that came from the outside in this regard, by staying together.

2.2.3. Couple-3

The female partner (C3FS) is 41 years old, a nurse. Has a Master's degree. She belongs to the Sunni sect. She resides in Istanbul Umraniye with her husband and children. They met through mutual friends. She stated that she was from Ardahan but was born in Istanbul and her husband is from Tokat. During the interview she stated that not sect discrimination but educational differences in their marriage were a question mark for her at first, but this situation changed as she got to know her husband.

Male partner (C3MA) is 43 years old and is a tailor. He is a secondary school graduate. He belongs to the Alevi sect. He lives in Istanbul/Umraniye with his wife and children. They met through mutual friends. He is from Tokat. The point he emphasized in the meeting; is that a good relationship is important rather than being from different sects.

2.2.4. Couple-4

Male partner (C4MA) is 53 years old and is retired from machine operation. However, he currently manages a package store. He is a primary school graduate. He is from the Alevi sect. He lives in Istanbul / Umraniye with his wife and children. They met living in the same neighborhood with his wife. He was born and raised in Elazig due to his father's job, but he stated that he is originally from Tunceli. He mentioned that he and his wife have a similar culture and that this contributed positively to their relationship. As a child, he experienced various discriminations due to being Alevi.

Female partner (C4FS) is 45 years old and is currently a housewife. She stated that she had worked in various institutions before. She is a high school graduate. She is of the Sunni sect. She lives in Istanbul/Umraniye with her husband and children. They met living in the same neighborhood with her husband. She is from Agri/Dogubeyazit. She is the youngest child of the family and immigrated from Dogubeyazit to Istanbul when she was a child. She stated that learning about different cultures and beliefs made her happy.

2.2.5. Couple-5

Female partner (C5FA) 38 years old, pharmacist. She has a master's degree. She comes from the Alevi sect. She lives in Istanbul/Pendik with her husband and child. She is from Malatya on his father's side. She is highly sensitive to the traumas of being an Alevi. She is the sister of the 6th female participant.

Male partner (C5MS) is 42 years old and is engaged in the dermacosmetics trade. He is an associate degree graduate. He is of the Sunni sect. He lives in Istanbul/Pendik with his wife and child. While participating in the research, he persistently had a belief that they are not suitable for this research. In the research,

from time to time, attitudes related to this have emerged. He emphasized throughout the interview that the solution is communication.

2.2.6. Couple-6

The female partner (C6FA) is 45 years old and is an engineer. But she is currently working as a process designer. She works in a job where she is in contact with more people. She has a master's degree. She comes from the Alevi sect. She lives in Istanbul/Kadikoy with her husband and child. She is from Malatya on his father's side. She has a character who likes to read and research. She tried to answer the questions asked in the interview, mostly with the information she obtained from the historical point of view. She focused on her personal development and her own process with Gestalt and Transactional Analysis trainings. The 5th participant is the older sister of the female participant.

Male partner (C6MS) is 44 years old, computer engineer. Has a graduate degree and has quit master's. He comes from the Sunni sect. He lives in Istanbul/Kadikoy with his wife and child. He is from Ankara on his father's side. He is familiar with the difference due to the fact that his mother is Cypriot Turk, and he knows the Alevi sect beforehand, unlike the other non-Alevi participants.

2.3. MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

2.3.1. Data Collection and Procedure

Before starting the research, approval of the Istanbul Bilgi University Ethical Committee was taken. Interviews were conducted via online platforms and the SAYA Psychological Counselling Center where the researcher worked as a psychologist. Upon starting the interviews, a consent form that informed

participants that their voices will be recorded and video recording will be taken during interviews were asked to be signed by the participants (See Appendix B).

Prior to conducting interviews, a pilot interview was conducted with one of the couples. After this pilot interview, it was decided that the couples should be interviewed separately in order to collect richer data. Before starting interviews, a form requesting the demographic information of the participants was filled out separately by the interviewees. By having the participants fill out both the demographic information form and informed consent form, they were prepared for the procedure. During the interview, semi-structured questions were asked to acquire information about Alevi and Sunni marriages. Voice and video recordings were taken at all times during the interviews. After the interviews were done, the audio recordings were turned into transcriptions.

The participants were not limited only to the questions formed at the beginning; the interview was shaped by providing an environment where participants were also able to talk freely about other things that they wanted to talk about without straying too far from the subject. The meetings lasted between 35 to 72 minutes. The voice and video recordings taken during the meetings were transcribed and analyzed via MAXQDA qualitative analysis program.

2.3.2. Semi-structured Interview Questions

In this study, questions were asked with the aim of understanding the challenges and the strengths of being in a Alevi-Sunni marriage and what they do to overcome difficulties. The questions were prepared based on the literature and addressed the following topics:

The meaning of being a couple and a family,

Their beliefs as Alevi/Sunni and the effect of their beliefs on their lives,

Similarities and differences from their parents, and parents' belief system,

Circumstances around the decision to get married,

What it is like to be in an inter faith marriage,

The challenges they faced and how they coped,

Any changes in their beliefs or practices since they got married,

The effect of being in an inter faith marriage on raising children as well as on other aspects of their lives,

Positive aspects of being in an Alevi-Sunni marriage.

There were all questions can be seen in Appendix C.

2.3.3. Application of the Analysis

Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) method was used to understand the challenges and the strengths of how Alevi-Sunni marriages. According to Braun and Clarke (2019), there are 6 stages of analysis. The same steps were followed in this process. To begin with, the interviews began to be transcribed. Furthermore, the notes obtained during the interviews, along with the notes accomplished during the deciphering measure, were read in order, and the essential areas were noted. Subsequently, the first coding process was started, and all the fundamental fields were coded and notes were taken. These codes were named based on the participants' stories and experiences and resulted in a large number of codes. In the process, some codes began to be grouped under larger categories. In the next stage, codes began to be raised to the level of possible themes.

The compatibility of these themes both with the data in itself and with other data, in general, was examined. Based on this harmony and repetition, “theme maps” were created. In the next step, emerging categories were given meaningful names. As these categories were closely examined within and across the interviews, themes and sub-themes emerged. The themes were read again and irrelevant or less

repetitive sub-themes/themes were removed by considering their relationship with the sub-themes. In this context, a total of 5 main themes and sub-themes related to these main themes emerged These; “The Sect is not a Salient Issue”, “Everyone Can Live Their Faith As They Wish”, “Parents' Change in the Process”, “Different Groups not Influencing One Another” and “Difference of Sect As a Source of Richness”.

Sub-themes under “The Sect is not a Salient Issue” are: No Impact or Difficulty on The Relationship, Being Human Comes Before Religion and Sect, Faith and Power as Intertwined, Conscience vs Traditional Aspects of Religion and finally, Nothing Has Changed For Me.

The sub-themes under the second theme “Everyone Can Live Their Faith As They Wish” are: Open-minded Perspective on Faith in the Family of Origin, Relationships Without Reference to Faith, Similar Experiences, Similar Views, Respecting and Encouraging the Practice of Worship in the Relationships, and Free Will of the Child.

The sub-themes under the third theme are: “Parents' Change in the Process” and below The Parents' Initial Disapproval, The Initial Concern of the Families Before Marriage, the Change of Prejudices in the Family and the Environment, Families' Acceptance of the Spouse sub-themes are included.

The sub-themes under fourth theme “Different Groups not Influencing One Another ” are: No Influence of Relatives and Environment on Their Marriage, No Sectarian Attitude towards Children, Family, and Other People, and No Sectarian Attitude Regarding Childrearing.

The sub-themes under fifth theme are: “Difference of Sect As a Source of Richness” and sub-themes were created as Stronger Relationship Between the Partners, Coming to Know the Partner's Sect, Getting to Know a Different Culture, and Lives without the Pressure of Faith.

As an example of a thematization process, the theme “Sect is not a Salient Issue” and the sub-theme “Being a Human Comes Before Religion and Sect” can be

mentioned. During the interview process, when the participants were asked about their relationship with their sect, many participants expressed in different ways that the sect was not important to them. This situation was noticed during the interviews, and the issue was mentioned in the notes kept separately for each participant. It has been stated that for many participants in the individual coding process, they never thought about the issue of sect in their partner preference and that certain human characteristics are of the utmost importance to them. Some participants stated this more indirectly as a moral trait (being honest and well-intentioned), while some participants stated it more clearly as humanity, others as valuing humanity and society. In addition, it was revealed during the coding that human characteristics are at an important point not only in the choice of spouses, but also in the upbringing of children and their individual lives. Here, in particular, in every question asked about the impact of the sect on relations, they emphasize humanitarian characteristics, not the sect, which has led to the idea of “humanity, not the sect, is the priority” as the title. This topic has been examined both within each interview and between interviews with the theme map. The title of the sub-theme appeared from a participant who explained that being a human being in life is the main thing for her. In this direction, the name of the sub-theme “Being Human Comes Before Religion and Sect” has become the last, along with the views of the consultant teacher. The fact that humanity is more important than the sect has given rise to the idea that the sect is not a priority for the individual. When examples of such sub-themes multiplied, the theme “The Sect is not a Salient Issue” was finally formed.

2.3.4. Trustworthiness

A few steps were followed to ensure trustworthiness while conducting the research. First of all, notes taken during the interview and audio/video recordings constituted two different sources of data. The researcher conducted the analysis by comparing the coding with the notes she took during the analysis phase. In addition, the first and second thesis advisors were also involved in the analysis phase along

with the researcher. With their own interpretations and inferences, they helped moved the process away from being exclusively the researcher-participant duo towards a more negotiated one. Also, the findings of the study and the experiences of the participants were compared. (Nowell et al., 2017).

2.3.4.1. Member Checking

After the themes of the research were generated, they were shared with the participants and they were asked whether the results were congruent with their experience or if they wanted to add anything in line with the interview they had. The text that sent to the participants is in the Appendix D. 4 out of 6 couples replied back. 3 couples stated that the findings were correct and appropriate for them, and one couple stated that they wished that more research like this would be done. Although one participant stated that all the themes reflected their experiences, she was not very sure about the third theme. Perhaps her husband's experience was better captured by this theme. She also stated that the sect is not an obstacle to being a family, and that commonalities can always be found.

2.4. RESEARCHER PERSPECTIVE

Choosing this topic within the scope of my master's thesis was very meaningful for me. Cultural studies had always been a subject that interested me even before my graduate life. After learning many issues related to relationships from the Couple and Family Therapy courses in the Clinical Psychology program, I decided to combine these two areas of interest. I come from a family that was brought up with the Alevi faith, and it is important that the partner you marry or have a relationship with is from the Alevi sect, especially in the extended family I grew up in. Partnership with a Sunni or another sect or belief is not very welcome. I think that there is an unspoken but felt prejudice in the extended family that being

with someone from the Sunni sect can cause problems due to past traumas. Frankly, I started to wonder about this issue, since there are not many different examples around me. Was it really difficult for couples who belonged to the Alevi-Sunni sect, as is supposed? Or was that a prejudice? What was the relationship they really experienced? How was this issue handled between them? I determined the subject of this thesis based on these questions.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

This research was carried out to understand the effect of being from different sects on the relationships of individuals from contradictory sects. 6 couples were interviewed separately with a total of 12 participants.

This section contains the conclusion part of the analyzes of the interviews with the participants. Demographic information about the participants was explained in Table 2.2. and the following section. Five main themes emerged as a result of the analysis: “The Sect is not a Salient Issue”, “Everyone Can Live Their Faith As They Wish”, “Parents’ Change in the Process”, “Different Groups not Influencing One Another ”, “Difference of Sect As a Source of Richness”. Examples of main themes and sub-themes are given in Table 3.1. In the following, there is detailed information about the main themes and sub-themes. As mentioned before, the IDs of the participants were designated by the order of the couple, their gender, and whether they were Alevi or Sunni. Thus, C2FA refers to the Alevi female participant of couple 2.

Table 3.1.

Summary of Themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
The Sect is not a Salient Issue	No Impact of Difficulty on The Relationship
	Being a Human Comes Before Religion and Sect
	Faith and Power as Intertwined
	Conscience vs Traditional Aspects of Religion
	Nothing Has Changed For Me

Table 3.1. *(continued)*

Summary of Themes

Everyone Can Live Their Faith As They Wish	An Open Minded Perspective on Faith in the Family of Origin Relationships Without Reference to Faith Similar Experiences, Similar Views Respecting and Encouraging the Practice of Worship in Relationship Free Will of the Child
Parents' Change in the Process	The Parents' Initial Disapproval Initial Concerns of Families Before Marriage Change of Prejudices in Family and Environment Families' Acceptance of the Spouse
Different Groups not Influencing One Another	No Influence of Relatives and Environment on Their Marriage No Sectarian Attitude towards Children, Family, and Other People No Sectarian Attitude Regarding Childrearing
Difference of Sect As a Source of Richness	Stronger Relationships Between the Partners Coming to Know the Partner's Sect Getting to Know a Different Culture Lives Without the Pressure of Faith

3.1. THE SECT IS NOT A SALIENT ISSUE

Under this main theme, all the participants emphasized that their sect did not have much influence on the various aspects of their lives. Considering the subject of the research, the fact that the issue of sect lacks salience in either the partner relationship or the extended family is striking.

There are five sub-themes within this main theme: No Impact or Difficulty on The Relationship, Being Human Comes Before Religion and Sect, Faith and Power as Intertwined, Conscience vs Traditional Aspects of Religion and finally, Nothing Has Changed For Me.

3.1.1. No Impact or Difficulty on The Relationship

In this sub-theme, the focus was on the possibility of any difficulties arising from sect discrimination and whether religious order allocation had an effect on the relationship. Both in these specific discussions and while answering other questions, all of the couples stated that their relationship is not affected and that they are not experiencing any hardship. More specifically, the couples offered various answers such as keeping a distance from their own belief, being away from their spouse's connections with their belief, not knowing sect discrimination, and living in an environment similar to other sects, such as individual living of the belief they are familiar with does not affect the relevance.

One participant stated that their relationship is not affected because they are far from their own beliefs, *“But maybe it is easier for me to live with an Alevi because I do not fulfill all the duties of Sunnism. Now, if I fulfill all my Sunni duties, that is, if I perform my prayers and fast if I wear something else, maybe this will affect both of our lives. But since I take life easy, by reason of this maybe we don't have too much trouble together.”* (C2FS) Her husband agreed, *“Of course, we have certain beliefs, although we do not do anything as a requirement of religion. In this context, to give an example, and to be honest, maybe I could not have married a*

lady in a chador. I don't know how I would react at that moment if my wife was wearing a turban. But let me tell you my current point of view.” In his words, he claimed the effect of his wife's not living in faith intensely on the continuation of their relationship. (C2MA)

Another woman said: *“But I think it's good, my husband and I don't have a hard opinion about it. My husband is also not a very conservative person related to his sect. Since I am also like that, we did not have any difficulties in that regard.”* She states that since neither of them are very sectarian, they do not experience any problems in their relationships. (C4FS)

An Alevi participant shares a dialogue with her spouse before they got married. She laughed while talking about how her husband does not discriminate and how this has no effect on their relationship:

“This is what I said to my wife before I got married. I said, "I am an Alevi". He said to me, “So what should I do? Do I have to do something about it?” "I don't know, people may have obsessions, like I'm not marrying an Alevi, I don't know what I'm doing." He had an answer as "Never mind, what a thing to be obsessed about". So, I said, "I'll tell you this beforehand so that it doesn't come out that you're like this," I mean, there was a conversation between us." (C5FA)

Another female participant asserted that she has friends from the Sunni sect and claims that she does not find her husband's sect strange and that it does not affect her relationship: *“So, I am very used to it. So, I knew from the people around me, my dear friends, and so on. That's why I never found my husband strange because of his belief. Nothing has ever happened against me coming from him, either.”* (C1FA)

Finally, a male participant stated that since belief is an individual experience, it is not reflected in their relationships:

“If a person is a believer, my sin is mine, your sin is yours. If someone believes in the hereafter, everyone will be judged for their sins, and everyone

will be rewarded for their good deeds. Since I think so, I have never had a problem with myself. My wife is also likewise; of course, maybe she finds it strange, maybe it was her shyness, but we never had a problem. She didn't reflect it, did we reflect it to each other." (C3MA)

In substance, all participants appointed that they did not experience any problems or difficulties in this regard in their relationships. In this respect, this subject is the most fundamental result of this investigation.

3.1.2. Being a Human Comes Before Religion and Sect

When the participants were asked about the impact of their partners being from different sects or the effect of their children growing up in different sects, not all participants emphasized the difference. All of the participants emphasized that the humane side of themselves, their partners, and their children is the most important thing. For example, one participant expressed the importance of his wife's being a good person rather than his wife's sect, as follows:

"Oh, I always say things for me, for instance, whether the person in front of me has good intentions, has a good approach to me; so whatever happens, be human first. Let her/him get on well with me so that I can get on well with her/him. Whatever it is, it doesn't matter in the end. We're all human, so I've always looked at things this way until now." (C1MS)

More specifically, a female participant elaborated on her need to be seen as an individual with all of what makes her a whole:

"I am a human being, I want to be seen as a human being, I want to be spoken to as a human being. I don't know about any identity, it's not bigger than me. Because if I don't exist, the doesn't exist either; that identity doesn't come into being by itself. I will say that it is more than a sum of all the parts; in terms of Gestalt, it is more valuable than all the individual parts. So my whole is much more worthwhile than that part of it being an Alevi." (C6FA)

Another participant, like the previous one, stated that she does not look at life through sect discrimination, but through being a good person. She expressed that this is a point of view that is effective in raising children in her relationship with her husband and family, with the following examples:

“ I love life, I love my husband, I love my children too... Being an Alevi or a Sunni is not important for me, it is important to be the right person. Bringing up the kids properly is substantial. Being a morally decent person is important. The same would be true for me if I was a Sunni in a Sunni family. I am a member of an Alevi family, but the same goes for me. I do not evaluate people and events in terms of Sunni and Alevi sects. Being human is something else in itself, I presume.” (C2FS)

In the example below, one participant explained the importance of being a decent human being rather than sect in child-rearing in more detail:

“Or a person can choose to be human first, to recognize the quality of humanity, to be conscientious. In other words, a person can choose his religion, he can choose his faith. These are things you can earn later, things you can do. But being human, being a good adult, raising good children, and so on, that's hard. We try to teach humanity first to our children. We have two children. In other words, our children should be conscientious first and not separate people. I think God is one, so it approaches everyone equally. I think everyone has equal rights.” (C3MA)

One female participant stated that she does not think about her husband's sect like other participants and that a person's character affects him: *“How can I say, I guess if I were born again, I would marry my husband again because don't care if my husband is from a different culture, sect, or religion. I think we wouldn't have had such a problem because I liked him, his personality, too.”* (C3FS)

Overall, participants seemed to place a high priority on "a person's humanity", with some pointing to specific traits such as wholeness, honesty, purity, morality, and character structure.

3.1.3. Faith and Power as Intertwined

This sub-theme captures individuals' views on the meaning of sect or religion for themselves. The data points to changes in their views, such as coming to see religion and sects being a political tool, as a means of imposing sanctions on people through religion. 7 out of 12 participants gave answers in this direction. The following is from a male participant who sees religion is a purely political phenomenon:

“For me, religion seems like a political phenomenon... I realize that religion was the same as political parties are now. That's how I view religion right now. This is my point of view of course. So when I get into sects or religions a lot, I am a person who believes in Allah. But when people make a distinction, I observe that people ignore Allah or associate partners with Allah. Just because then it seems to me that he was thinking that God did wrong the previous time. You know, there are 500 years and 600 years between every religion that came out later... The last religion is Islam, and then sects came out. In fact, there is no sect in the Qur'an in the book. But after asking and asking, everyone made up something and you know, a leader came out and dragged someone after him. I see religion as part of a political phenomenon. Like politics.” (C3MA)

Here, he came to the idea that sects operate from a leadership perspective, just like a political party, and that non-discrimination, which is the most important point of view of religion, is opposed through the introduction of sects. Supporting the above statements, another participant added the following:

“And anyway, these two concepts actually came out because of this; It is something that comes out of the question of who will be the caliph since it comes out of a power struggle again. In other words, a certain segment, naturally, Hz. They see that Ali has the right, while another part says, 'No, it will be someone else'. It's essentially something that comes out of here. So it has some political basis.” (C6FA)

Similarly, another participant talked about the exploitable aspects of religion that stem from a political deficiency:

“I think people have created themselves somehow and created to restrain society... Because if your law doesn't work, you can exploit it very well with religion. You know, 'if you do this, you will go to hell, if you don't do that... you will go to heaven, I don't know what you do' or 'O people, take this goodness, this is a sin...' In a way, conscientiously -how do they say to be exploited by religion?- they are very easily exploitable creatures. That's why I think religion is a system that exists for this.” (C5FA)

The participant in the following example expressed how the events in the places where religion is taught and experienced affect his relationship with faith and how it harms other people psychologically: “Maybe it takes it away a bit. Because by using religion, there are so many absurd and disgusting things that we may involuntarily hold back a little more because of something that this age has brought. So let me tell you for myself; if I were a Sunni and married to a Sunni, I would not get up and send my child to a Quran course at this age.” (C2FS)

To summarize, in this sub-theme, the abuse of religion-related to the Sunni sect in areas such as politics and education was emphasized. Additionally, by giving a political meaning to sect discrimination, it is removed to be an issue between their relations.

3.1.4. Conscience vs. Traditional Aspects of Religion

Many participants stated that they use the traditional or moral aspects of religion in their daily lives, in their relationships with their partners and children, both with their families of origin and their nuclear families. 6 out of 12 participants made comments in this regard. For example, a participant said,

“What I see right now is a little more... I don't know... There is a phenomenon we call “beware of your hand, tongue, waist” here. It actually makes more

sense to me this way... In other words, you won't steal, you won't covet someone else's property, or you won't look at someone else's privacy, your spouse, your friend... Basically, the most basic feeling of people living together. Now, if you don't steal, there is no problem and if you don't look at anyone sideways, there is no problem either. In other words, it is in fact a basic situation, in my opinion.” in his words, he emphasizes that he builds his perspective on life-based on the moral norms of the Alevism doctrine. (C2MA)

Another participant, who is from the Sunni sect, similarly stated that there is a moral point of view in religion in his nuclear family:

“But at the core of it is our being a good person. In other words, we are trying to adopt the good moral understanding of our prophet and to continue it in our lives. In other words, even if we could not do things like praying and fasting in terms of religious belief, form, we are trying to practice the moral part of Islam more in our lives, such as not being entitled, acting justly, helping people.” (C3FS)

While talking about the meaning of religion for herself, a female participant stated that they did not give religious education to their children directly, but that they mostly talked about the moral side of religion and mentioned the following: *“It's not how you believe in it, it's how you believe it is important for me. So the important thing is that we always tell our children, don't be fair, don't lie, always be truthful, be clean here (showing her heart)... After not harming anyone I think that's what faith is, actually.”* (C2FS)

Another participant emphasized that the rituals of both Sunni and Alevi sects do not fulfill the more worshipful ones, but fulfill their traditional ones: *“But, for example, we make our ashura, we sacrifice an animal, bla bla. when the time comes.”*(C4MA)

Yet another participant said, *“So we are more on the side of tradition... We are doing traditional things... Eid-al-Adha and Eid-al-Fitr are celebrated. Apart from that, if it is not actually to be a good person in general, I would say at the level of reciting the Qur'an when there are only five daily prayers or when there*

is a place for religion only at funerals or when there is something good and good at work." expanded the previous participant's statements with. (C6MS)

As it can be seen, half of the participants practice their faith not as obligatory worship, but from a traditional or moral point of view. An emphasis on tradition and morality present a common ground for partners from different sects.

3.1.5. Nothing Has Changed For Me

In this sub-theme, 10 of the 12 participants, when asked whether being with someone from different sects caused any change in their marriage, stated that there was no change in their marriage. For instance, one participant claimed that there is no change and that his spouse approaches this issue in the same way as his family: *"So my wife didn't have any suggestions bla bla... You know, it's the opposite thing, my wife treated me just like my family treated me. You know, will you go to the Eid prayer, dear, will you set an alarm in the morning? No, it didn't happen, so I continue in the same way as I did before I got married or not."* (C5MS)

Another participant emphasized that he has moved away from his sect, but that this is not a relationship-based change: *"Yes, so how many years?... 12 years... We have been married for 18 years now. For 12-13 years, I continued to live in the same way as before marriage. Here is the fasting part, the Friday-Eid prayers... But the distance from the last 5-6 years is about me, it has no effect on our marriage."* (C6MS)

Overall, these sub-themes suggest that participants approach the issue of sect from a more political perspective, dissociate themselves from it in that sense, and tend to attenuate its importance vis a vis their relationship; emphasizing the priority of being a decent human being and embracing religion as tradition and morality present the partners with a common ground to cope with the possible challenges of cross-faith marriage.

3.2. EVERYONE CAN LIVE THEIR FAITH AS THEY WISH

This main theme, captures the notion of embracing a libertarian and respectful perspective that does not discriminate against the other faith; this gets discussed in relation to their respective families of origin, from their spouse's family origin, the relationships they establish in their own nuclear family and social life, and in the similar relationships they see around them. Some sub-themes of this main theme are important in terms of showing why sect discrimination does not affect their relations.

There are 5 sub-themes in this main theme. These are: Open-minded Perspective on Faith in the Family of Origin, Relationships Without Reference to Faith, Similar Experiences, Similar Views, Respecting and Encouraging the Practice of Worship in the Relationships, and Free Will of the Child. Each sub-theme will be explained in detail in the following sections.

3.2.1. An Open Minded Perspective on Faith in the Family of Origin

In this sub-theme, especially the perspectives of couples towards faith in their families of origin were examined in detail. When looked at, it was concluded that these families were generally open-minded, not suppressing their own sect while raising their children, their non-discriminatory thoughts and attitudes about other sects and beliefs, and the differences between the partners' experience of faith in their families of origin. All participants gave examples to this sub-theme.

When asked about the similarities and differences of worship between them and their families of origin, A Sunni participant stated that she was never forced by them:

“But, there was never any pressure. It was the same for my older brothers and sisters. I am the youngest child in the family, so there was never any obligation for me. Everyone could do what they wanted, but in general, of course, we are different. So we are quite different. Some children didn't do it, but there was no force or pressure. My parents used to fast and pray, but we children never

did. You know, I had brothers and sisters who fasted, but there was never any force, so we could do whatever we wanted. But it was different, of course.” (C4FS)

Another participant stated that her father was not prejudiced and even had a point of view that she learned from:

“I am Sunni, but there was no difference between us as Alevism or Sunnism, there was no such thing during our upbringing. Because my father was also a Social-Democratic man. He had a lot of Alevi friends. He used to bring Hz. Ali's necklace and give it to us. We never grew up with such a segregation. I mean, by God, you are Sunni, you are different, you are Alevi, I did not grow up in a family that had an opinion that you are different. So it wasn't something I was too attached to.” (C3FS)

It can be said that this attitude caused her to have a non-discriminatory perspective in her own life.

Similarly, a male participant emphasized that his family did not have a discriminatory attitude, “*Alevis have a fast, I don't know exactly what fast they are; so it could be an ashura fast or another fast. Even though my mother is Sunni, she also fasts on that Alevi fast as well.*” (C5MS)

A participant expressed their parents' different experiences of their faith as follows:

“My mother fasts, she always prays. You know, sometimes there are prayers that don't make sense; but there are dervish lodges and zawiyas, they are also in Alevi culture. You know, they hope for help from the dead, maybe it's psychologically good sometimes, but it's like sanctifying the place; for example, my mother believes in it, but my father doesn't.” (C3MA)

In such examples, especially among spouses in the family of origin, mothers performed their prayers more than fathers. The fact that the families of origin have a flexible point of view among themselves and not discriminating against religion or sects in their other relationships may have given their children a flexible point of view. Therefore, these people may have become more open to being together with someone from a different sect.

3.2.2. Relationships Without Reference to Faith

This sub-theme is about the participants' having friends and neighbors from different faiths/sects in their childhood and now. Eight out of 12 participants gave examples on this subject. A Sunni participant explained her closeness with Alevi people with these words: *"I can even say that my best friends are my Alevi friends. Because I could share many things with them in a more comfortable way, I guess I thought that they would not judge, that is, because I could guess what they were thinking, so I could get on with those people more. I didn't have any problems. There are no problems I can remember right now."* (C4FS)

Similarly, a male participant talked about his friendships:

"I have a lot of friends around me; there are Kurds, there are Alevis, we were in university together. We also lived in the same house. We also shared the same environments. So there were never any disagreements or conflicts between us. Because I don't know, we were friends, so we looked at each other from that perspective and we were close to each other. Likewise, in business life. I don't know, I never wanted to question them or learn about them in detail because the issue never came into my life." (C1MS)

Stating that there is no negative attitude in the family of origin, a Sunni man expressed the relationships he established in his childhood:

"I mean, I don't remember anything bad being spoken. For example, when we were children, we had a downstairs neighbor, a family that had migrated from the east. There was talk of them being Kurds, but I don't remember ever talking about being Alevi, but they were Alevis and Kurds after all. Similarly, we had Alevi neighbors and we were playing with them. I mean, I didn't hear much negative propaganda about Alevis when I was a kid." (C6MS)

When looked at from this point, it may be that establishing relationships with people from different sects, both in their families of origins and later in their social lives, may have enabled these individuals to take a more open-minded point of view

regarding other belief systems and sects. This point of view can be considered as playing an important role in not having problems in their couple relationships.

3.2.3. Similar Experiences, Similar Views

The sub-theme relates to the similarity of marriages in participants' family and social circles; just like in their own marriages, sect discrimination did not have an effect in many of these marriages. Eight of the 12 participants shared their experiences on this subject.

One participant said, "*We have friends and family members around us who married Alevi. So everyone is equally comfortable.*" She stated that there were similar marriages both in his social network and in her family, and that there was no problem in their marriages either. (C1FA)

Another participant similarly talked about the experience of her relative:

"I mean, my close cousin, my brother's wife's nephew, got married, like two years ago, with an Alevi person, but nobody made it that much of a problem. Her father said that if he loves my daughter, Alevi or Sunni is not very important to me... We grew up together, so we're the same age or something. We went to the same schools. She had experienced fewer problems, let me tell you, no one has ever done such a discrimination." (C2FS)

As a result, being together with people who are like them may have provided couples with a safer space against discriminatory discourses and a sense of solidarity, the feeling that they are not alone. It is thought that these two factors may have made a positive impact on their couple relations.

3.2.4. Respecting and Encouraging the Practice of Worship in the Relationship

This sub-theme is about individuals respecting each other's practice of worship not being disturbed by it and having a supportive approach. Seven out of 12 participants expressed their experiences on this subject.

One participant expressed his wife's supportive attitude towards their worship despite being from a different sect as follows:

“Let me tell you the simplest example. On Fridays, we go to the Friday prayer. For example, I don't go most of the time. So either I'm not feeling well, something is going on, or I'm not going because of work and so on. My wife constantly pushes me, she says “why don't you go to the Friday prayer, why don't you go to the Friday prayer, look, everybody goes, you go too”, for example. So we don't have any problems with that. My wife pushes me even though she is an Alevi or even though I am a Sunni.” (C1MS)

Similarly, a male participant talked about respecting his wife's faith and being supportive, *“For example, my wife used to fast, and I would run and bring her pita so that it would be warm. She would be happy that I brought the pita or I would always wait for her to break her fast at the dinner table; this is respect. So more than anything, actually respect is the most important thing.”* (C3MA)

Another participant shared the memory of not being disturbed by his spouse's faith as follows:

“One day my wife came with a brass plate in her hand, you know, there are different figures on the plates. Hz. Ali is on it and she had something else in her hand. ‘Dear’, she said and she asked me for permission to hang it in the house. I said why do you want permission; you can hang it anywhere you want. For example, it was very surprising for me, why does she ask me about it, she can hang it wherever she wants, it's not a problem at all.” (C5MS)

As can be seen, there was open-minded and respectful views towards the other's sect in their own relationship.

3.2.5. Free Will of the Child

This sub-theme is about the fact that a liberal perspective is not only what they experience or observe, but also what they want from their children and that they act accordingly. All participants think the same on this issue. One woman said she wanted her son to be free to experience his faith

“I will not oppose if anyone wants to do his worship, let's say my child wants to do so in the future. I want it to be as his own idea makes him feel happy, that is, his own opinion.” (C4FS) From a similar point, another participant expressed the consensus with his wife on this, *“We generally agree on one thing, that is, we agreed at the age of 18, or rather, at the point where he decides for himself.”* (C6MS)

Parallel to this, another participant expressed similar wishes and actions as a parent as follows:

“So yes, I am in favor of her making her own decision. Of course, I will give the information of both parties; even if I do not give it, this child will be able to understand this difference or see what is done and how. You know, his father is fasting and used to go to Friday prayer, but now he doesn't go to Friday due to the pandemic, but she will learn one day and her father will know that he is doing these things, after all. So I want her to decide for herself.” (C1FA)

One woman emphasized that the all sects are under the same faith and emphasized their children's free will and their own attitudes as parents. *“You know, they are Muslims, and as children learn religion, they decide their own lives and their own beliefs. We do not put pressure on this issue, so we are not oppressive.”* (C3FS)

This sub-theme as well as the other sub-themes and the first theme, reveal that the perspectives of individuals from their family, environment and social circles have a positive effect not only on their own relationships but also on their children living their faith.

3.3. PARENTS' CHANGE IN THE PROCESS

Contrary to the open-minded perspective of the parents mentioned so far, this main theme captures the difficulties caused by their parents in the marriage of some couples and their changes over time. Although a few couples had difficulties in the marriage phase, this problem disappeared in their relationships over time. The sub-themes are; The Parents' Initial Disapproval, The Initial Concern of the Families Before Marriage, the Change of Prejudices in the Family and the Environment, Families' Acceptance of the Spouse. These are explained in detail below.

3.3.1. The Parents' Initial Disapproval

In this sub-theme, as it can be understood from the title, some difficult situations arising from the restrictive attitudes of the parents will be described. Two out of 6 couples talked about the events in which they had difficulties in this regard.

A participant spoke of his wife's family's disapproval of him because he is an Alevi, both laughingly and in an embarrassed tone, with the following sentences:

"Her mother didn't consent to our marriage. She said they should not come, they are like this, they are like this. Oh, and I said to my wife, I guess this will not work here. Either you come with me or let it end here. So I had her run away with me... We even said let's come and ask for the girl's hand or something, they opposed, He shouldn't come because he is Alevi her parent' said. Of course, this was difficult for me. I said I am giving you a week, either you come or it ends here. That's what happened after that." (C4MA)

An important point here is that when a similar question was asked to the participant's wife, she stated that there was no problem with her family. In this case, it seems like she finds it difficult to talk about the situation experienced her husband.

Another participant talked about her father not allow her to get married:

"As I said, my father caused troubles for about a year or so. When I say trouble I mean he said we couldn't marry. We didn't meet face to face, but he

was angry with me. I did something so that he wouldn't see me so much for a month or so. It was the family house. I was staying with my brother... When I told my father and he caused problems, my brothers were also something like holding back. Let's not let them get married, let's not get into trouble or something.” (C2FS)

These statements show that that marriage was not accepted due to the fact that the participant's spouse to be was Alevi.

The below participant similarly described the reluctance of his spouse's family to allow their marriage as follows:

“We were sending news to my wife's family that we would come to ask the family to give their daughter for marriage, that is, we decided with my wife and under the conditions of that day. Of course, since we knew that the other side would oppose, such a process continued for more or less a year... We had a dating period for 3-4 years. When we decided to marry, we were telling my wife's family, we will come to ask for marriage, but I did not say anything to my own family. I didn't say anything like we're going to go or go ask this girl for me. Because I was already predicting that my wife's side would oppose and that this process would be softened, and I was not telling my own family about it. There was a reaction on the part of my wife's family. We had been saying it for a while, so we expected the same reaction again... I know that they had some arguments in the family at the last stage. These are, of course, sectarian things. His brother called us because my wife told her family and aunt that she will run away. At the last stage, his father told his brother “do whatever you like.” (C2MA)

In all cases, Sunni parents did not allow their children to marry Alevi participants. Participants stated that their parents were not allowed to marry due to prejudiced thoughts and social pressure towards Alevis. This will be further elaborated in the discussion section.

3.3.2. Initial Concerns of Families Before Marriage

One of the consequences of parents and relatives being influenced by prejudiced thoughts towards different sects is the anxiety they experience at the beginning of the marriage. In this sub-theme, in addition to the previous 2 couples, 2 more couples talked about the anxiety experienced by both their families and their spouses' families during the marriage phase.

For example, a Sunni participant stated the first reaction of her family with these words, *“But of course, when I was going to introduce my husband to my family at first, my family was still wondering that the impact of his different sect even if I have a Social-Democratic family. You know, after all, it's a different culture, a different sect.”* (C3FS) Similarly, another participant said, *“In the last stage, my wife's younger brother called me. We chatted for an hour and a half. Of course, the main thing here is, well, after you take our daughter, are you going to apply pressure? Will there be religious changes? Things like what do you expect from her?”* were the things that they talked about. (C2MA) Additionally, another participant talked about the anxiety of a close cousin: *“When I got married, she said to me, “I wish you hadn't married a Sunni, that you had found an Alevi.” Have you thought about it well, are you sure, then for some reason, she had a hesitation that I would be living with him without marriage?”* (C1FA)

As a result, when looking at all the examples, there was a concern about the problems that the female participants may experience, regardless of their sect. Considering the position and patriarchal perspective of women both in Turkey and in the world, this result is meaningful.

3.3.3. Change of Prejudices in the Family and the Environment

In this sub-theme, there are examples where the opinions of parents and relatives who have concerns or do not allow them to marry changing positively over time. In total, 4 couples talked about this issue.

To express the change of thoughts in her family, one participant stated, *“Then, when my parents got to know my husband and family, there was no such sectarianism. They became very good parents, sons and, at work, in-laws with each other. We did not have such a problem. Our wedding was also beautiful.”* (C3FS) Moreover, another participant talked about the role of her relatives in the change of her family's thoughts, *“My uncle told my father, you are doing something that is wrong, Alevi or Sunni, we should not separate an Alevi person like that. He said that separating people is a sin and wrong. After that, my father probably decided a little bit, changed his mind, I mean, a little bit thanks to my uncle.”* (C2FS) Furthermore, one participant said that her uncle, who was suspicious of her husband's family drinking alcohol, changed over time, *“But I know that he doesn't think so now, I very well know that. So, as I said, yes, my uncle used to think that way.”* she stated. (C4FS)

To summarize, it is seen that the opinions of the participants' families have evolved to a positive place with the support of their environment, the effect of time and understanding. At this point, it can be said that the fact that the problems do not continue for a long time has a positive effect on the couple's relationship.

3.3.4. Families' Acceptance of the Spouse

Finally, in this sub-theme, in addition to the positive change in opinions, there are examples of families accepting their children's partners even though they are from different sects and developing relationships in this direction. There are different examples of this in 4 out of 6 couples.

One participant stated the acceptance of herself and her family by her husband's family, *“Even though they told us that they we do not pray with our compassion, sincerity, showing our love for them and showing our respect for them, they have accepted me. I am very much loved as a bride.”* (C1FA) Another participant described his relations with his wife's family, *“I love the whole family very much. They love me as well. For them, I can say that maybe I turned out better*

than they expected. I mean, I don't want to praise myself, but they love me. I love them too. We'll go to each other. So we don't have such a problem." (C4MA)

When asked about the relationship between his wife and his extended family, a male participant said the following:

“My own villagers and the people around me love my wife more, they have a special place for her. They have said this to herself, and they say it a lot in absentia. They always say that the outsider is better than your own relatives... My aunts, uncles love my wife. So it has a positive effect, there is no negative effect at all. Also my siblings, in my family, in my parents.” (C3MA)

To summarize all the sub-themes, many families and relatives who, at the beginning, did not initially want the marriage due to some environmental prejudice changed their thinking over time for various reasons. The fact that this situation was experienced by 4 out of 6 couples on average shows how important and influential the anxiety in families is. However, it is an extremely important and positive step that with the open-mindedness of families and close network, such anxiety can be reduced. Such change results in lack of long-term problems in the relationships of the couples.

3.4. DIFFERENT GROUPS NOT INFLUENCING ONE ANOTHER

This main theme encompasses the fact of the family and the non-family circle -such as coworkers, social environment- not being affected by the marriage of the couples and not having an impact on the couples' marriage. The sub-themes within the main theme are, No Influence of Relatives and Environment on Their Marriage, No Sectarian Attitude towards Children, Family, and Other People and No Sectarian Attitude Regarding Childrearing.

3.4.1. No Influence of Relatives and Environment on Their Marriage

In the previous theme, the concerns of the parents at the beginning of the couple's marriage and the restrictions they made were discussed. Here, on the other hand, it was stated that during the marriage process, especially parents, extended families, people from business life and social environment did not affect the marriage of all the participants. The important point here is that for many participants the word 'impact' carried a negative connotation. The following participants asserted that the families did not have an impact on their marriage, *“No, we haven't seen any effect. My wife's sister's husband is also Sunni... My wife's family is already used to it. And I already told you about the structure of my family at the beginning of the conversation (he stated them with an open mind). So, there were no cases...”* (C5MS)

“My family has a large family structure. I mean, my family isn't just made up of mom and dad. We are a somewhat large family. My aunts, I don't know, my uncles... We are quite a crowd in that way. For example, it was never said for them either... Maybe they could have said... 'Look how their family will be Alevi or something...' I would have heard it, even if it wasn't told directly to me. But I have never encountered such a reaction. So, both sides welcomed us positively.” (C1MS)

“They (friends) haven't caused any problems either. As I told you, there were similar marriages around us. You see, there wasn't such a different reaction for their loved ones. There wasn't even any.” (C1FA)

To summarize, none of the couples have faced any negative reactions regarding their marriage from their families, friends, and relatives during the marriage process.

3.4.2. No Sectarian Attitude Towards Children, Family, and Other People

Participants tended to deny that their cross-sect marriage had any effect on anybody around them. The following example included the researcher and participant's discussion on these topics:

“PI: Well, did the Alevi-Sunni marriage affect family members other than you, such as children, mothers, fathers?”

C5FA: No.

PI: Or did you have a problem with this?

C5FA: None, we didn't.

PI: Well, having an Alevi-Sunni marriage means you and the environment outside of your family, such as extended family, relatives, friends, business life, and the like...

C5FA: There were no problems there either.

PI: Did it affect them too? Have you had any problems?

C5FA: None. No, because I also have relatives who have Alevi-Sunni marriages. It's not a big deal, it's not a problem." (C5FA)

While any direct effect of their marriage on other people is flatly denied, what exactly the participant understands and says is unclear.

Differently, some participants gave clearer answers about the effect of this problem on the child. For instance, one woman expressed that as they are attentive as parents, their child, now an adult, has not been influenced:

“No, no, no. Because as I said, we never reflected. Frankly, we didn't have these kinds of arguments around the kids. My son is very young now, but my daughter has seen both. We lived together with grandparents. No, it didn't affect her... For example, I didn't receive any questions from my

daughter. 'My grandmother is like this... the other one is like this... why is she like this...', so there was no question." (C4FS)

3.4.3. No Sectarian Attitude Regarding Childrearing

When this question was asked directly, all participants expressed an absence of a sectarian attitude regarding raising children. Some of them thought that they were willing to intervene correctly as parents because the children are young, some did not raise the children based on faith, some of them are raised on the common theme of Islam, and the majority thought that they are not/will not be influenced because they care/will give significance to their character rather than a sect. One participant emphasized that they teach the sects as much as they know, and they have open communication with their children and they respect them.

"When we talk, maybe we say to the children once in a while... You see, we always say that... Here, for example, we also said why we came here. My husband and I said that we are actually here because our sects are different. The God we believe in is the same, but the worship we do is different. (Note: they came to the meeting with their children-this couple was interviewed face to face). Children are more comfortable because they don't know detailed information about religion, so we don't have much of a problem right now because I don't know either. I talk about the religion, my husband also does. But in the future, the child will decide that for himself." (C2FS)

Another participant said, "*We encourage our child not to believe in any religion.*" He also stated that he and his wife are raising their children in this direction since they are far from their beliefs. (C6MS) On the contrary, another participant said, "*I have nothing to do with sect differences. 'I don't know or I don't believe them; I'm just a Muslim, I'm not Alevi or Sunni.' I said to my child.*" She

expressed that she raised her children with the common aspects of the two sects. (C3FS)

Lastly, a participant described how he raised his children by giving importance to their character:

“I try to make sure that our children are honest first, not whether they are Sunni or Alevi, rather than what they believe or not. But while we are educating them, we want them to be honest people first. Frankly, right now, we don't have much effort to either go to the mosque or go to the cem house. Will it happen in the future? I don't think so, it won't. Our priority is, to be honest, respectful, useful people to society. The issue of religion is obviously secondary to us when raising children.” (C2MA)

Although all participants looked at the issue from different perspectives, they stated that they tried to prevent their children from being affected by something negative. Taking into consideration both their perspectives on their own lives and the relationships they have established with their families and social network, it is extremely meaningful that they have this point of view.

To sum up, the main and sub-themes described so far point to an open-minded and non-prejudiced perspective of families, as well as the existence of similar marriages and friendships.

3.5. DIFFERENCE OF SECT AS A SOURCE OF RICHNESS

This final main theme captures the couples' experience of the difference of sect as a source of richness. The sub-themes included in this main theme are stated as Stronger Relationship Between the Partners, Coming to Know the Partner's Sect, Getting to Know a Different Culture and Lives without the Pressure of Faith. Each sub-theme will be detailed below.

3.5.1. Stronger Relationship Between the Partners

This sub-theme is about being an exemplary couple, mutually developed extra sensitivity about sect discrimination, standing together against the discourses of others; such examples were given by 6 out of 12 participants. One participant said, *“I don't know, the two of us sit and talk, how do we make decisions so that people don't look at us bad... I can say that people show us an exemplary couple in this neighborhood... Whether it's with our honesty... Whether it's our humanity... We don't gossip... From our work to our home... Everyone in the neighborhood already knows my wife, they know what kind of person we are.”* he expressed that their marriage is a unifying sanctuary against difficulties and contributes to their being an exemplary couple. (C4MA) From a similar point, another participant referred to sectarian statements by a relative of his wife as, *“It does not affect our lives... We called it his own opinion, so actually.”* (C2MA)

In this context, the importance of people's discourses may change according to their degree of closeness with other important people. It is a difficult thing to ignore the discourses of close others and not have them reflect on the relationship. And this can be considered as an important attitude for the couple. Same participant said, *“For example, sometimes if I'm going to be angry about something and make an extreme comment, the truth is, I take care not to do it in case my wife might get hurt.”* (C2MA)

To summarize, sect discrimination may have a unifying aspect on the relationship.

3.5.2. Coming to Know the Partner's Sect

Many Sunni participants stated that they had not heard of the Alevi sect before and that they got to know this sect in their relationships with their spouses. In addition, some participants stated that they knew the Alevi sect before, but did

not experience it and that they could do this together with their marriage. Two Alevi participants had the opportunity to experience the rituals of the Sunni sect. 7 out of 12 participants gave examples on this subject. For instance, participants described researching their partner's sect, and even actively performing Alevi rituals both in terms of worship and tradition:

“I mean, when was it supposed to be after we started dating?... Was it a few months later?... Maybe 6-7 months later or something... I did research to see what the characteristics of these sects were, or why ours is different, and hers is different. Also because I'm curious. After that, for example, they have a fasting month... For example, Alevis had a fasting month. For example, I didn't know that. Everyone knows the month of Ramadan. Why is that? It is even advertised on TV. Something wrong in my opinion. But, for example, I did not have any information about the fasting of the Alevis. I had researched this. For example, they do not even drink water. When they open the normal fast, there will be no water, I don't know, certain things will not be eaten, and this is mourning fast and so on. I didn't know any of these. That's when I researched it. But to me, it seemed very right, that fasting thing in that sect.” (C1MS)

“I also go to the cem houses they go to, even if something happens or not... For example, we went to Karacahmet at that time when my daughter was preparing for the university exams, I prayed. Maybe I've been to a cem house rather than a mosque... I've been to places where Alevis believe. In general, I think it had positive effects. So it's like I'm starting to look like them. I think I looked alike... If I give an example of theirs, you know, there is Lokma delivery, let me say it's a local pastry style like that... They have a traditional dish like a kete. I've been making and distributing it for many years; they make it and distribute it when they have any intention or have a bad dream at work. Here I make and distribute bla bla... On the anniversary of my father's death... So I live almost like them 90% of the time... I fast for a day or two in their Muharram month. (C4FS)

On the contrary, a Sunni man said, *“My wife fasted in Ramadan to try it out of curiosity. She fasted the year I didn't. Let me tell you, she was torrid in hot weather and fasted for three or four days. Even though I said don't fast... We didn't have any problems...”* he explained that he and his wife have never had any problems and described, his wife's practice of Sunni worship. (C5MS)

To summarize, since Sunnism is more well known than Alevism, Sunni participants were more interested in and experienced the Alevism sect, while Alevis practiced their spouse's worship less than their own.

3.5.3. Getting to Know a Different Culture

In this sub-theme, the participants especially considered difference as cultural difference and stated that their marriage with their spouses provided them with positive cultural gains. 5 out of 12 participants mentioned this issue.

“For me, this may not be true for you, but now when you live in such a small place and you are always together with people from the same culture... Because when I was single, there were always people from A's where I lived. And these were the circles of people who were always close peasants or close relatives. Now, apart from this environment, the people I work with at the hospital, my colleagues, or a few friends outside, that is, my closest friends were also generally A's. Our language, culture, customs, eating habits, and meals were all similar. Now when I met my husband, I was introduced to a completely different culture. I was introduced to a completely different cuisine. For example, I didn't know about the Madımak Genocide. Or maybe we didn't make dolmas. Dolma in my mother-in-law is something that can be eaten in the morning even for breakfast. Now a different culture... A different food culture. So everything has a culture. Sitting, getting up, hosting guests, chatting, religion, everything has a different culture. You know, first of all, there are girls' henna and boys'

henna at the henna night. We have henna made only by boys and girls. Here we do not have alcohol, you know, they have alcohol. They can have an alcohol presentation in every conversation. It's like our men are drinking alcohol at a special time, at work or out, for a meal. I mean, actually, I met with a lot of differences, but I saw that all of the people I met were such forward-thinking, intellectual, more social, more knowledgeable, even people with low education levels who read a lot, research a lot, and have a lot of knowledge; such ignorant people who look with blinders. they are not.” (C3FS)

“So different... Okay, we were both born and raised in the east, but after all, we come from different cultures... Their beliefs are different, for example, we went to the village... to my husband's village... When the sun first came up in the morning, there was a very old aunt who was my husband's relative. She was praying, as soon as he saw the sun. I noticed and wondered why such a thing? When I asked my husband, he said that the sun is very sacred for us, the beginning of a new day and the sunrise, you see, today will be a good day and good beginnings. It was different, the belief seemed different to me because I had never heard or seen such a thing before. They were seeing the sun and praying. It caught my attention that at least I lived with different cultures... Making cem rituals in the cem house, that is, men and women are together because men and women do not come together in a mosque, you may know that it is a sin for Muslims. But when I first saw it, men, women, children, and old people all gathered together and prayed, worshiped together in the speech of the clergyman, whom they call dede, in the cem house. It's good that they pray together... It was interesting that everyone prayed together for themselves. It's nice and different... It is very, very different from us.” (C2FS)

“For example, I do not sacrifice an animal. In other words, I do not cut or destroy another life for my sin, or if I think so. But we see when we go... We go to sacrifice. There is the rush of the sacrifice, their excitement, being with

them, that is, slaughtering their animals, it is beautiful. Being with them...”
he actually talked about the beauty of being together even though he is far away. (C3MA)

In summary, the participants defined the difference in worship through culture and spoke positively of the reflections of this difference in their couple relationships and relationships with their families.

3.5.4. Lives Without the Pressure of Faith

This sub-theme is about life without the pressure of faith. Especially Sunni participants mentioned that if their spouses were from the same sect, they would have experienced the faith more intensely and their freedoms might be restricted accordingly, while some of the Alevi participants mentioned that if their spouses lived their faith more intensely, they would have had problems. Some participants, on the other hand, stated that they are more comfortable because both parties do not live their faith intensely. Participants from both sects agree that this makes their relationship more sustainable. 9 out of 12 participants mentioned this issue. One participant expressed the comfort she feels because of her husband’s being from the Alevi sect, with these words:

“You know, if I were in a Sunni group, maybe I would have fulfilled or had to fulfill those duties more, or it would have been noticeable if I didn't do it because everyone else was doing it. But there is no such pressure on this side. Maybe I'm comfortable because of that. I mean, if I stayed on an oppressive side, I would definitely be influenced, I guess I could do something more for religion because of that thing. But now if I want something, I do it. I'm not doing anything for someone's pressure or someone's coercion. I do as much as I can, but if I were on the other side, maybe I would have had to act and live differently because of environmental or social pressure.” (C2FS)

Another participant evaluated this issue of freedom and oppression based on male and female roles and Alevism and Sunnism: “*A bride, a girl who comes to the Alevi community, comes to the Alevi house, will feel very comfortable. She is so free she, she is cherished. But for example, when our girls go to the Sunni side, they become a little more oppressive... To turn to religion a little more... It's like 'perform your prayer'. But there is never any pressure for us.*” (C3MA)

As a result, people feel comfortable both in their relationships and in their own faith experiences due to the fact that the Alevi sect has a more open and liberal point of view.

When all sub-themes are evaluated, it can be stated that being with someone from a different sect enriches the participants from different points, both in their relationships and in their individual lives.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to understand how being from different sects in Turkey influences the spousal relationship. The possible challenges they experience in their relationships, the way they address these and the gains they have achieved have been approached from the perspective of systemic theory. In this direction, 6 couples were interviewed separately and certain themes were generated based on their existing experiences.

The cultural environment in which people live shapes their perspective on life (Veroff & Goldberger, 1995). This cultural environment includes elements such as shared values, verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, social roles, expectations, traditions, rules, behaviors, attitudes and beliefs. At the same time, the beliefs, attitudes and values of individuals in a cultural group may differ from each other (Matsumoto, 2000).

Like culture, religion also includes certain values, beliefs and attitudes and can affect people's feelings, thoughts and behaviors (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011). Furthermore, religion and culture also have interrelated effects at the societal as well as the individual level (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010).

Especially recently, with the increase in technology and globalization, the interaction between people from different cultures has increased (Whiten et al., 2011). The situation where these cultures coexist is called "Multicultural", and the situation where they interact and transform each other is called "Intercultural" (Yogeeswaran et al., 2021). Landis (1949) refers to marriages that individuals make that differ from each other in any respect other than gender, as intergroup marriages or mixed marriages. This includes belief, identity, race, nationality and even socioeconomic status, education or physical differences. In the literature, these marriages are also called Multicultural or Intercultural marriages.

Below, the 5 themes that emerged in this research are discussed in the context of previous studies and theories.

4.1. THEMES

4.1.1. The Sect is Not a Salient Issue

Religion can be defined from different points of view. According to Durkheim, religion is the belief in what is sacred for oneself, the practices developed by that person in that matter and the existence of prohibitions (1912/1995). When looking from cultural perspective, according to Cohen (2009), religion is a tool and realizes the interaction between people and the environment through the sharing of the meaning, knowledge and values produced and transferring them from generation to generation.

Sects can be considered as currents of thought that emerged in various periods (Aslan, 2017). Wilson describes how sects emerged as a result of social events (Ertoý, 2004). In fact, Islamic sects emerged from the differences of opinion after the death of Muhammad (Aslan, 2017). Besides, in Kutlu's review, it is asserted that the established religion is forced with several alterations, since sects have a kind of fragmented nature (Kocadağ, 2009).

Interreligious or intersect marriages have increased, especially in Europe and North America, caused by the blurring of borders between countries, the lessening of interference by third parties, and secularization. For example, there has been an increase in the number of Jewish-non-Jewish marriages in the United States in the last few decades (Kalmijn, 1998).

On the contrary, marrying people from other religions, is not common in places where religious values, beliefs and practices are important for the person and where religious distinctions are strong; for example, for Muslims, Hindus,

Buddhists or for Catholics and Protestants in North America (Kalmijn & Tubergen, 2010). However, such interfaith marriages can and do happen.

In this context, it is necessary to consider how intense religion is for the person (Heaton, 1984; Curtis & Ellison, 2002). Intense experience of different beliefs or sects can cause conflict between the spouses. Daneshpour (2003) stated that when Muslim men have Islamic expectations from their non-Muslim wives, for example, their clothes being more modest, eating halal food or not socializing too much with the opposite sex, this causes a conflict between them. Similarly, in a study of Curtis and Ellison, men who believed in the Bible thought that their wives' working outside the house would increase their power, and restricted their partners (2002). When we look at the intersectorian situation, since the Catholic sect is more conservative than the Protestant sect, divorce is more difficult in cases where both partners have an intense experience of their beliefs, compared to people who do not (Salisbury, 1970). Similarly, the frequency of conflict between individuals in Protestant-Catholic marriages varies according to their level of liberalism and conservatism (Petersen, 1986). Bustamante et al. (2011) found in their research that in societies with rigid gender norms and male and female roles (for example, Morocco, Mexico), spouses have difficulties with their partners. Also, from the systemic point of view, for example, in cases where gender roles between couples are decisively pronounced, one of the partners is hierarchically higher than the other. This, in turn, can create problems between couples (Nichols, 2013). The Alevi-Sunni couples in this study were able to create a balance in terms of hierarchy by avoiding to accept the gender norms and by holding on to their unity as partners.

On the other hand, this research revealed that sect is not a salient factor that defines individuals and the couple relationship in the marriages of Alevi-Sunni couples; their character and personality traits are more important than the different sects. When the participants practice their religious beliefs, they do it with a customary feeling, without much thought. Moreover, some of the participants communicated with their partners from a more egalitarian place, as they approached the religious or sectarian distinction from a much more political place and did not make any distinctions in terms of male and female roles. Parallel to this, in a study

by Inman et al. (2011) some participants mentioned that they did not identify themselves in relation to culture because they found it meaningless; the important thing was to be human. In a study conducted in Turkey, Çatak (2015) noted that since most of the Alevi-Sunni couples are distant from their sect's practices, their relationships are not affected by this. Similarly, Seshardi and Knudson-Martin and Boratav et al. found that couples do not argue about this issue, as they do not put cultural difference at the center of their relationships (2013; 2021). According to Tatkin, it can be said that these couples create a couple bubble by putting their relationship at the center of their lives (2020).

Considering the fact that gender roles are an element of conflict for some couples, but not a conflict in general for Alevi-Sunni couples, it is important to evaluate the humanistic perspective of Alevism. Some of the participants in this study mentioned that women are valued among Alevis and that men and women have equal status. Some women stated that the participant who married an Alevi person would have been suppressed if she had married a Sunni person. Underlying this value and lack of pressure is the point of view in Alevi-Bektashism that no work can be done without consent. In addition, the fact that men and women are side by side while performing religious worship is another factor that shows that men and women have equal social value (Aktaş, 1999). In the research by Çatak, it is argued Alevi women are vulnerable to being exposed to suppression impact (2015). Traumatic experiences of Alevis throughout the history, from the first emergence of sects to the last 20 years, can be considered as the reason for this situation (Erman & Göker, 2000).

Since almost all of these traumatic experiences are political, most of the participants approach the sect distinctions as a political issue. The fact that Alevis sided with Shah Ismail in the war between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid Empire can be shown as a reason for the emergence of discrimination against Alevis (Markussen, 2000). In this regard, it is emphasized by a few participants that most of the prejudiced thoughts towards Alevis have a political origin. The fact that the couples putting the sect distinction in a place distant from themselves and standing against it would be approached as a notion that makes couples closer to each other.

Seshardi and Knudson-Martin (2013) also argue that being together against prejudice and discrimination is a factor that strengthens the couple's relationship.

In the research it can also be seen that the reason why being of different sects did not affect the couple's relationships may be the tolerant world view they gained as a result of their migration experience. It can be thought that the spontaneity, the ability to cope with uncertainty and the ability to look at cases in a holistic manner related to the migration experience may also have positive reflections on the relationships of individuals (Falicov, 2003). Aktaş (1999) stated in his article that after 1965, Alevi moved away from the countryside to the city. However, in Shakland's review, Irlenkäufer (2011) asserts that Alevi are less aware of the developments in the cities since they mostly prefer rural areas while migrating from the village to the city, and they do not keep as much abreast of the progress in the urban life as the Sunnis. It can be assumed that they do this because they are afraid of being discriminated against.

The findings suggest that most of the participants in these marriages did not experience any ups and downs in their relationships due to their sects.

Couples from different beliefs or cultures stated that they cope with conflicts more easily when they base their relationships on certain common values. In this context, Bustamante et al. (2011) stated that one of the reasons why couples are happy is that they think about common values rather than differences and create new common values in their relationships as a couple. In addition, in their research, Boratav et al. (2021) found that common values, rather than cultural differences, are important for couples. These common values are stated by Daneshpour (2003) as respect, honesty, trust, loyalty and appreciation. Inman et al. (2011) emphasizes that if couples try to find a middle ground in their relationships and act as a team, they cope with problems easily. Concordantly, in a study of Methodist and Lutheran couples, the spouses stated that it is important for them that both sects belong to Christianity and that the God they believe in is the same (Williams & Lawler, 2003). If we apply this example to Alevism and Sunnism, facts such as both of them having faith in Allah and Muhammad, believing that Ali has descended from Muhammad's

family and accepting the Qur'an as a holy book could be considered as the common values of the couples (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). These values actually serve the same purpose even though they are practiced differently. Similar to the motto of Alevism "Control your tongue, your hands and your loins" advises one to control one's self and not to act in a wrong way in relations with other people; Sunnism advises one not to lie, steal, or speak ill of someone (Shindeldecker, 1998; Bilmen, 2003).

Researchers have stated that apart from the common values, the fact that couples put their similarities at the center of their relationships, rather than their differences, enables them to cope with problems more easily. These points can be socioeconomic status, education, areas of interest (Daneshpour, 2003; Inman et al., 2011). This is in line with the theory of homogeneity, that emphasizes certain similarities, such as ethnicity, religion, race, socioeconomic similarities, age, related fields, education level, etc. Research generally supports the preference for partners to choose similar others (Jo-Pei et al., 2008).

In support of the above research, the participants in these Alevi-Sunni marriages also state that they care about more about general moral norms in their relationships, as common values, rather than the differences of their sects. Apart from this, when their education levels, the places they met, their social environment and families are examined, it is understood that the couples always have similar geographical cultures, places where they were born and raised, education levels and perspectives on life. This situation can be given as an example for couples to think about their similarities rather than differences.

4.1.2. Everyone Can Live Their Faith as They Wish

As mentioned before, in this main theme, it has been stated that Alevi-Sunni couples have a more flexible point of view while fulfilling their own beliefs and the beliefs of those around them. Points such as the importance of an open-minded view of families towards beliefs, having similar ideas with those around them, the

relationships they establish with their environment without discrimination of sect, the couple's respect and support for each other's beliefs, and finally the free will of the child are emphasized here. Under these headings, research supporting or opposing this theme will be discussed below.

In the research it is understood that if the families do not mind their children marrying someone from a different sect and humor their children, it is because these families are already tolerant towards each other in terms of religious beliefs and they do not have a discriminatory perspective regarding other religions and sects. The reason for this could be that the essential value is placed on people and not religion; hurting someone is the main misdeed, and the important achievement is to be the perfect human being (İnsan-ı Kamil) in Alevism culture (Shindecdelker, 1998). Breaking hearts is also condemned in Sunnism (Ağaoğlu, 2018). Therefore, it can be thought that families who live their lives in this way can tolerate the differences of opinion with regard to religion and will not mind their children marrying someone from a different sect.

The environment where the participants were born and grew up enabled them to be more gentle towards their partners' sect in their school and business life; also the existence of people of different ethnic identities in this environment contributed to them being more flexible when they first met their spouses. Lewis Jr and Ford-Robertson (2010) discuss the increasing opportunities of meeting individuals from different cultures due the presence of today's media together with the political movements of the past. Thus it could be seen that people are open to interact with very different circles and that culture or belief may not be a restrictive factor in most individuals' mate preferences today.

How such marriages are perceived in the environment where the individuals live appears to make a difference. Several studies on Alevi-Sunni marriages have been conducted in Nevşehir, İstanbul, Berlin and İzmir until now (Balkanlıoğlu, 2012; Çatak, 2015; Ülkücan et al., 2019). These studies have shown that Alevi-Sunni couples living in Nevşehir experience more difficulties than the ones living in İzmir, İstanbul or Berlin. Nevşehir is a rural province with a high concentration

of Alevi population. It can be said that this province is more closed to interaction compared to many other provinces. Therefore, the higher the number of similar marriages in that environment, the easier life is for the couples.

One of the important observations in this study is that these couples have similar marriages around them and these marriages continue without any problems. On a similar topic, Jo-Pei et al. (2008) also came up with a similar finding. It has been understood that the marriages of couples from different cultures in Malaysia, as emphasized by Structural Theory (Kalmijn & Tubergen, 2010), are around other similar marriages that are socially accepted, making it easier for them to actualize this marriage.

In this study, when the participants were asked about their belief experiences, most of them stated that they did not fully fulfill their belief, but that they did when they wanted and that their spouses supported them in this regard, which was good for their relationship. Reiter and Gee (2008) have stated that supporting each other in this way will reduce the problems in the couple relationship. In addition, people who are in mixed married marriages have described this as one of the ways to cope with their differences (Knudson-Martin, 2013). From a similar place, Kim et al. (2007), on the other hand, state that when Korean women maintain their own culture in their relationships, it is psychologically good for them and this situation reflects positively on their relationships. In a study on the same subject in Turkey, Ülkücan et al. (2019) found that the partners did not actively participate in the cultural practices of each other's religions, and that everyone performed their own worship. However, as the couples get to know their partner's sect well, they tend to explore it and their prejudices towards this sect somewhat change in the course of time. Parallel with this situation, several participants in this study stated that after marrying their partners, they have explored their partners' sects or had the opportunity to get to know their spouses better.

On the other hand, Curtis and Ellison (2002) state that the dominance of one side in couples with different beliefs can result in the non-dominant believer to accommodate to the belief of the person with a dominant belief and may cause

serious conflicts in the relationships of the couples due to the inequality between dominant and non-dominant beliefs. As an example of this suppression, among the couples Daneshpour (2003) studied, Muslim participants insisted that their spouses turn to Islam, and their spouses experienced serious difficulties both internally and relationally (for example, dressing, eating-drinking and socializing) if they turned in that direction. When considering Turkey, the fact that Sunnis are more dominant since they have more power than Alevis in political and social sense, it is reasonable to expect that Alevis would be under pressure in these marriages (Markussen, 2000; Aġaoġlu, 2018).

While raising children, the presence of a dominant party in intersect marriages sometimes causes the dominant extended family to affect their marriage. For example, Catholics are more conservative than Protestants in Catholic-Protestant marriages. As a result, in a study by Landis (1949), Catholic grandparents wanted their grandchildren to be brought up more according to the Catholic sect, while Protestant elders spoke of a desperate situation where they predicted that their grandchildren would turn to the Catholic sect. However, children generally tended to lean towards the Protestant sect. In a different study by Salisbury (1970) study, children tended towards the Catholic sect due to the fact that Catholics generally lived their faith more. In the present study, on the other hand, all participants stated that they wanted their children to make their own sect choices of their own free will and raised them accordingly. When it comes to their own parents, participants stated that although Sunni parents were more dominant than Alevi parents, they had hardly ever interfered in this matter.

Petersen (1986) found that within Catholic and Protestant marriage types (Catholic-Conservative Protestant; Catholic-Catholic; Liberal Protestant-Catholic) couples, depending on how intensely they lived their faith, their children were also more tied to their beliefs. Arweck and Nesbitt similarly emphasized that when parents are distant from their beliefs, the child experiences a similar process (2010). From this point of view, it is seen that some of the participants in the study emphasized several times that they expected their children to be distant because

they themselves are distant from their beliefs, and that they will not guide them in any way.

4.1.3. Parents' Change in the Process

This main theme encompasses the difficulties faced by a few participants whose parents were initially opposed to marriage from a different sect. Parents did not approve of this marriage and were worried at first, but later their prejudices changed and they came to a position of accepting and valuing their relationships and partners. This theme will be discussed in more detail below.

In Turkey, girls and boys are given the same value in Alevi families, with both treated equally at the point of decision-making about marriage. Therefore, Alevi families have less influence on their children's marriages than Sunni families. According to Alevi families, marriage is a union of hearts and therefore the consent of individuals is always more important (Aktaş, 1999). In this current study, there were similar findings. Sunni families are more likely to not allow couples to marry or to punish them for doing so. The reason for this is that Sunnis think that Alevis are not real Muslims and that they pose a mischief to Islam (Markussen, 2000).

In this study, many participants in Alevi-Sunni marriages wondered how their families would react when they introduced their spouses to their families, or how they would be received in their spouse's family. Similarly, in a study of marriages from Asian-Indian and White origins, couples wondered about their families' first reactions to marriage. Some stated that their families approached their relationship with various concerns, but that their perceptions changed afterwards, and that most of them received positive reactions about this marriage from their families, social network and friends (Inman et al., 2011). Daneshpour (2003) found in his research that the families of female Christian participants had a concern that they would move away from Christianity and become Muslim due to their marriage with their spouses. Similarly, in the study conducted by Kouri and Lasswell (1993), although some of the families of the participants had difficulty in accepting their

spouses at first, they later got over this situation and some of them had no difficulty in accepting. Acceptance of their relationship by families facilitates the marriage process for couples. Similar results emerged in the current study, with some families becoming more accepting over the marriage with time.

According to Minuchin, the problems that couples have with other systems are caused by the fact that their boundaries with others are too strict or too fluid. Other systems will have more interference with these boundaries if they are vulnerable. On the contrary, if they are overly stiff, other systems will have less of an impact (Nichols, 2013). In this study it is revealed that the interferences of other systems were the most challenging for individuals; yet nevertheless, the couples eventually managed to establish balanced boundaries against other systems. At the same time, they were able to successfully manage the third parties outside of them (Tatkin, 2020).

Gender roles still present a dominant issue in Turkey. In traditional Turkish society, masculinity carries more status and power, although differences do exist (Sunar & Fişek, 2005). In this study, there is also a concern about the oppression of their children by the dominant sect in the families of some participants, as well as a concern about the oppression of the female partner. In other words, besides the dominance of the sect, there is also a concern about the dominance of gender. Çatak's (2015) study also showed that especially the families of female participants initially did not want these marriages to happen since they worried about their children changing their sect and their offspring not being of their own sect; but over time, these prejudiced thoughts disappeared as they got to know the groom. More generally, cultural issues may intersect with gender issues as well (Reid, 2002).

4.1.4. Different Groups Not Influencing One Another

This main theme suggests that being with someone from a different sect did not have a negative effect on either on the couples themselves, their families, close circles or their own children.

In this study, although the families of some participants were negative towards the idea of their children marrying someone from another sect, most of them did not see this as a problem. Apart from their families, participants did not see any negative reaction from their distant relatives and friends, and did not encounter any problems at work. Similarly, in a research by Inman et al. (2011) most participants stated that their marriage was positively welcomed by their family and social environment. On the other hand, Balkanlıoğlu (2012) found in a study conducted in Nevşehir that Alevi-Sunni marriages could cause serious problems in the family; couples were vulnerable to certain discriminatory attitudes such as social isolation and accused of committing crimes and corrupting the family blood. Furthermore, these couples experienced social stigma by the larger society as well. Some participants stated that their marriage was greeted strangely in their social or business life, but that they did not reflect this on their relationships. Although not as many as Balkanlıoğlu's (2012) study, Çatak's (2015) study also revealed that some couples have serious problems with their families.

As for the issue related to children, Arweck and Nesbitt's study (2010) found that children from families of different faiths did not experience any religious or cultural conflict. The reason seems to be that belief is not an element in the first place in the family. In Aşlamacı's (2013) research on raising children in Alevi-Sunni marriages in Turkey, it is stated that children are not affected by discrimination about their sects, they do not experience any pressure, and an environment where they can freely learn their religion is offered to them. Similarly, in the current study, couples also stated that their children do not face any problems due to sect discrimination. It has been understood that religious differences are not an important factor for Alevi-Sunni couples, and one of the reasons for this is their own distance from religion. In fact, studies have found that children born as a result

of such marriages will have more complex and rich ethno-religious identities (Gielen et al., 2008). Daneshpour also stated that couples from different faiths raising their children with the cultural values, languages, roles and behaviors of both faiths will be enriching for the identity of the children (2003). Arweck and Nesbitt (2010) similarly stated that the children of parents with different beliefs are more open-minded, flexible and tolerant.

Regarding raising children, participants emphasized that character and personality traits are important for their children and that it is important to raise them with common moral values in both sects and to be able to intervene correctly as parents. From a similar point, in the study conducted by Alweck and Nesbitt (2010) religiously different couples stated that they raise their children with universal values as respectful, empathetic, thoughtful and tolerant. Balkanlıoğlu (2012) also points out that Alevi-Sunni couples prefer their children to be well-educated and well-behaved regardless of any preference of sect. Aşlamacı's research (2013) emphasized that some couples would like to raise their children with different commonly shared values. The similar results in this study may be due to the importance given to certain moral values (for example, not to lie, not to be unfair, to be self-controlled, respectful and honest) shared by both Alevis and Sunnis and the couples' tendency to behave in this way (Shindeldecker, 1998; Bilmen, 2003).

From a different point of view, Bustamante et al. (2011) found in his research that one of the areas where couples have the biggest problems is about raising children. In the past, in the studies conducted by Landis (1949) and Salisbury (1970), children were found to be leaning towards a sect that was more dominant in the marriage. In addition, Petersen (1986) stated in his research that children's religious feelings and commitments may be weak when they have parents with different beliefs. In this regard, Arweck & Nesbitt (2010) found that these children attended religious services less and had less control over the cultural aspects of religion. In this study, it was observed that the children of some participants had not yet formed their religious identity due to their young age, while

others were in a much more uncertain situation in terms of belief. In addition, some participants stated that their children experienced their beliefs more intensely, especially if they were from the same sect as their spouses.

Other systems can also have an effect on children's religious identities. In a study by Arweck and Nesbitt (2010), children of Indo-British couples were found to be exposed to discrimination in their environment and the religious education that the children of couples from these different faiths received at school affected their religious identity. Similarly, in this study, the participants were concerned that the religious identity of their children might be affected, since the religious education in Turkey is predominantly Sunni-oriented. Also, the fact that children with Alevi-Sunni identity are exposed to questions about sect discrimination at school has also worried their parents.

4.1.5. Difference of Sect as a Source of Richness

This theme captures the idea that being from different sects strengthens the couple relationship, with partners experiencing the culture of the other, benefiting from knowing a different culture, and the comfort of living one's faith without pressure.

Some of the participants tried the worship of their spouse's sect or started to fulfill the rituals of that culture, out of respect and sensitivity. Similarly, in a study of Asian-Indian and white couples, partners were found to integrate into each other's culture, respect their traditions and to behave sensitively (Inman et al., 2011). On the other hand, Ülkücan et al. (2011), stated that the participation rates in each other's worship are very low in Alevi-Sunni couples. Also, being with someone from a different culture can also be challenging for couples. For example, Korean women have had to cope with difficulties that may arise due to their relationships with their American spouses, such as uncertainty in their cultural identity or loneliness (Kim et al., 2007). Similarly, Daneshpour (2003) stated that

when non-Muslim spouses are forced to perform the rituals of their Muslim spouses, this does not improve their relationship.

Inman et al. (2011) point to the importance of recognizing another culture, with diversity enriching relationships. Ülkücan et al. (2011) state that being with someone from a different sect can change one's prejudices and related behaviors. The benefit of the person's change is not only for their partner. The definition of difference as an area for learning something new, a richness, a color, an attractive and instructive field is good for the psychology of the person who marries someone from a different culture (Kim et al., 2007; Inman et al., 2011; Seshardi & Knudson-Martin, 2013). This situation actually creates a relationship in which the partners stand side by side against the prejudices of other people (Seshardi & Knudson-Martin, 2013). In this research, it is revealed that marrying someone from another culture enables the participants to get to know a new life. In this study, especially some Sunni participants noted that as they got to know their spouse's culture, their prejudices about that culture changed and even stated that these characteristics contributed to being an exemplary couple in many areas.

Although some conflicts between couples or within the family may seem as if they stem from their different ideological roots, in fact, it can be seen that these couples and families have similar and interrelated perspectives. However, a kind of open communication appears to be a must; otherwise, one party experiences it as a freedom while the other experiences it as uncertainty (Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2019). Bustamante et al. (2011) states that an important factor that creates problems between partners comes from the inability of couples to communicate with each other about cultural differences. The ability of couples to communicate openly about their cultural or religious differences strengthens their relationship (Reiter & Gee, 2008; Seshardi & Knudson-Martin, 2013). As another related example, in the research on marriages of people of different sects within Christianity, it is stated that being respectful and tolerant of differences and establishing an open communication solves problems (Williams & Lawler, 2003). The couples in this study were able to talk about their being of different sects, and in this way they have

also explored the differences between them, got to know each other more, and avoided potential problems.

In the study, it is seen that many participants are quite open-minded and mindful of differences and that they are open to discuss their ideas with each other and make common decisions by employing an open-communication. These achievements of individuals match up with the above-mentioned issues in regard to being more flexible and the matter about reconciliation. When these open-minded couples who employ an open communication and are tolerant of the differences between each other are analyzed with the systemic perspective, it is observed that many of them inherit these characteristics from their families. From a systemic perspective, according to Bowen, our inherited experiences through generations and our existing relationships are reflected in our feelings, thoughts and behaviors in our present relationships (Nichols, 2013).

Lastly, in a study conducted on a similar subject, it is asserted that the source of the salience of the conflict between Alevis and Sunnis is miscommunication and lack of trust (Ağaoğlu, 2018). Although it is not the case for the couples in the research, it can be thought that these couples also have prejudiced thoughts regarding this issue.

4.2. THOUGHTS ON ALEVISM

This study mainly aims to reveal how being of different sects affect the partners in their relationships. Although the themes discussed above are limited to the extent of couple relationships and their relatedness with other systems, some of the participants in the interview also mentioned the general discriminatory thoughts towards Alevis and gave examples from their own experiences. Below, this issue is discussed by referring both to certain theories in psychology and to resources from the literature on Alevism and Sunnism.

Gudykunst (2004) refers to "power distance" as one of variables in understanding intercultural relationships. To reiterate, a kind of dominance and social hierarchy are more common in people of the higher power distance culture; towards the people of the lower power distance culture. Considering the Alevi and Sunni sects, the people-oriented approach of the Alevism allows the individuals being considered as a more equal within the whole society, while it could be seen that religion is a power factor and a shared form of relating through the religion-oriented approach of Sunnism (Algül, 1999). Also, Sunnism is more highly regarded by states throughout the history, compared to Alevism (Markussen, 2000; Ağaoğlu, 2018). Therefore, it can be said that Sunnism is based on a cultural structure with a higher power distance, whereas Alevism, on the contrary, is based on a structure with a lower power distance. From this point of view, the above mentioned concerns of Alevis with regard to suffering an oppression becomes more meaningful.

Moreover, it can be said that this affects not only the participants of the study but also their children. As an example, one Alevi participant in particular expressed worries about their child turning to the dominant Sunni sect. When the reason for this specific participant's concerns is questioned, it is understood that the participant was worried about certain traumas in their own past to reflect on the child. Parents of the participants also had their share of this concern. Many Alevis experienced the suffering related to immigration, the difficulties in adapting to a new place, and having to hide their Alevi identity. Falicov states that in many cases, including the immigration stories, the things turned over through generations would always be embedded in the individual; so we should look at the whole picture not only from a horizontal but also from a vertical perspective (1988; 2003). She also asserts that the cultural identities of minorities can be suppressed due to their disadvantaged position. Accordingly, this study reveals that Sunni parents are able to perform their worship more than Alevi parents and have more opportunities to educate their children about their own sect. On the other hand, Alevi participants stated that their families were hesitant to perform their worship and to teach them.

Alevis have been discriminated against for centuries. One of the last examples of this discrimination is the Sivas Massacre (Akbaş, 2010). In this regard, one participant could hardly speak of the memory she has experienced indirectly. Thus, it can be said that the participants have various experiences of discrimination just because they are Alevis. One of the participants says that he was insulted with the word "Rafizi" (Akbaş, 2010), which means infidel, irreligious and used to insult Alevis when he was a child, and the impact of these memories.

Some participants also mentioned that their perception of life and their way to behave differed from each other. The most frequently mentioned differences are that Alevis drink alcoholic beverages and Sunnis do not, or that Alevis are less oppressive than Sunnis. Although this perspective seems a bit narrow-minded, the fact that Alevis have a more secular political stance supporting the opposition, while Sunnis live in a more orthodox way can be seen as the reason why the participants think in this way (Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012; Erman & Göker, 2000; Markussen, 2000).

On the contrary, many participants had positive thoughts towards Alevis, stating that Alevis are open-minded, enlightened, honest and do not have a discriminatory view. Alevism advises that the real purpose of human beings is to reach the highest level that one can reach. In this regard, it has certain principles such as "Four Doors Forty Levels" (Dört Kapı Kırk Makam), "Perfect Human Being (İnsan-ı Kamil) and "I am the Reality" (En-el Hak) (Shindeldecker, 1998). Alevis also have developed a great affinity with Atatürk's principles and reforms, hoping that the Republican era would be more secular. Atatürk's pictures are in many Cemevis today is an example of this fact (Markussen, 2000). All these may account for the positive thoughts of many participants towards Alevis.

4.3. COMMENTS ON THE POSSIBLE REASONS FOR SOME OF THE FINDINGS

As mentioned earlier, this study aimed to investigate the problems that couples experience due to sect differences and how they cope with them. Considering the findings, it was understood that the couples did not have any major problems caused by sect differences. It is possible that the interpretations of some of the findings may be assumptive.

First of all, sects are forms of beliefs that are differentiated from the main religious currents in which there is generally a high level of worship as dissociated volunteers. There are many varieties of sects, and they are generally not accepted by the state. As an example, the Conversionist, the Adventist, the Introversionist, and the Gnostic sects can be given. (Wilson, 1959). In Turkey, the Alevi sect is also differentiated and excluded from the mainstream Islamic religion (Erman & Göker, 2000; Çarkoğlu & Bilgili, 2012). When looking at inter-sect marriages in other countries, studies show that there are conflicts between spouses due to the dominant denomination in Catholic-Protestant marriages (Landis, 1949; Petersen, 1986). It is common to think that there will be conflicts between spouses in Alevi-Sunni marriages in Turkey due to events in the past and the prejudices of groups about each other (Çatak, 2015; Markussen, 2000; Ağaoğlu, 2018). However, in other studies, including this one, it was found that couples did not have any problems regarding sect differences (Çatak, 2015; Balkanlıoğlu, 2012). According to Ülkücan et al. (2019), the reason for this is that couples have low participation rates in both their own and each other's religious and cultural activities. Moreover, this situation is not only the case in Alevi-Sunni marriages. In the research by Boratav et al. (2021) on international marriages, it was found that the participation of people in their own cultural activities was low. Similarly, in studies conducted in other countries, it was found that the degree of conflict between partners increased more when people experienced their beliefs intensely (Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Daneshpour, 2003).

In addition, the change in the family structure in Turkey can be added to the reasons why the results are different from what was expected. In today's urbanized families, the roles of men and women are more equal, the hierarchy is decreasing, and the importance given to the extended family is decreasing compared to the older generation of rural families. Rather than accepting the rules of the extended family, the individual's own process is gaining more priority (Sunar & Fişek, 2005).

Considering this change, it can be said that the salience of sects has decreased over the generations covered by this research. Couples living in today's urban environment may be placing less emphasis on the sectarian values that their parents cared about. It can be stated that these couples are in a structure that is differentiated from the upper generation pairs (Bowen, 2004). In fact, many couples in the research do not regularly perform the worship of their sect. Some couples, on the other hand, preferred to continue the traditions and customs of their sects. It can be assumed that if these couples had brought the worship of their sects to their home, the problems they would have had could have been greater. The participants also used expressions to support this possibility.

Another reason may have to do with the duration of the marriage. In the study, it was asked directly if they had a problem with sect differences at the beginning of their relationship and during the marriage period, and all couples stated that they had not had a problem at any period. However, Kurdek (1999) found in his research that couples usually have conflicts at the beginning of their marriages, but this decreases in the process, and accordingly, relationship satisfaction drops rapidly at first, then becomes constant and increases in the following times. In this research, due to the fact that couples have been married for a long time, the sect difference first caused a problem, but then the problems may have been solved. At the same time, couples may not have wanted to fully share their own problems in the study. This may have resulted in the assumption that couples did not have problems due to sect differences.

Finally, looking at the history of research on the impact of sect differences on the relationship, it seems that there are older studies on this issue in the West compared to Turkey. Perhaps if there were more previous on sect separation in Turkey, we would have seen more findings about couples experiencing more conflict. Observation about parents' concerns and the restrictions in this study support this possibility.

4.4. CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

In the formation of an individual's perspective, besides his/her own private attitudes, what he/she learns in the society is also important (Biever et al. 1998; Nichols, 2013). Counselings and psychotherapies conducted from a multicultural approach provides a unique perspective to counselors and psychotherapists in regard to certain topics that people learn in the society, such as nonverbal behaviors, values, racial and ethnic identity, religious beliefs, needs and communication (Kararmak, 2008; Coleman, 2004).

There may be certain situations that may disrupt the therapeutic relationship caused by the therapist's being in a different culture than their client. Therefore, therapists may approach the fact that their clients are from different cultures with prejudice. Fisek and Kagitcibasi (1999) defined these prejudices as "Alpha and Beta bias". Alpha bias is the condition that the differences between the two cultures are too visible. This circumstance actually makes it possible to notice the important features of the other culture. But on the other hand, it makes it difficult to see the common areas between the two cultures. In addition, it creates cultural relativism and makes what the dominant culture has important. In a therapeutic sense, the inability to see commonalities and see the characteristics of the dominant culture negatively affects therapy. Beta bias, on the other hand, is the ignoring of the differences between the two cultures. Ignoring differences creates a problem, especially when these differences have an acquired significance for a person. At

this point, the therapy that the therapist applies to everyone may not be suitable for this client, and this damages the therapeutic relationship. In this case, the open-mindedness of therapists will eliminate the obstacles (Fisek & Kagitcibasi, 1999). Similarly, according to Biever et al. (1998), therapists should be more open and curious to think about cultural differences, be open to an alternative explanation regarding these differences, consider that some of the conflicts may arise from them, try to show his/her clients that both the differences and the similarities can exist in a relationship, yet they should not see cultural differences as an explanation for every issue. Therapists can increase their multicultural competence within the supervision groups or other groups to keep a more open mind about this issue. For instance, they can experience belonging to a different culture through role-plays and participate in activities where they can think about, discuss, and see other differences (Caldwell & Galiardi, 2014). They should also try to create new stories by considering the experiences told by their clients (Morgan, 2000). In addition, Waltman and Rubalcava also state that the therapist should stay in an empathetic position and try to give his/her clients the ability to empathize (2005).

In addition, Falicov emphasized that in the cases of multicultural couples, therapists should support resilience both for the individuals, couples and families, help them strengthen their personalities (2003). Because in the systemic approach, it is important and functional to talk about the positives and strong aspects of the clients in order to increase their awareness and to make them more liable on these issues. Considering what is going well, rather than retrospectively what the current problem actually is, would help to solve this problem, especially at the times when therapeutic process is a bit stuck (Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2019). Considering this study, the power of the couples can be underlined in that they care about their similarities and shared values rather than their differences, encourage each other about their differences, and do not put sect differences at the center of their relationships, and consider their differences as possibly a source of richness. Similarly, Virginia Satir said: “We get together on the basis of our similarities; we grow on the basis of our differences” (2016).

When cultural differences partners couples are not a problem, the therapist should set aside his or her own preconceptions about it, evaluate how important this issue really is for the couple, and create a space to talk about it (Daneshpour, 2003). It is important to talk about what the culture of the other means for each person, the influence of these cultures on the couple's relationship, and the existence of a cultural space formed in this relationship (Blount & Young, 2015; Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). If there is no problem, how they manage this and the strengthening effect of this on their relationships should be taken into account. The clinician should emphasize the resolving effect of communication in that relationship (Daneshpour, 2003). In addition, it is important to evaluate other factors that are important in a couple's relationship. For example, the positive impact of the attitudes (such as similarity, wealth, deepened point of view) they develop towards the difficulties (like lack of acceptance by the family and the social environment, uncertainty, difference) they experience coming from different cultures on their relationships should be understood (Blount & Young, 2015; Biever et al. 1998).

Moreover, as a solution for couples who have problems with their cultural differences, Falicov (2003) advises therapists to first pay attention to their differences, then contextualize them, recognize their dilemmas, and shape the family with various interventions in this context. Many individuals think that their partners are constantly trying to influence or change them, partly because they have been involved in their own culture and cannot look at themselves from an outsider's perspective. However, when one realizes how his/her own culture shapes himself/herself and sees that his/her partner's experience is just alike, the problems become avoidable (Waldman & Rubancava, 2005). Cultural genogram, which is one of the important interventions in systemic theory, can be used as a tool for these interventions (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1995).

The systemic point of view is an another important tool in this regard. In the Systemic approach, it is aimed for the individual to be responsible for his own communication style and perspective and to raise personal awareness (Schlippe &

Schweitzer, 2019). In this approach, individuals may change by introspecting on their own experiences. In the psychological counseling, it can be said that these cultural elements are heavily used in this personal transformation process. Treatment or counseling plan is applied according to cultural elements (Kararmak, 2008). Thus, it can be understood that the source of an emotional state experienced by the client comes from a much more external systemic issue, such as immigration, discrimination, and/or oppression (Coleman, 2004). Apart from the couple's relationship, it is important that there is a space where extended families can talk about their concerns. These issues can be addressed by including families in the therapy process. Couples therapists can provide support for families to accept these marriages (Daneshpour, 2003).

Couples therapists must pay a close attention to cultural issues in the cases of multicultural couples. Unfortunately, mental health professionals who receive traditional education often do not pay attention to the cultural factors in the therapy or counseling process (Coleman, 2004). The therapists who are interested to provide counseling on the issues related to the culture should first be aware of their own cultural prejudices, values and limitations. In addition, they should take what they notice more welcomingly and work with the client in parallel with these (Sue et al., 1992; Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005; Fisek & Kagitcibasi, 1999). The counselors should perform their interpretations by constantly evaluating them in terms of individual, social and cultural factors (Coleman, 2004). At the same time, a competent counselor should be aware of the socio-political factors and have specific knowledge about the culture of the group with whom he/she works (Sue et al., 1992). Cultural genograms are an important tool that makes it easier for therapists to do these things. When the therapist applies the cultural genogram to himself/herself, he/she realizes his/her own cultural identity and has increased cultural awareness and sensitivity. In this way, he/she realizes which cultural identities he/she is influenced by as a therapist and how this affects his/her relationship with the client during treatment (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1995). Then it would have a positive impact such as providing safe disclosure environment and

strengthening the therapeutic relationship through the counseling process (Kararmak, 2008; Poulsen, 2018). In the counseling process, the counselor tries to find out what the identity or cultural elements of the client mean to himself/herself and what effect these identities or cultural elements have on them (Kararmak, 2008). If the mental health worker is able to see the circumstances experienced by his/her client from a multicultural perspective and to evaluate their problems within this respect; he/she would help the client to gain the ability to realize that the matters at which the client is looking as the source of the problem are at a much different point, and thusly he/she can intervene in this way (Coleman, 2004). Otherwise, a counselor who is unaware of the cultural differences between themselves and the clients might put his/her clients under pressure through unethical and harmful interventions (Sue et al., 1992). Indeed, there is no direct tool to measure whether therapists could improve themselves with regard to this issue. Therefore, experts who would like to make progress in this sense should constantly improve themselves with practice and research (Coleman, 2004).

In addition to the client's relationship with the therapist, the relationship between the therapist and the supervisor is also extremely important in the multicultural counseling process. Just as the therapist should be more open-minded about cultural differences, the supervisor should realize his own prejudices about this issue and be free of them. In this way, they can establish a meaningful and strong therapeutic relationship with the supervisee and discuss these issues during the training. Thus, cultural differences have a field that can be spoken about in educational programs. Supervisors who are competent in this regard may realize that the issue of cultural differences may cause an imbalance of power and hierarchy in the supervision relationship, and accordingly, they are not in a position to make assumptions, but rather to explore and be curious. In this way, the supervisor creates an environment where the therapist can talk more freely about cultural differences and increases the therapist's awareness of multicultural characteristics. The supervisor can also increase the awareness of his/her supervisor by using a cultural genogram, encouraging him/her to get into different groups, or by observing him/her in the educational process (Estrada, 2018).

It is thought that the results of this study would contribute to both the couples in therapy and the literature on family therapy. Up to now, studies on Alevi-Sunni marriages have generally addressed the difficulties experienced by the couples, and from a sociological perspective. However, this study reveals the resistance points that the couples cope with while exploring their difficulties, and seeks out how to consider them from the perspective of systemic therapy. As mentioned before, for the couple therapists who would like to work on these cases, it might be better for them to have a quest to learn about the conflicts caused by sect differences by listening to the couples empathetically. They should break down their prejudices on these issues by doing research on these kinds of cases, working them in their interships or experiencing being with them. At the same time, it might also be critical for the couple therapists to see the effect of the sect differences on the relationship, if there is any, and to make the couples track these effects. In addition to the differences, the therapists might also help such couples showing them the similarities and strengths in their relationships. Yet, in addition, it could also be suggested that a mental ground should be created by the therapists to better retrospect on the effects of sect differences, assisting the clients to gain some common skills that are expected to exist in a relationship.

This research does not only touch upon the issues in the family, but it also sets an example for how cultural, historical and sociological events might have an effect on the couples systemically. When the culture is considered as a part of the system, illustrating how it could influence the development of the individual and the relational field would contribute to the therapists using Systemic Theory in Turkey.

4.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

This research examined the effect of being from particular sects on the relationship of Alevi-Sunni couples in Turkey. In Turkey, these marriages have

been dealt with mostly in the field of sociology and have not been studied in the field of Clinical Psychology before. Within this context, it contributes to clinicians and researchers who desire to work on this subject. In the case, a total of 6 couples who defined themselves from the Alevi or Sunni sect were interviewed.

Almost all the participants thought that it was pointless to take part in the investigation since they did not have a specific problem with sect discrimination. Apprehension of the reasons why these couples do not experience problems will provide a fundamental resource for researchers who want to work in the field of couple therapy, especially in terms of how couples cope with this factor that they cannot change in their lives and how they do not reflect it on their relationships.

Since cultural issues are a subject that is mostly studied in social psychology in psychology, it is thought that the study can be a source not only for clinical psychology literature but also for areas such as social psychology, sociology, history, religion, and politics. Therefore, the fact that this subject includes many contexts has been an element that enriches the research. To our knowledge, this subject has never been studied in the field of clinical psychology in Turkey before.

Although they defined themselves with their sect, no participant fully fulfilled the worship of their sect. In parallel with this determination, it has not been fully explained how sects, which is one of the points of interest of the research, are reflected in the relations when fully experienced. In addition, since sects were not the main issue for the participants, it was not directly revealed whether they had any problems in their relationships, raising children or in their environment, or if they had any problems, how they overcame their problems. Therefore, it can be suggested that researchers who want to work on this subject in the future should pay attention to the experience of individuals' sects or feelings of belonging. Researchers can concretely measure with scales the extent to which the participants adhere to their religion.

Some participants did not understand some questions clearly and answered the questions incorrectly. This lack of comprehension increased even more among

the participants with lower education levels. It is theorized that researchers who desire to work on this subject in the future ask the questions more directly and simply and create them in a way that everyone can understand, which will make the research more accessible.

Even if the participants had different socioeconomic conditions and education levels in terms of demographics, business or financial issues were more important to them than the sect, as they all lived in Istanbul, that is, in the metropol. How the experiences may be different in different regions of Turkey is one of the areas that can be studied in the future.

It is hoped that the perspectives of all the participants and the researcher will shed light on the change in the prejudices of the Alevi-Sunni conflict in Turkey through the contribution of this investigation to the literature.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This research tries to understand the effect of the partners being from Alevi and Sunni sects in Turkey on their couple relationship, family and social life. In the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 couples in total, 3 Alevi women- Sunni men and 3 Sunni women- Alevi men. 1 couple was interviewed face-to-face with other couples via online platforms due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Although there are studies on this subject in sociology, there is no study in the field of clinical psychology; hence, it is thought that this subject will benefit clinicians and researchers in clinical psychology in Turkey, especially in the field of couple therapy.

It has been understood that multicultural or interfaith couples have awkwardnesses in communication, religion, gender roles, raising children, and relations with family and social environment. Other studies in Turkey, it has been figured out that couples generally do not have a problem between themselves in this regard, but problems with family and environment have emerged in some of them for the sake of prejudiced thoughts about intersect marriages. Correspondingly, in this case, the difference of sect did not constitute a problem in the couple relationship. The reasons for this are mostly that couples do not put their ties with their sect and sect discrimination at the center of their relations, and that the people around them and themselves are more open-minded on this issue.

In addition to that, the couples stated that they overcame the problems they experienced by defining difference of sect as a source of cultural richness, living their beliefs freely, remaining generally without prejudice in their relationships and by being open-minded, flexible, and staying in open communication. Moreover, some couples claimed that they had problems with their family of origins because they were married to someone from a different sect, which disappeared over time.

In this research, as a couple therapist working with couples, I have learned much about seeing how couples deal with the elements from their past that they cannot change and what should happen in a well-functioning couple relationship. Perhaps most fundamentally, my idea that Alevi and Sunni marriages can be very conflictual has completely disappeared. I hope anyone who has doubts about this in their mind will change their mind after reading this thesis, as well.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Demographic Information Form

<u>Eş 1</u>	<u>Eş 2</u>
Cinsiyet	Cinsiyet
Yaş	Yaş
Meslek	Meslek
Ekonomik Durum	Ekonomik Durum
Alt Orta Alt Orta Orta Üst Üst	Alt Orta Alt Orta Orta Üst Üst
Eğitim Durumu	Eğitim Durumu
Okumamış İlkokul Ortaokul	Okumamış İlkokul Ortaokul
Lise Lisans Yüksek	Lise Lisans Yüksek
Lisans Doktora	Lisans Doktora

Birlikte

Yaşadıkları İl

Yaşadıkları İlçe

Berberlik Süresi

Evlilik Süresi

Çocuk Sayısı

Çocuk Cinsiyeti

Çocuk Yaşı

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form

BİLGİLENDİRİLMİŞ ONAM FORMU

Sayın Katılımcı,

Bu çalışma Prof. Dr. Hale Bolak Boratav danışmanlığında İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Klinik Psikoloji Yüksek Lisans Programı Çift ve Aile Alt-dalı öğrencisi Berivan Kızılocak tarafından tez çalışması kapsamında yürütülmektedir. Çalışmanın amacı; Türkiye’de farklı mezheplerden olan bireylerin, çift ilişkilerinde farklı mezhepten biri ile birlikte olmalarının yarattığı zorlukları ve kazandırdığı beceriyi anlamak ve bunların çift ilişkisine yansımalarını ortaya çıkartmaktır. Çalışmadan elde edilecek sonuçların hem sosyolojik anlamda hem de psikolojik anlamda mezhep farkını ve çift ilişkisini anlamaya yardımcı olacağı düşünülmektedir.

Katılım tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayalıdır. Görüşmeyi yapmanın katılımcı üzerinde herhangi bir olumsuz etkisi olması beklenmemektedir. Buna rağmen, konuşmak istemediğiniz herhangi bir konu olduğunda kesinlikle değinilmeyecektir. Görüşmenin herhangi bir noktasında hiçbir gerekçe belirtmeden görüşmeden çekilebilirsiniz. Araştırmadan çekilmeniz durumunda verdiğiniz bilgiler değerlendirmeye alınmayacak ve imha edilecektir.

Çalışmanın titizliği ve verimliliği açısından yapılan görüşmeler ses veya görüntü kaydına alınacaktır. Görüşme sürecinde ses veya görüntü kaydına alınmaması istenmediği bir durum olduğunda bu durum çalışmanın süreci açısından değerlendirilecek ve katılımcı ile ortak bir karara varılacaktır. Bunun yanında ses veya görüntü kaydının baştan istenmediği durumda ise görüşme başlamadan sona erecektir. Bu çalışmanın hiçbir aşamasında kimlik bilgileriniz sorulmayacaktır, verdiğiniz bilgiler gizli tutulacaktır. Elde edilen bilgiler sadece araştırmacıların erişimine açık olacak ve yalnızca bilimsel yayın amacıyla kullanılacaktır.

Görüşmelerin her bir katılımcıyla ayrı ayrı yaklaşık 30- 45'er dakika olacak şekilde yaklaşık 1- 1.5 saat arası sürmesi beklenmektedir. Bir sorunuz olduğu durumda araştırmacıya sormanız araştırmanın sorunsuz yürümesi açısından önemlidir.

Araştırmanın amacı, süreci ya da sonuçları ile ilgili daha fazla bilgiye ihtiyaç duyarsanız ya da yorumlarınızı paylaşmak isterseniz ... e-posta adresinden araştırmacıya ulaşabilirsiniz. Araştırma sonuçları belirlenince sizinle e-posta yolu ile bu sonuçların sizin deneyimlerinizi yansıtmadığını teyit etmek ve düzeltmek istediğiniz bir şey varsa bunu bize iletmeniz için iletişime geçilecektir.

Yukarıdaki bilgilendirmeyi okudum. Bu çalışmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum ve istediğim zaman bırakabileceğimi biliyorum. Görüşmenin ses ve/veya görüntü kaydının alınmasını onaylıyorum. Araştırma sonuçlarının benim deneyimlerini yansıtmadığını anlamak ve teyit etmek için tarafıma e-posta yoluyla ulaştırılmasını onaylıyorum. Verdiğim bilgilerin bilimsel amaçlı yayınlarda kullanılmasını kabul ediyorum.

TARİH

AD SOYAD

İMZA

APPENDIX C: Interview Questions

Bu çalışmada Türkiye’de farklı mezheplerden olan bireylerin, çift ilişkilerinde farklı mezhepten biri ile birlikte olmalarının kazandırdığı beceriyi anlamak ve bunun çift ilişkisine yansımalarını ortaya çıkartmak amacıyla size bazı sorular sorulacaktır. Bu soruların herhangi bir doğru veya yanlış cevabı bulunmamaktadır.

1. Bildiğiniz gibi biz bu araştırmayı çiftler ile yapıyoruz. Sizin için çift olmak ne anlama geliyor? Peki, aile olmak ne anlama geliyor?
2. Dini inançlarınız konusuna gelirsek:
 - a. Din sizin için ne demek?
 - b. Alevi/sünni olmak ne demek? Hayatınızda nasıl bir yeri var?
 - c. Dini inanç ve ibadetleriniz konusunda anne babanızla benziyor musunuz, farklı mısınız?
 - d. Ailenizde dinle ve farklı mezheplerle ilgili nasıl konuşulurdu?
3. Evliliğinize gelecek olursak: Eşiniz ile evlenmeye nasıl karar verdiniz?
4. Alevi-Sünni evliliği yapmak sizin için nasıl bir deneyim oldu?
 - a) Farklı mezhepten olmanın birlikteliğinizin ilk zamanlarında ilişkinize ne gibi bir etkisi oldu? (evlenme süreci, düğün, ailelerin öğrenmesi, vs) Daha sonraki yıllarda nasıl bir etkisi oldu?
 - b) En çok hangi konularda zorluk yaşadınız?
 - c) Nasıl çözdünüz? Bu şekilde çözmeyi nerden/kimden öğrendiniz?
 - d) Dini inançlarınızda ve ibadetinizde herhangi bir değişikliğe sebep oldu mu?

- e) Alevi Sünni evliliği yapmak çocuk yetiştirmenizi etkiledi mi? Nasıl?
 - f) Alevi Sünni evliliği yapmak sizin dışınızdaki aile üyelerini (örneğin çocuklar, anne ve babalar) etkiledi mi? Nasıl? Bu konuda yaşadığınız bir problem oldu mu? Eğer olduysa bahsedebilir misiniz?
 - g) Alevi Sünni evliliği yapmak sizin ve aileleriniz dışındaki çevreyi (örneğin geniş aile, akrabalar, arkadaşlar, iş hayatı vb.) etkiledi mi? Nasıl? Bu konu bazında yaşadığınız bir problem oldu mu? Eğer olduysa bahsedebilir misiniz?
 - h) Alevi-Sünni evliliği yapmış olmanın güzel tarafı ne olabilir?
5. Konuştuğumuz konular ile ilgili başka eklemek istediğiniz şeyler var mıdır?

APPENDIX D: Member Checking

Değerli Katılımcılar,

Sizlerle İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Klinik Psikoloji Programı Çift ve Aile Terapisi alt dalı bitirme dersi kapsamında Prof. Dr. Hale Bolak Boratav danışmanlığında yürütülen “Alevi-Sünni Çiftlerin Güçlü ve Zorlu Noktalarının Nitel Analizi” isimli tez çalışmasının sonuçlarını paylaşmak isteriz.

Araştırma toplamda 6 çiftle gerçekleşen görüşmeler Tematik Analiz Yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmacı tarafında görüşme kayıtları yazıya dökülmüş, nitel analiz programı vasıtasıyla alınan notlar ve kodlamalarla beraber temalaştırılmıştır. Notlar ve kodlamalara bağlı ortaklaşan deneyimlerden 5 ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır.

Bunlardan ilki “Mezhep Dikkat Çeken Bir Mesele Değil” olmuştur. Bu temada genel anlamda mezhebin çift ilişkisi içerisinde değerlendirilen bir unsur olmadığından söz edilmiştir. İlişkide daha çok dikkat edilen noktanın kişilik ve karakter özellikleri olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Dinin aile ve çift ilişkisinde gelenek veya ahlaki kısımlarının sürdüğü anlaşılmıştır.

Diğer bir tema: “Herkes İncancını Dilediği gibi Yaşayabilir”dir. Bu temada ise katılımcıların dine bakış açılarının özgürlükçü ve karşılıklı saygı içeren bir noktada olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Burada katılımcıların ailelerinin ve sosyal çevrelerinin dinle ilgili ayrımcı bir yerden bakmıyor olmaları ve kendilerinin de ayrımcı bir yönden düşünmemelerinden kaynaklı aslında açık görüşlü bir bakış açısına sahip oldukları yordandırmıştır.

Üçüncü tema olarak ise; “Ebeveynlerin Süreç İçerisinde Değişimi”dir. Bu tema birkaç çiftte ortaya çıkmıştır. Ebeveynlerinin başta evlilikleriyle ilgili bir endişe veya kısıtlayıcı bir tutuma sahip olduklarından söz edildikten sonra süreç içerisinde bu fikirlerinin nasıl değiştiği ve şu an ebeveynlerle olan ilişkilerin bütün katılımcılarda olumlu olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Dördüncü tema olarak ise “İlişkisel Bağlamda Etkileşimin Olmaması”dır. Bu temada çoğunlukla katılımcılar bu evliliğin aile, geniş aile, sosyal çevre, iş hayatı ve çocuk gibi konuları etkilemediği ve aynı şekilde etkilenmediğini ifade etmişlerdir.

Son olarak beşinci tema ise “Mezhep Farklılığının Bir Zenginlik Olması” olmuştur. Burada katılımcılar farklı bir mezhepten birisi ile birlikte olmanın ilişkilerini güçlendiren bir unsur olduğundan, yeni bir kültürü ve inancı tanımının kendilerine olan kazanımından söz etmişlerdir.

Bu özet siz değerli katılımcıları bilgilendirmek amacıyla oluşturulmuştur. Sizlerden ricamız eğer sizin bahsettiklerinize uymadığını düşündüğünüz kısımlar veya eklemek istediğiniz önerileriniz varsa bu konularda geribildirimlerinizi araştırmacı ile paylaşırsanız çok seviniriz.

Araştırmacıya ... numaralı telefondan veya ... üzerinden ulaşabilirsiniz.

Bu zamana kadar ki paylaşımlarınız ve araştırmaya katkılarınızdan dolayı çok teşekkür ederiz.

Araştırmacı: Berivan Kızıloca

Danışman: Prof. Dr. Hale Bolak Boratav

APPENDIX E: Ethics Board Approval

Ethics Board Approval is available in the printed version of this dissertation.