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SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST: QUALITATIVE AND OBSERVATIONAL
INVESTIGATION OF LONG-TERM HAPPY MARRIAGES

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Survival of the Fittest: Qualitative and Observational Investigation of Long-Term
Happy Marriages

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Gözlemsel İncelemesi

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the experiences and interactions of happy couples who were married at least ten years and having at least one child. Both thematic analysis and observational method of SCID were used to understand the experiences of these couples. While all eight couples participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews, interactions of only seven couples were analyzed through the observational method. The duration of marriage ranged between 12 to 24 years with a mean of 18, while the relationship's longevity ranged between 14 to 32 years with a mean of 23. The participants' mean age was 46, varying between 38 and 59. While six couples had two children, two of them had only one child. The individual and couple interviews, which approximately took 45 minutes each, were conducted in participants' houses. Qualitative findings unraveled common factors and experiences contributing to happy romantic relationships in long-term marriages. The interviews covered information regarding perceptions of the marriage, partners' contributions for marital happiness, faced challenges, coping mechanisms, relationships with parents, parents' relationship, and unique qualities of their relationship. With the combined analysis method, qualitative findings were supported with observational data regarding patterns of couple interaction, communication strategies, and relational positions of longstanding happy marriages. The results showed that establishing a good balance of individuality and togetherness in marriage and with others, appreciating positive aspects, and adopting constructive communication strategies contributed to the improvement of these couples' relationships over the years. The results provided insightful information for the couple therapists about the factors behind a satisfying couple relationship and marital stability. The findings are discussed in the light of existing literature as well as limitations and suggestions for further studies presented.

Keywords: Happy Couples, Marital Happiness, Long-term Marriages, Marital Stability, Couple Relationship, Couple Interaction, Thematic Analysis, Observation

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada en az on yıllık evli ve en az bir çocuğu olan mutlu çiftlerin deneyimlerini ve etkileşimlerini incelemiştir. Bu çiftlerin deneyimlerini anlamak için tematik analiz ve gözlem yöntemi olarak SCID kullanılmıştır. Sekiz çiftin tamamı yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelere katılırken, sadece yedi çiftin etkileşimleri gözlemsel yöntemle analiz edilmiştir. Ortalama 18 yıl olan evlilik süresi 12-24 yıl arasında değişirken, ilişkinin süresi 23 yıl ortalamayla 14 ile 32 yıl arasında değişmektedir. Katılımcıların yaş ortalaması 46 olup, yaşları 38 ile 59 arasında değişmektedir. Tek çocuk sahibi 2 çift haricindeki tüm çiftlerin 2 çocuğu bulunmaktadır. Her biri yaklaşık 45 dakika süren bireysel ve çift görüşmeleri katılımcıların evinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Nitel bulgular, uzun süreli evliliklerde mutlu romantik ilişkilere katkıda bulunan ortak faktörleri ve deneyimleri ortaya çıkarmıştır. Görüşmelerin içeriği katılımcıların evlilik algıları, partnerlerin evlilik mutluluğuna katkıları, karşılaşılan zorluklar, başa çıkma mekanizmaları, ebeveynlerle ilişkiler, ebeveynlerin ilişkileri ve ilişkinin benzersiz nitelikleri ile ilgili bilgileri kapsamıştır. Nitel bulgular uzun süredir devam eden mutlu evliliklerdeki çift etkileşimi örüntüleri, iletişim stratejileri ve ilişki konularına ilişkin gözlemsel verilerle desteklenmiştir. Sonuçlar bu çiftlerin birbirleriyle ve başkalarıyla ilişkide bireysellik ve birliktelik dengesini iyi kurduğunu, var olan olumlu özelliklerin kıymetini bildiğini, yapıcı iletişim stratejilerini benimsediklerini ve böylece ilişkilerinin yıllar içerisinde daha da iyiye gittiğini göstermiştir. Bulgular tatmin edici bir çift ilişkisinin ardındaki faktörler ve evlilik istikrarı hakkında çift terapistlerine faydalı bilgiler sunmaktadır. Sonuçlar mevcut literatür ışığında tartışılmış, kısıtlamalar ve gelecek çalışmalar için öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mutlu Çiftler, Evlilik Mutluluğu, Uzun Süreli Evlilikler, Evlilik İstikrarı, Çift İlişkisi, Çift Etkileşimi, Tematik Analiz, Gözlem

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Like everything, the concept of happy marriage changes in time, too. In the past, marriages were mostly done for the needs of security rather than love and intimacy. Economic interest, protecting or achieving social status, stability, and the necessity of reproduction were much more effective in the choice for marriage (Estrada, 2009). Nowadays, especially in the Eastern culture, the rate of arranged marriages declines while the rate of love marriages inclines (Allendorf & Pandian, 2016). In modern weddings, couples choose to be their own matchmakers instead of an arrangement by families and society. They favor love and intimacy to security, respectability, children, and property (Perel, 2006).

On the other hand, traditional marriages that are done for these old concerns still occur in Turkey. At least, couples still want the consent of their families before marriage. However, affectionate motivations to form a marriage relationship are much more prominent (Demir, 2013). Expectancies from a marriage determine marital satisfaction, marital quality, and marital happiness. The concept of happy marriage in the modern world is also bound to change with changing motivations, gender roles, responsibilities, and expectancies. With this new concept of love marriage, people seek a partner who can be "the one" for them. In this situation, the motivational force becomes the love between the partners.

Nevertheless, a love bond is more fragile than losing a logical bond of convenience marriage. Moreover, in modern marriages, our expectancies from our partners are heightened. We expect our partner to be our best friend, lover, confidant, and supporter. We demand one person to be as satisfying as three different people (Perel, 2006). That situation puts modern marriages at stake, and disappointments

become bigger. With the increase of women's economic and social power, divorce is not difficult as in the past. Maintaining a long and happy marriage is much more challenging, and divorce rates keep increasing globally and nationally (Cohen, 2019).

According to statistics, the global divorce rate has increased by 251.8% since 1960. Today almost half of the marriages conclude with divorce in the world. Even though for some countries the rise stopped, for some other such as Turkey and Mexico the increase continues (OECD, 2018). People not only divorce more but also marry less, too. In 1960, there were 8 marriages per 1000 people while there are 4.84 per 1000 now. There was one divorce per 1000 people in 1960, while there are 2.12 per 1000 now (EuroStat, 2020). Couples prefer cohabitation instead of marriage more and more, and when they are married, they can get divorced much more quickly (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020). According to the OECD (2018), the most common reasons for divorce are incompatibility (44%), infidelity (18%), substance abuse (9%), physical and mental abuse (6%), and others (23%). The average length of marriage differs across countries. In most of the world, divorces commonly occur after 20+ years of marriage.

There are several reasons behind this global increase. With the feminist movement, women have become much more independent economically (Greene et al., 2012). Economic power creates a chance to get out of an unhappy marriage (Alola et al., 2020). In addition to that, the decision to marry has also changed. In the past, unions were having much more of a rational base. Instead of love, pragmatic approaches for choosing a partner were more common. We can say that there is a shift from businesslike marriages to romantic coupling (Perel, 2006). However, romantic love doesn't last as a business partnership. Thus, with more liberated women who have the power to separate, couples choose more to get a divorce when love is gone.

This increase in the prevalence of divorce leads to an increment in children whose parents get a divorce. According to OECD data, children are also affected in %54,7 of divorces. Like the global trend, from the 1980s to 2010s, the number of children whose parents divorced significantly increased in Turkey (OECD, 2019). In 2020, 135022 couples divorced, and 124742 children were affected by their parents'

separation in Turkey (TÜİK, 2021). On the other hand, there is broad literature about the negative impact of divorce on children. Many research show that children are negatively affected by their parents' separation in many areas, such as social and romantic relationships, self-esteem, academic competence, and trust (Cavanagh, 2008; Francia & Milliar, 2015; Gordon, 2017; Martinez Jr & Forgatch, 2002; Osborne & McLanahan, 2007; Ozen, 2004; Stallman & Ohan, 2016). A study with a Turkish sample shows that children of divorce are more likely to develop fearful attachment styles. They experience the relationship with their fathers as strictly controlling and less affectionate (Ozen, 2004). Related to this knowledge, some parents choose to stay together just for their children's sake despite their problematic couple relationship. However, literature also says that conflictual relationship between parents has detrimental effects for children, too. These kinds of parental ties can lead to triangulation of the child, problems in parent/child relationships, negative beliefs and ideas about love and marriage, and negative feelings about being in such a family (Dallos et al., 2016; Melo & Mota, 2014). So, staying in a conflictual or distant marriage just for children's sake also negatively impacts children.

As a result of rapid social change in Turkey, women's employment and economic freedom increases, and the traditional family structure adjusts to these changes. Likewise, the expectations from marriage become altered and keeping a marital bond intact happened to be challenging. Today, it seemed to be exceptional to maintain a happy marriage. Consequently, divorce rates continuously increase, too. In 2017, there are 128.411 divorces with a rate of 1,6 per 1000 marriages. From 2017 to 2019, the crude divorce rate of Turkey has increased 0,1 in every year respectively. (TÜİK, 2017; TÜİK, 2018; TÜİK, 2019). Most divorces (%29.3) occur in the first four years of marriage (TÜİK, 2020). %23-25 of the divorces happen in the marriages lasted for 5-9 years. Regarding marriage length, Turkey substantially differs from other countries with its low ratio of 20+ years of marriages ended with divorce (OECD, 2019). This trend shows that, especially among young couples, divorce rates continue to rise in Turkey.

Considering all these factors, it seems critical to understand the factors behind a fulfilling stable marital relationship.

1.2. MARITAL HAPPINESS

Nevertheless, contributions of a happy marriage to individuals' well-being are documented (Proulx et al., 2007). Beyond that, some research suggests that marital status has a significant relationship with psychological and physical health problems independent of the marriage quality (Carr & Springer, 2010; Lindström, 2009; Robles et al., 2014). According to the results, being married is related to better health, while being unmarried is related to diminished one (Aizer et al., 2013; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Robles et al., 2014). However, numerous research show that the impact of marital status on health depends on the relationship's quality (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2010; Lawrence et al., 2019; Proulx et al., 2007). A recent supporting study indicates that happy romantic relationships ameliorate individuals' physical and psychological health while unhappy ones deteriorate (Lawrence et al., 2019). According to Kiecolt-Glaser & Wilson (2017), women are at higher risk of being negatively affected by marital distress. Several studies suggest that being in a happy relationship positively influences individuals' general happiness, health, and longevity (Carr et al., 2014; Lawrence et al., 2019; Levenson et al., 1993; ÜMMET, 2017). Thus, relationship happiness and health also seem correlated.

A contradictory study in Turkey indicated that marriage decreases individual health in Turkey (Kaya & Yurtseven, 2016). They claim that individuals mostly live with their families before marriage in Turkey. This Eastern normative structure provides unmarried individuals benefits of close bonds and social support from the family of origin. Additionally, researchers underline the possible negative impact of the higher ratio of low marital quality and satisfaction in Turkey behind these contradictory results (TurkStat, 2012). In conclusion, all these results emphasize the importance of satisfying romantic relationships on physical and psychological health.

Taking all this information into account, we can easily say that the contributions of harmonious couple relationships are numerous, while the disadvantages of problematic ones are detrimental. As social creatures, humans need relational bonds. Consequently, healthy, secure, and satisfying relationships are essential to have a healthy, secure and satisfying life. Hence, the factors behind marital satisfaction had been widely investigated scientifically for decades.

1.2.1. Definition of Concepts: Marital Happiness, Marital Quality, Marital Satisfaction, Marital Adjustment, and Marital Stability

There is no consensus in the literature about the terminology used to refer to evaluations of romantic relationships. Therefore, there are various terms in the literature to refer to marital happiness. Marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, marital quality, and marital happiness are the most prominent terms used interchangeably (Delatorre & Wagner, 2020; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). However, there are minor nuances between these terms (Johnson, 1995).

Marital quality is the latter term that generally shares the exact definition and elements with marital adjustment, satisfaction, and happiness (Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Global in nature, it indicates a general quality of a marital relationship. Robles and colleagues (2014) defined positively valued marital quality as "high self-reported satisfaction with the relationship, predominantly positive attitudes towards one's partner, and low levels of hostile and negative behavior."

Marital adjustment implies not only partners' subjective evaluation such as satisfaction but also objectively observable parts of a marriage such as behaviors and interactional patterns (Johnson, 1995). Spanier (1976) also defines marital adjustment as a "process" which was constantly affected by various factors such as relational conflicts, level of cohesion, and agreement between partners.

The term of marital stability refers to the constancy in perceived marital satisfaction as well as the longevity of marriage (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). However, considering the duration of a marriage in terms of stability can be tricky because some

couples may choose to maintain their marriage for certain reasons other than marital satisfaction such as keeping an intact family structure for the sake of children (Dush et al., 2003; Weagley et al., 2007).

Marital satisfaction is another prominent term used to evaluate partners' perceptions of their relationship. Hawkins (1968) defines marital satisfaction as happiness, joy, and satisfaction of a partner sensed by marriage considering all aspects of the relationship while Burr and colleagues (1979) defines it as “subjectively experienced reaction to one’s marriage”. Similar to marital satisfaction, marital happiness also signifies partners' subjective positive evaluation of their relationship (Johnson, 1995).

Beyond these minor nuances, all of these concepts share the same quality of subjectivity (Harrison & Westhuis, 1989). In the present study, the term of marital happiness will be used to refer relational contentment of the couples. However, it should be noted that the term of happiness can be considered as an umbrella term for all these nuanced subjective experiences.

1.2.2. Assessment Strategies

Numerous measures have been used to investigate marital satisfaction. Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) by Wallace & Locke (1959); Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) by Spanier (1976); The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) by Funk & Rogge (2007); Quality of Marriage Index (QMI) by Norton (1983) are some of the most prominent ones. Numerous scales like these were highly preferred by researcher investigating marital experience because of their ability to diminish conceptual and methodological challenges with high levels of standardization (Johnson, 1995).

Though, several critiques have been made regarding the limitations of using a scale to measure marital experience. Sabatelli (1988) claims that using a single measurement to assess marital quality has a risk of validity considering the impossibility to dissect the blended components of marital experience. On the other hand, when a measure focuses on a specific unit of analysis, it happens to neglect other

crucial components of marital quality (Johnson, 1995). Another pronounced drawback of these scales appears to be the subjectivity derived from the self-report structure. In order to eliminate this limitation, using a multi-method approach is suggested (Birchler et al., 1975).

For this purpose, researchers prefer using observational method. These methods differ in terms of their focus as well as their orientation. While microanalytic coding systems, such as Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System (RMICS) by Heyman (2004), focuses on micro interactions coded every few seconds, global systems, such as Interaction Dimensions Coding System (IDCS) by Kline and colleagues (2004), pays attention on the entire interaction regarding specific dimensions (Kerig & Baucom, 2004).

Qualitative methods offer a more holistic analysis of participants' experience in terms of psychological processes and relationships instead of distinct isolated elements of experience. As a result, they appear to be a better alternative to assess human psychology. Even though they were criticized about the subjective nature of the analysis compared to standardized measures, qualitative assessments propose a better understanding about the participants' responses and more applicable to different cultures and groups (Goldman, 1990).

1.3. MODELS AND THEORIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

Several models propose different theoretical perspectives about the nature of a healthy and functioning marriage. In this section, these models and theories will be covered to present a comprehensive picture of relational dynamics in marriages.

1.3.1. Ecological Model of Lewis and Spanier

According to Lewis and Spanier's Ecological Model of Marriage (1979), there are three levels of resources and barriers affecting marital satisfaction. These levels are individual, interpersonal, and social and economic. The individual level includes personal characteristics and abilities that facilitating and nurturing an enduring and

satisfying romantic relationship. Individuals' psychological and physical health, social skills, and education level, which can affect relationships positively or negatively, can be considered an individual's resources and barriers. The interpersonal level signifies interactional products of a relationship constructed in time, such as attitudes and emotions between partners. Lastly, social and economic level indicates financial resources and barriers such as employment, financial stability, and social resources and barricades such as social status and social support network (Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Marks et al., 2008) According to the Ecological Model, to understand a marital relationship dynamics, one should consider all three aspects together.

1.3.2. Sprecher's Social Exchange Theory

Sprecher's social exchange theory (2001) suggests that people stay in the marriage if the rewards of the marriage relationship surpass the costs of it. According to this model, marital satisfaction level depends on the amounts of prizes gained by marriage. If partners believe that there are no better alternatives outside of the marriage, they prefer maintaining their relationship with their spouses. Equally, when marital satisfaction gets higher, partners choose to invest more in their relationship. A high level of investment also increases partners' marital commitment (Rusbult, 1980; Sprecher, 2001). The model proposes that perceived marital satisfaction also affects the perception of inequity in the relationship. With transitional stages such as parenthood, the increase in distress can cause decline in marital satisfaction. As a result, perception of unfairness may intensify and lead to resentment of the under-benefiting partner (Sprecher, 2001).

1.3.3. Rusbult's Investment Model

Rusbult's Investment Model (1980) claims that there are further reasons besides satisfaction behind marital commitment. The investment that binds spouses to each other and the lack of better alternatives for the existing partner are among these reasons. Similar to Social exchange theory (Sprecher, 2001), the investment model suggests that relationship satisfaction depends on the ratio of rewards and cost of a romantic

relationship. However, investment theory proposes an additional perspective regarding commitment (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult et al., 1986). According to the investment model, dependence toward partner increases when the amount of investment in the relationship is high. This increased dependence fosters commitment and investment in the relationship. Thus, the relationship between investment and dependence appeared bidirectional as there is a mutual cyclical growth (Caryl et al., 2011).

1.3.4. Johnson's Commitment Theory

After his investigation about the nature of marital commitment, Johnson proposed three types of commitment that motivate people to stay married. These types appeared as personal, moral, and structural (Johnson, 1991, 1999). According to Johnson's framework, personal commitment is related to the individual wish to stay married. This wish may be fostered by attraction to partner or interest in the relationship. Apart from these attractions, couple identity as an essential part of personal identity seems to strengthen personal commitment. On the other hand, moral commitment originates from the sense of a moral obligation to resume a marital relationship. This sense of responsibility may be developed from acceptance about marriage, such as "till death do us apart" or direct responsibility toward the partner. Likewise, one can feel obligated to stay in a marriage to maintain consistency regarding his/her choices or attitudes. Lastly, structural commitment refers to the possible barriers preventing or challenging the dissolution of marriage. Johnson claims structural commitment generally becomes evident when personal and moral commitments decreased. Possible inferior circumstances of the alternative situation, social pressure from others who disapprove of divorce, difficulties caused by termination procedures, or unwillingness for losing irreversible investments can be considered under the structural commitment (Johnson, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999). Emphasizing the tripartite nature of commitment, Johnson underlines the importance of investigating motivations behind marital stability further than personal wishes to stay in a marriage.

1.3.5. Adult Attachment Theory

According to Bowlby's attachment theory (1969, 1973), the relationship between the infant and the caregiver shapes the emotion regulation system of the child. The child develops a view of self and others according to the availability of the caregiver in stressful times. As an enduring internal system, the representations about attachment figures and reactions get activated in the face of stress. Taking one step further, Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed that attachment bond in adult romantic relationships triggers similar processes, and they conceptualized adult attachment from this perspective. Parallel to Ainsworth and colleagues' observations about the infant-caregiver relationship (2015), they claimed three types of adult attachment styles as secure, anxious-ambivalent and, avoidant. While securely attached adults are comfortable with intimacy and closeness, anxious-ambivalent ones are highly preoccupied with closeness and fear of losing, and avoidant ones sense an uneasiness with intimacy and closeness (Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Ainsworth et al., 2015). However, the more recent theories divide avoidant types into two sub-categories and suggest four types of adult attachment as secure, preoccupied (or anxious-ambivalent), fearful-avoidant, dismissive-avoidant (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This division suggests that fearful-avoidant adults seek closeness but also fear from it with an anxious-ambivalent approach while dismissing ones exhibit high levels of avoidance and emotional detachment with no desire for closeness.

1.3.6. Gottman's Model of Marital Interactions

Gottman's model of couple therapy (Gottman, 2008) and his longitudinal research of couple interactions provide precious information about healthy and unhealthy couple relationship dynamics (Gottman & Levenson, 2002). Gottman and his colleagues (1998) conducted research with newly wedded couples to distinguish between micro-level behaviors predicting couples' prospecting happiness levels. According to the results, gentle approach, de-escalation of negativity, high amount of positive affect and soothing responses to partner's negativity, wife's soften start-up to

a conflict, and man's acceptance of his wife's influence on him are found to be the predictors of a stable and happy marriage. The outcomes highlight that anger is not destructive, but patterns of contempt, belligerence, and defensiveness are (Gottman et al., 1998). On the other hand, high levels of neutral affect during a conflict appear as no affect, and no affect is much more detrimental than negative. Low levels of positive or negative affect in a relationship lead to distance and alienation between partners, which causes unhappy marriages and separation in the long run. Alternatively, couples with high levels of unregulated volatile affect in the relationship tend to divorce earlier (Gottman, 2008; Gottman & Levenson, 2002).

According to Gottman's Sound Relationship House Theory (Navarra & Gottman, 2017), marriage can be considered as a house which was carried by its walls of trust and commitment. In his best-seller book called *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (Gottman & Silver, 2015), he suggests the house of marriage should contain seven elements for a long-lasting marital relationship such as keeping partner's world in mind, sharing admiration and love for partner, turning towards partner for emotional connection, maintaining a positive perspective, resolving solvable conflicts, supporting each other's life goals, and creating a shared meaning in life.

As stated by Gottman (1995), four destructive interaction patterns prevents communication and conflict resolution in the couple relationship. These interaction patterns called four horsemen are criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. These four horsemen create an escalation of negative affect and negative cycles, which are hard to break. Gottman suggests calming down, speaking non-defensively, validation, and over-learning in conflicts for restraining from these negative behaviors if the goal is a stable and happy relationship (Gottman et al., 1995).

In his marriage lab, Gottman also investigated the dynamics of successful couples and their interaction patterns. According to his results, there are three types of couples who are successful in their marriage relationship. These couple types are

validating, volatile and avoidant ones. Validating couples are good at listening and validating each other while they create a space for conflict. Volatile couples often tend to have heated arguments, but they balance their negative interaction with a high amount of positive affect with love and passion. Lastly, avoidant couples choose to agree to disagree in unresolved conflicts instead of repeatedly arguing the same old problems. Gottman underlines the importance of a magic ratio of 5 to 1. He suggests that even though these successful couples have conflicts and negatively affected interactions, they always balance their negative interaction with positive ones. According to his observations, for a successful relationship, couples should have five positive interactions for each negative one (Gottman et al., 1995).

1.3.7. Olson's Circumplex Model

According to the Circumplex Model of Olson (2000), only a balanced couple or family system can function properly. This model points out three aspects of couple and family relationships: cohesion, flexibility, and communication. Cohesion (togetherness) is defined as *the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another*. With a focus on balance, the model concentrates on the system's manner of balancing separateness and togetherness. According to the model, there are four levels of cohesion possible in any system.

From very low levels of cohesion to very high, these are disengaged, separated, connected, and enmeshed. As stated by the model, very low levels and very high levels of cohesion are signifiers of dysfunctional relationships within a system. Thus, individuals in a relationship should feel emotional connection and support while having personal spaces and separateness.

The flexibility dimension focuses on the balance between change and stability regarding roles and rules within a system. According to the circumplex model, a functional relationship should be both structured and flexible. On the other hand, rigid or chaotic systems hinder functionality. In rigid systems, there is an inability to change the stiff structure. Thus, the system cannot adopt any developmental change which is

needed for proper functioning. Conversely, chaotic systems lack the structure and rules required for predictability and organization.

The last dimension that the circumplex model hypothesizes that functional systems need is communication skills. According to the model, positive communication skills work as a facilitator for acceptable levels of cohesion and flexibility. Positive communication skills contain attentive listening and empathy as part of listening skills, speaking for oneself instead of others as speaking skills, self-disclosure of emotions and thoughts about self and relationship and, tracking by staying on the subject with respect and regard.

Even though the circumplex model proposes a general assessment approach for all family systems, it also accepts the possible impact of culture on functioning. With different ethnic groups, the culturally normative levels of cohesion and flexibility can also be different. Thus, what can be assessed as dysfunctional for a Western family can also be functional for an Eastern family. That's why Olson (2000) states that clinicians and researchers should be aware of specific cultural norms while assessing the functionality of a family system.

1.3.8. Kağıtçıbaşı's Model of Interrelatedness

Investigating agency and interpersonal distance as two different dimensions, Kağıtçıbaşı proposed a new perspective to understand interpersonal dependence and interdependence in different cultural contexts (Kagitcibasi, 2005). Her psychological interdependence model challenges the consideration of autonomy as separateness. On the contrary, it suggests that autonomy is related to the agency dimension while separateness is related to the interpersonal distance dimension. Instead of considering autonomy and relatedness as distinct and mutually exclusive concepts, Kağıtçıbaşı underlines the compatibility and coexistence of these notions. Her model offers a synthesis of two basic human needs of agency and relatedness with her construct of autonomous-related self (Kagitcibasi, 1996; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996).

Similarly, she proposes a model of psychological interdependence as a third position different from dependence vs. independence (Kagitcibasi, 2005). According to the Family change model, psychological interdependence is distinct from material interdependence (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005). This model suggests that while material interdependence diminishes, psychological interdependence maintains. As stated, cultural context and socioeconomic changes have a tremendous impact on the emergence of the concept of autonomous-related self. Similarly, the model of family change, which explains the increase of psychological interdependence between family members, is also nurtured from socioeconomic developments. That's why both autonomous-related self and high levels of psychological interdependence can be seen primarily on the young and high SES urban population (Kagitcibasi, 2005; Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005).

1.4. FACTORS RELATED TO MARITAL HAPPINESS AND STABILITY

Even though factors behind a long-term happy marriage appear various and unique for each couple (Bachand & Caron, 2001), there is a vast literature about common factors shaping a long-lasting happy marriage. In this section, the most common areas related to marital stability and happiness in the literature will be described.

1.4.1. Change Over Time

There are different perspectives regarding the effect of time on marital happiness. Most of the longitudinal research show that marital happiness decreases in time (Birditt et al., 2012; James, 2015; VanLaningham et al., 2001). According to Huston and colleagues (2001) marital happiness declines in time due to the effect of fade in romanticism and distress coming out by emerging problems throughout the marriage. Conversely, some research claims that relationships are primarily stable, and marital happiness endures in time (Amato & James, 2018; Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

A different approach asserts that a couple relationship can be resilient to challenges and grow from them. According to this perspective, a sense of "we-ness" in

partners contributes to increased marital satisfaction (Alea et al., 2015; Reid & Ahmad, 2015). Moreover, adversities faced as a couple can create opportunities for growth and increased intimacy between couples if they are dealt with repair acts. This perspective resembles the development of couples' coping skills to growing muscles. If couples can recover relational tears caused by tension and difficulties with flexibility, their relational muscles are strengthened and become more resilient to new possible injuries as a couple (Fergus & Skerrett, 2015). Besides, in well-functioning relationships couples are also expected to learn constructive communication strategies in time which will ease their way on the road. (Robinson & Blanton, 1993)

Sprecher's 4-year longitudinal study (1999) about the changes in love and marital satisfaction over time also demonstrated that couples' feelings of love, satisfaction, and commitment increased in time if their relationship remains intact. The study also explored the association between real and perceived changes in the relationship. The comparison between perceived change and the actual change between different time points shows that despite no actual change according to the scores from separate time points, spouses remark increased love, commitment, and satisfaction (Sprecher, 1999). These results support Ross's emotion theory (1989) which proposes that people who are currently happy and in a state of love believe that their positive feelings increased over time in a romantic relationship. Thus, this perceived increase of love can be specific to the couples who are currently happy and satisfied in their relationship.

1.4.2. Marriage Between Two Families

With the contract of wedding, two distinct families connect each other by the marital bond. Managing relations between and within the family of origin require certain attitudes. Partners maintain their closeness with their own families while they construct a new connection with their in-laws. To achieve this, several factors appeared helpful.

1.4.2.1. Family of Origin & Differentiation

Research investigating the relationship between Bowen's concept of differentiation from the family of origin (Bowen, 1978), couple interactions, and marital satisfaction shows an association between differentiation levels, perceived satisfaction and interaction patterns (Gubbins et al., 2010). According to their results, a high level of differentiation from the family of origin, which is operationally defined as a low emotional reactivity to parents and no triangulation, is related to less flooding (Gottman, 1999) during marital arguments and high levels of marital satisfaction. The positive influence of differentiation on marital stability is also exhibited with samples from Eastern cultures. Another study conducted in Korea shows that the impact of parental conflict on children's marital stability is mediated through differentiation from the family of origin (Lim & Lee, 2020). The results displayed that individuals, who failed to differentiate from the family of origin where high conflict occurred between parents, transfer parents' dysfunctional interaction patterns to her/his marriage through emotional cut-off or family projection, whereas an emotionally differentiated individual faces less marital conflict.

Still, several studies point out the positive impact of close family ties on marriage (Antonucci, 2001; Helms et al., 2003; Sprecher et al., 2006). According to Helms (2003), strong family ties influence couple relationships positively by providing a support system and a space for emotional sharing in the time of a marital conflict. However, extreme closeness with the family of origin prevents the formation of coherence and a sense of togetherness between spouses at the beginning of a marital relationship. Thus, partners should establish required boundaries with their family members to protect the marriage relationship from family origins' interferences (Minuchin, 2018).

Positive or negative, the ideas about being a partner and having a marriage relationship are influenced by parents' marriage as the first and the closest role models. When the impact of parental couple relationship on children's marriage is examined,

spouses' reports from long-term happy marriages indicated that parental relationship affected individuals' marriage positively. While most of the couples' parental relationships are still intact, other couples whose parents' relationship has negative qualities report that they shaped their own marriage as a reaction to their parents' problematic relationship. Thus, happy couples either model their parents' healthy marriage or transform their relationships' negative aspects into positive ones (Bachand & Caron, 2001).

1.4.2.2. Relations with In-Laws

It's reasonable to think marriage as a pact not only between partners but also between two distinct families. Not surprisingly, closeness with in-laws in early marriage predicts marital stability (Orbuch et al., 2013). Research focusing on the impact of the relationship between spouses and in-laws indicates that positive relationships with in-laws increase the quality of marriage and marital adjustment (Fatima & Ajmal, 2012; Lashari & Lashari, 2017; Orbuch et al., 2013; Santos & Levitt, 2007). Conversely, stressful interactions with in-laws have a detrimental impact on a marital relationship (Bryant et al., 2001; Fatima & Ajmal, 2012; Orbuch et al., 2013; Williamson et al., 2013). Furthermore, closeness with in-laws appeared more vital than closeness with an individual's own family for marriage well-being (Timmer & Veroff, 2000). Beyond the nature of the relationship with in-laws, the concordance of spouses' perceptions regarding the partners' closeness with in-laws also appeared critical for a harmonious marital relationship (Fiori et al., 2020). Additionally, relationship quality with in-laws before marriage tends to persist and predict relationship quality after the wedding (Fingerman et al., 2012). Thus, having a good start with in-laws seems essential for a stable marital future.

1.4.3. Key Aspects of Marital Relationships

Marriage literature shows that certain issues have an important place in the relationship of married couples. The possible effects of these issues on the couple's

relationship and how it would be beneficial to address them have been revealed by previous research.

1.4.3.1. Communication & Conflict resolution

Every couple faces conflicts at some points of their relationship. However, happy couples' conflicts differ both in content and their preferred resolution strategies. According to Levenson (1993), happy couples mostly conflict about these topics from the most concerning to the least respectively: recreation, communication, children, money and in-laws. Understandably, because of the enjoyed companionship between partners, the most conflicting issue appears as the wish to find more couple time and attend activities together in happy relationships. In addition to that, in happy couples, even these topics creates minor disagreements between the couples (Levenson et al., 1993; Rauer et al., 2020). There is an attunement in happily married spouses approaches to the resolution of conflict as well as the concordance about perceived importance and content of conflicting topic.

Communication is among the most important aspects of marital relationship. In order to understand the conflict resolution patterns of happy couples, investigation of their communication styles becomes requisite. Researchers have been trying to examine differences between healthy and unhealthy interaction patterns and communication strategies for decades. To do this, some studies (Carstensen et al., 1995; Rauer et al., 2020) use observation technique to uncover the micro level interactions, while the others choose quantitative (Lauer & Lauer, 1986) or qualitative methods (Alibeli et al., 2019).

Qualitative findings, which are reached from the analysis of partners' self reports, highlight several important qualities of favorable couple interactions. According to happy couples' common description, talking to each other is essential part of their relationship. Openness as an ease in expression of true feelings, acceptance towards each other's differences and choose to resolve issues by talking are the significant conditions present in couple interaction (Alibeli et al., 2019; Asoodeh et al.,

2010). Consequently, couples' satisfaction about their manner of talking also appears higher.

Observational findings displays that distinguishable aspects of unhappy couple interaction are higher negative reciprocity, higher rates of displeasing behaviors and low rates of pleasing ones (Margolin, 1981). Conversely, happy couple interactions stand out with more positive affect, humor and validation even in conflict resolution process (Carstensen et al., 1995). Additionally, with increase in age, the positivity level of interactions also increases. As a result, older couples resolving conflicts with less negative behavior and more positive affection.

Gender differences are also seem apparent in couple interactions. In discussions, independent from the quality or satisfaction of the relationship, women appeared much more expressive than men. They not only express positive feelings but also expressions of negative affect, confrontation and anger are higher, too. On the contrary, men manifest much more defensiveness, escape from conflict and neutrality in conflict discussions (Carstensen et al., 1995).

1.4.3.2. Gender Roles

Even though the equity between partners is vital, because of the gender differences, same conditions does not lead to same results. One example of this peculiarity becomes apparent with the subject of employment. According to the recent findings of Alola and colleagues (2020), women's unemployment diminishes divorce, while men's unemployment escalates it. This difference seems related to two factors. First, dependence and increased tolerance of unemployed women to their husbands foster the maintenance of the marriage. Second, gender norms associated with men's role as the family breadwinner lead to low self-esteem in unemployed men and higher conflict between the spouses. (Alola et al., 2020) Furthermore, with higher traditional gender norms woman's relative income negatively affect the life satisfaction of both spouses (Hajdu & Hajdu, 2018).

On the other hand, women's employment increases women's quality of life, expectancies, and marital satisfaction with healthier strategies for resolution conflict, while unemployment rises experienced emotional and physical violence (Jha & Singh, 2020). Similarly, highly educated women's marital quality and stability appears higher (McLanahan & Jacobsen, 2015).

1.4.3.3. Sexuality

Sexuality is a significant part of a marriage. Numerous studies underline the positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction (Lawrance & Byers, 1995; Santos-Iglesias & Byers, 2021; Spahni, 2017). Also, this relationship appears bidirectional in nature. Thus, not only sexual satisfaction predicts relationship satisfaction, but also a satisfying relationship increases sexual satisfaction (Vowels & Mark, 2020). For middle-aged couples in a long-term marriage, sexual satisfaction emerges as one of the most prominent aspects affecting marital quality (Spahni, 2017). Even in old-aged couples, sexual intimacy between partners seems essential to have a satisfying relationship that provides a sense of being wanted, worthy, and loved (Hinchliff & Gott, 2004; Santos-Iglesias & Byers, 2021). Beyond that, a satisfying sexual life seems to diminish the negative impact of other issues in a relationship, such as poor communication (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005).

Several dimensions are related to sexual satisfaction, such as frequency, desire discrepancy, the balance of initiation, and self-disclosure of preferences (Velten & Margraf, 2017). The longitudinal study of Schoenfeld and colleagues (2017) conducted with 105 couples highlights the significant relationship between sexual frequency, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction. Results indicate that while sexual frequency predicts sexual satisfaction, frequency predicts marital satisfaction only when sexual satisfaction decreases. When predictors of sexual frequency inquired, the husband's positive behaviors were found related to the frequency of sexual contact. In contrast, the valance of the wife's behaviors does not affect occurrences of sexual contact. On the other hand, negative behaviors decrease sexual and marital satisfaction

in both partners (Schoenfeld et al., 2017). In addition to these findings, sexual pleasure increases when partners openly communicate regarding sexual preferences (Byers, 2011; Theiss, 2011) and initiation frequency is balanced and high in both parties (Velten & Margraf, 2017).

1.4.3.4. Financial Matters

Understandably, the financial situation can affect the marriage relationship for better or worse. In good scenario, high-income levels appear to reduce the possibility of divorce. Literature suggest that higher levels of education and income appear related to better functioning and higher marital satisfaction (Lindahl et al., 2020). Together with income level, the research underlines the vitality of income sustainability for marital stability (Alola et al., 2020).

Another issue between couples related to income becomes the management of the finance of the household. Literature shows that happy couples in an enduring marriage prefer joint finance management (Asoodeh et al., 2011). In this way, there is a balance of power between spouses, leading to low conflicts about financial issues. Thus, joint management appears as a factor behind marital quality and stability (LeBaron et al., 2019).

1.4.4. Essential Features of Happy Marriages

Research shows that particular feature are vital for happy marriages. These qualities appeared as the partners' attitudes to each other, the quality of their relationships and certain situations that affect the relationship positively.

1.4.4.1. Commitment

As Johnson's commitment theory (Johnson, 1991, 1999) implied, commitment to relationship and partner is a significant factor for continuing a marital relationship. While Johnson presents the various motivations behind marital commitment, the impact of commitment on couple relationship is investigated by different researchers.

Lauer & Lauer (1986) defines commitment as endurance and dealing with difficulties instead of choosing to give up on marriage. According to the results of their

examination, sense of commitment derived from the positive qualities of marriage works as a uniting factor in happy couples while unhappy marriages mostly endure because of children. Their following study also confirms the enhancing effect of commitment to partner and relationship on stable and satisfying marriages. In this study, which is conducted with 100 couples who were married at least 45 years, commitment appears as one of the four prominent qualities of long-lasting happy couple relationships (Lauer et al., 1990). Similarly, another longitudinal study investigating the marital strengths in enduring relationships which continued at least 30 years confirms the constructive impact of commitment (Robinson & Blanton, 1993)

As well as the influence of commitment, the factors enhancing commitment in a marriage also examined. A qualitative study that explores key factors behind couple relationship happiness found that for strengthening the commitment, spouses should protect partner and relationship by giving a central position to them in their lives (Reibstein, 1997).

1.4.4.2. Equity

With societal changes and the rise of the feminist movement in the last decades, equity between partners appears as a prominent factor behind marital happiness and stability.

Research conducted with a Turkish sample indicates a positive relationship between a sense of equity in the relationship and marital satisfaction. The perception of relational equity increases when a partner perceives his/her partner's relationship maintenance behaviors and appreciation (Akçabozan Kayabol, 2017). Another qualitative study that explores key factors behind couple relationship happiness of self-described happy couples notes that balance between spouses appears as a central factor reinforcing commitment (Reibstein, 1997). Though, to achieve a balanced relationship, caring equity and reciprocity between partners is essential.

However, in some traditional cultures, the importance of equity between couples depends on the level of traditionality of the couple. A study in İnan that

examines the factors behind successful marriages confirms that equity appears as an essential factor when the traditionality level decreases. In contrast, for couples from traditional marriages who accept conventional gender norms, equity seems not critical (Asoodeh et al., 2010).

1.4.4.3. Appreciation and Gratitude

Expressions of appreciation and a sense of gratitude are vital for a long-term happy marriage. Several studies confirm that appreciation which is described as acknowledging positive aspects of a partner and being grateful for these qualities is among the factors affecting the happiness and longevity of a relationship (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Reibstein, 1997; Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Beyond positive feelings emerged by appreciating and being appreciated, appreciation also fosters positive behaviors of spouses reciprocally. As a result of this reciprocal relationship, a maintenance behavior increases when it is appreciated, and consequently, it intensifies the partner's appreciation (Kubacka et al., 2011). Therefore, this positive cycle leads to the upsurge in marital satisfaction (Akçabozan Kayabol, 2017).

Moreover, appreciation creates another positive interaction cycle between partners. Expressing gratitude towards the partner also fosters being appreciated by the other partner. In this way, the mutual expression of appreciation between partners strengthens the stability of a relationship (Gordon et al., 2012). However, the power of appreciating acts not only in positive interactions. While feeling appreciated by partner increases relationship satisfaction, relationship satisfaction decreases when sacrifices are not responded to with partner's appreciation. (Young & Curran, 2016)

Like appreciation towards a partner, self-appreciation is also essential to deal with external challenges and difficulties in a marriage. A study searching for features of stable and happy couple relationships focuses on these couples' coping strategies to balance between family and work-life shows that couples should use their relationship as a source of strength for effective coping strategies. To do this, acknowledging,

supporting, and admiring the qualities and positive aspects of the relationship, partner, and oneself are necessary (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012).

1.4.4.4. Commonalities

As opposed to the prevalent idea of "opposites attract each other" research suggests that similarities between partners are much more effective to glue when the subject is a long-term romantic relationship.

According to the qualitative study of Caron & Bachand (2001) that exploring factors related to the longevity of a marriage, similar backgrounds and interests are the third prominent feature affecting marriage stability after friendship and love. Their results show that similar beliefs, values, and thoughts about life, marriage, and parenthood facilitate the marital relationship. Besides similar backgrounds, the accord between partners about life goals and important life decisions are also vital for a long-lasting happy couple relationship (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Lauer et al., 1990). Like sharing similar thoughts about marriage in general, attunement and congruence between partners' perceptions and opinions about their relationship are also important (Robinson & Blanton, 1993).

Studies conducted with couples from Eastern culture also support findings of the positive influence of the commonalities (Asoodeh et al., 2010). According to the study of Fatima & Ajmal (2012) especially having similar religious beliefs and practices is influential on marital longevity and happiness.

1.4.4.5. Friendship

The power of friendship for long-term relationship happiness is well established in the literature. As a matter of fact, it appeared as the most common factor contributing to the longevity of happy marriages in some studies (Bachand & Caron, 2001; Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Lauer et al., 1990).

As good friends, happy couples enjoy spending time together, and this shared enjoyment creates a sense of pleasure that emerged from the relationship (Reibstein, 1997). A previous study conducted with 100 couples who are married at least 45 years

investigated the factors behind a stable and satisfying marriage proposes that there are four prominent qualities of long-lasting happy couple relationships. These are friendship between partners, commitment to the partner and relationship, elevated humor, and accord between partners regarding life-goals, important decisions, and social life (Lauer et al., 1990). Considering that all of these features seem to more like qualities of a good companionship rather than a romantic relationship, we can easily say that the vitality of friendship between partners is discernable.

Preserving humor and playfulness in the relationship is another feature of happy marriages. As a part of their friendship, happy couples use elevated use of humor (Asoodeh et al., 2010; Lauer et al., 1990) and laugh together much (Lauer & Lauer, 1986) in everyday life. The valence of humor usage also depends on the quality of the relationship. Spouses who report higher satisfaction with their relationship use more positive humor while using less negative humor (provoking conflict or concealing anger) or avoiding humor. On the other hand, spouses who report lower levels of relational satisfaction use more negative humor or avoidance behavior in couple interaction (Butzer & Kuiper, 2008). Thus, not only the amount of humor in a relationship but also the manner of using it influence relationship dynamics in marriage.

1.4.4.6. Support

The positive effect of support between partners on relationship satisfaction and marital adjustment was recognized by several studies (Lashari & Lashari, 2017; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012; Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Robinson & Blanton's study (1993) proposes support as a strength for endurance of marriage while Lashari & Lashari (2017) underlines the positive impact of husband's supportive attitude on women's marital adjustment. Additionally, another study searching for features of stable and happy couple relationships focuses on these couples' coping strategies to balance between family and work-life shows that support between partners helps couple to overcome external challenges in the marriage (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012).

As a broad concept, several types of support take place in everyday life. A study questioning what type of support is the most influential for marital satisfaction shows that only emotional support among partners is significant for relationship satisfaction. Besides, the correlation with emotional support and marital satisfaction occurred independent from partners' race/culture or sex (Xu & Burleson, 2004). These findings differs from the previous literature noting that perceived social support from partner seems related to the marital satisfaction and individual well-being only for women (Acitelli, 1996).

1.4.4.7. Tolerance Towards Differences

Happy couples in stable relationships also faces with challenges and difficulties. However, with their tolerance towards life and each other, they are able to transform these difficulties into resources while seeing challenges as a change for growth. Määttä & Uusiautti's study (2012), which was mentioned above before, shows the happy couples' strategies to deal with external challenges and difficulties while using relationship as a source of strength. Their results demonstrate that happy couples can accept changes and be able to adapt to those changes. More importantly, they are tolerant towards differences of each other. These abilities come from their flexibility and patience which are very critical abilities for tolerance (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012).

Yelsma's (1981) findings also support the idea that happy couples' approach to differences as opportunity for growth of relationship. Moreover, they see differences as chances for development not only for relationship but also for oneself (Yelsma, 1981). A study investigated qualities of happy couples in Arab Emirates also presents that accepting differences between partners is one of the key elements of happy marriages (Alibeli et al., 2019).

1.5. HAPPY MARRIAGES IN TURKISH CONTEXT

1.5.1. Marriage in Turkey

A great emphasis is given to family and marriage in Turkey. As a result, marriage rates appear high in Turkish population. In a study conducted with 1605

people, 95.4% of the participants stated that the family is very important. (Inglehart et al., 2018). However, research also show that there is an increase in the number of people who had never been married or divorced. Moreover, the age of marriage also appears to increase each year (Beşpınar, 2014).

A recent study which investigates the differences between x and y generations' attitudes towards marriage shows that men's inclination to marry appear higher than the women in the new generation (Sungur et al., 2017). With cultural and societal changes which fosters gender equality and employment, getting married turns out to be an unpreferred option for younger women (Gazioğlu, 2014).

Spouse choice preferences also changes with new generations. As opposed to arranged marriages prevalent in previous generations, young people prefer choosing their partners and then introduce them to their families' approval (Pinar, 2008). Though, it should be noted that a vast difference between Eastern and Western regions in terms of marital practices. While personal preferences in spouse choice are much prevalent in Western side, the rate of arranged marriages appears higher in the Eastern regions. In addition to societal changes which mostly occurred through immigration from rural areas to urban cities, an increase in educational level and SES seems to be behind this shift. Individuals with higher SES and education prefer getting married later and prioritize their own choices over family's expectations (Beşpınar, 2014).

On the other hand, the compatibility between two families still seems to be one of the most concerned aspect of marital relationship. Thus, it seems that the traditional approach and emphasis on family still prominent in the choice of marriage in Turkey (Beşpınar, 2014). The relation between the method of spousal choice and marital adjustment also varies according to the literature. While some research claims that there is no relevance between method of choice and marital harmony (Polat, 2006; Öner, 2013), some others propose that spouses who chose their partners on their own have healthier communications and better adjustment than the ones who made arranged marriages (Hortaçsu, 2007; Taştan, 1996).

Societal changes have a vast impact on choice of divorce, too. Instead of levels of marital happiness, women's economic independence seems more related to the increased rates of divorce. Moreover, the consequences of getting divorced shows differences according to socioeconomic levels of the divorcee. For lower classes, being divorced is less acceptable for women than men (Ozbay, 1989). Thus, women from low SES can prefer to continue an unhappy marriage considering the difficult of bearing the possible consequences of divorce (Sunar & Fisek, 2005).

Women's approach to marital configurations also differs when they prefer getting married. According to recent findings of Çopur & Gürel (2020), women have more egalitarian and modern approach to marriages. In addition to embracing an equal gender role-division in the house, their acceptance towards non-marital cohabitation was higher than men (Arıcı, 2011; Çopur & Gürel, 2020). On the other hand, there are also studies that contradict with women's egalitarian attitude which propose that both women and men adopt traditional gender roles suggesting that men be the breadwinner while women taking care of the house (Baykal, 1991; Beşpınar, 2014; Vefikuluçay et al., 2007).

Traditional hierarchical structure and patriarchal norms suggesting man to be the main authority figure of the family was highly embraced by Turkish society. Even though the respective changes in the organization of Turkish families for the last decades, the residuals of this patriarchal structure still can be seen in modern Turkish families. Men in the family still keep characteristics of a distant authority figure with limited emotional disclosure and distance (Boratav et al., 2017).

On the other hand, significant changes regarding the position of men in the family are remarkable. According to AÇEV study (2018), men appeared to more involved at housework and childcare practices as fathers. Different than previous generations, contemporary fathers play with their children more and sharing of the labor in the house is more prevalent especially if the socioeconomic level of the family is higher and the mother is working, too (Bozok, 2018). According to the Kadir Has University Women Studies Research Center's investigation (2020), even though men

mostly take responsibility for house related works that only requires contact with outside world such as arrangement of house care and technical repair or shopping for house, share of domestic responsibilities such as cooking or cleaning also increases with the education level of the men. However, men's involvement in house labor is still seems like an assistance to women instead of shared responsibility (Bozok, 2018).

Ministry of Family and Social Politics Family Structure Research (2011) shows that as traditional gender roles proposed, women take responsibility of house related works while men were in charge of financial decisions. However, a recent research show that this traditional role division brings about senses of inequity and unfairness in the women (Çopur & Gürel, 2020). As a red flag in marriage that is perceived better by women, this sense of unfairness can lead to marital dissolutions. Even if the marital union endures, the dissatisfaction caused by inequity yields to diminution in marital happiness.

1.5.2. Research on Marital Happiness in Turkey

As a country that gives importance to marriage, the number of studies on marriage is quite high in Turkey. Even though the rate of marriages also appears high in the Turkey, literature suggests a negative relationship with marital happiness and duration of marriage in Turkey. Thus, as marriage continues the happiness levels decreases (Cirhinlioğlu et al., 2019; Çabuk et al., 2017; Şentürk, 2013).

However, Turkish population's embrace of collectivistic tendencies seemed to contribute to marital connection. Cirhinlioğlu (2019) states that level of collectivism positively affects marital quality. Partners who show high levels of collectivistic behavior give weight to emotional self-disclosures, show high levels of agreement and emphasizing loyalty which leads to increase in marital quality (Cirhinlioğlu et al., 2019). Consistently, similarity between partners seems to play an important in marital adjustment. Couples who think that there is a great amount of similarity between them displayed higher marital adjustments (Şentürk, 2013).

On the other hand, factors behind marital happiness differs according to gender in Turkey. As stated by Cirhinlioğlu and colleagues (2019), men's perception of marital quality appears higher than women. They interpreted their findings considering the male-dominance in the culture. As they claimed, while men can benefit and enjoy from marriage, women cannot experience advantageous of being married (Cirhinlioğlu et al., 2019).

Yet, women's employment seems to predict conflict resolution strategies and marital adjustment of women. Studies investigating the impact of women's employment status on marital adjustment demonstrates the positive influence of women's occupation on marital life (Güçlü-Ergin, 2008; Sezer, 2005). Another study supports these findings showing that working women have higher scores on positive conflict management styles in their marital relationship compared to unemployed ones (Öner, 2013). Moreover, women who have higher SES show lower levels of conflictual behavior and higher levels of marital adjustment (Polat, 2006). Besides, independent from gender, there is also a positive correlation with higher level of financial income and marital adjustment. Related to the income level, higher life satisfaction predicts marital adjustment, too (Şentürk, 2013).

According to Öner's quantitative study (2013) which explores the Turkish married couples' conflict management styles indicates that women are generally better at positive conflict resolution strategies than men. Regarding conflict management styles education level was also found as a significant predictor for married men. As Uğurlu (2003) stated, lower educated men utilize more negatively valued conflict management strategies compared to higher educated ones.

Last but not least, another recent study (Özdemir-Kemahli, 2019) explores the factors behind happy couple relationships in Turkey by using the method of grounded theory. In this study, the participants' length of marriage ranges from 2 to 9 years. It shows that behind a satisfying romantic relationship; there are empathy, commitment, love, respect, trust, belonging, gratitude and tolerance. Moreover, happy couples have

affective communication skills, functional conflict resolution skills, proper role performance and quality time together. This study shed many lights on healthy Turkish couples' dynamics. However, it focuses on marriage quality and marital satisfaction but not on the longevity of the relationship. Yet, increase in divorce rates says that preserving a good romantic relationship is much more difficult. We know that families, individuals and children are negatively affected by divorce or conflictual/distant couple relationship. That's why exploration of the factors for maintaining a happy couple relationship is as important as exploration of factors for having it.

1.6. THE PRESENT STUDY

There are numerous researches on literature which is searching for factors providing a happy romantic relationship (Bath, 2010; Estrada, 2009; Ferguson-Cain, 2015; Speed, 2005). However, most of the research is quantitative in nature and there is not much study on exploration of couples' own experiences, perceptions and interactions (Williamson & Lavner, 2020; Yedirir & Hamarta, 2015; Yücel, 2013). In the past, couple researches were focusing more on the negativity and destructive patterns in the couple interaction. That's why there is a vast literature on what's unhealthy for a romantic relationship (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 2000). With postmodern perspectives that focus on the healthy parts of the interaction and tries to empower the couples' own resources, there has been an increase in the research focusing on the factors for positive interaction (Bachand & Caron, 2001; Gottman & Silver, 2015). However, results also show that every couple's experiences are unique and there are various factors affecting the longevity of a marriage (Bachand & Caron, 2001). Moreover, the concept of marriage keeps changing and cultural differences has enormous impact on what makes a marriage happy. Thus, investigating same phenomenon in distinct cultures and in different times offers valuable information.

Being married and creating a new family through marriage are still highly important for Turkish population. Even though divorce rates are increasing, there are

still numerous dysfunctional and unhappy marriages which are preserved for the sake of children or because of cultural pressures and fears for failure in family life. However, the negative impacts of preserving a dysfunctional marriage on individuals and family are well-known. Divorce or keeping an unhappy relationship do not bring the real solution. That's why investigation for underlying factors for sustaining a satisfying couple relationship in marriage in Turkey is especially important and necessary.

Though, despite the existing need and interest on investigation of marital relationships, constructive research focusing on the underlying factors behind a lasting satisfying marriage is limited in Turkey. Previous research mostly concentrated on mediating or moderating factors as well as correlational findings. The other studies appeared to focus on factors related to either marital happiness or marital stability. Özdemir-Kemahlı's study (2019) shed many lights on healthy Turkish couples' dynamics. However, it focuses on marriage quality and marital satisfaction but not on the longevity of the relationship. Yet, increase in divorce rates says that preserving a good romantic relationship is much more difficult. We know that families, individuals and children are negatively affected by divorce or conflictual/distant couple relationship. That's why exploration of the factors for maintaining a happy couple relationship is as important as exploration of factors for having it.

However, a research design that complements qualitative and observational data about marital dynamics of long-lasting and happy marriages in Turkey is nonexistent. Considering this gap in the literature, it was aimed to provide information regarding experiences and interactions of couples who had a long-term happy marriage.

From this motivation, we propose a study which will investigate the experiences of happy couples who are married for at least 10 years and having at least one child. We include only couples with child(ren) because having children brings new roles and new challenges to couple relationship. We are interested in happy couple relationships which are able to deal with all these new challenges through adapted coping skills. In addition to that, we are not only interested in healthy romantic relationships but also healthy family relationship with happy parents. Parents' couple relationship is highly

important for a happy family life. Thus, with the results of this proposed study we aim to understand not only happy couple relationship but also happy parents' relationship with each other and with their families.

METHOD

2.1. DATA COLLECTION

A snowball method was used for the data collection. After the Istanbul Bilgi University Ethics Committee's approval, social media announcements were shared through e-mail and WhatsApp groups and personal social media accounts of Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Announcements contained the participant criteria, the main aim of the study, and the data collection procedure. After contacting the participants, the procedure was explained in detail, and an appointment time was scheduled with the couple. After each interview, participants were also asked to refer other couples who meet research criteria as well.

The sample was limited to married (at least ten years) heterosexual couples with at least one child in this study. As face-to-face interviews were required, only couples who live in İstanbul, Turkey, could be included. Participants were limited to married couples to see how they have overcome the challenges of being married and having children, such as new roles, responsibilities, and involvement of extended families. Since being married for at least ten years was one of the criteria for the sample, only heterosexual couples could be included as gay and lesbian couples cannot be legally married in Turkey. Literature shows that divorce may not be an option most of the time, especially for spouses from low SES, because of economic dependency and cultural pressure. Therefore, only couples from middle-high SES, which aren't bound to their marriage but still prefer being together, were included to eliminate the impact of economic or cultural limitations. To achieve this purpose, the participant criteria were limited to couples with at least an undergraduate degree from a university and an occupation. A monthly income of at least 10000 TL in total was also expected.

The couples who are married for less than ten years or not having any children were excluded. On the other hand, retired people who had a working life in the past and people who were studying for career change were evaluated as accordant with the criteria. Participation of a couple in which one of the partners stated that they met the requirements during the telephone conversation revealed that she was a high school graduate before the interview and was evaluated together with the advisor. It was decided that the participant would be accepted to the study, taking into account her previous work life, her successful career, and her income.

As a result, the study participants were heterosexual Turkish couples who have been married for at least ten years and have at least one child from this marriage. Besides these criteria, participants were included if only both partners claimed they had a happy relationship with their partner.

The pilot study was conducted with the first couple. After elaborations between the researcher and the advisor, following the same procedures with all couples was decided.

Before the meeting, the participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded in audio and video, that these records would be transcribed during the analysis process, and that the records would be destroyed after transcription and observation coding processes. It was also stated that all documents would be stored in an encrypted folder of an encrypted computer. Participants were also briefed that feedback will be given to them about the thematic analysis results, and their approval will be obtained before the publication.

2.2. PARTICIPANTS

Eight couples participated in the study. While all of them participated in qualitative part, only seven of them took part in the interactional observations. All of them were married for at least ten years with at least one child. Their age ranged between 38-59, and the mean age was 46. While the duration of relationship ranged

between 14-32 years with a mean of 23 years, the marital duration varied between 12-24 years with a mean of 18 years. Six couples had two children while the other two had only one. Except one, participants had at least a college education. All of the participants had a profession they pursued. For half of the couples, the total household income was between 10000-30000 TL. The other half's total income was higher than 30000 TL.

Tablo 2.2.*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

ID	Age	Education Level	Occupation	Hometown	Ethnicity	Religion	Household Income (TL)	Marriage Duration (years)	Relationship Duration (years)	Age of Children
1F	40	Master	Psychologist	Trabzon	Turkish	Muslim	30000+ ₺	15	17	F(6,5), M(11,5)
1M	40	Master	Textile Engineer	Trabzon	Turkish	Muslim	30000+ ₺	15	17	F(6,5), M(11,5)
2F	44	Master	Finance Manager	İstanbul	Turkish	Muslim	30000+ ₺	21	24	M(13), F(17)
2M	52	Master	Civil Engineer	İstanbul	Turkish	Muslim*	30000+ ₺	21	24	M(13), F(17)
3F	42	University	Foreign Trade	İstanbul	Turkish	Muslim	10000- 30000 ₺	17	25	F(4), F(13)
3M	44	Master	Veterinarian	İstanbul	Turkish	Muslim	10000- 30000 ₺	17	25	F(4), F(13)
4F	50	High School	Senior Executive	İstanbul	Turkish Armenian	Christian	30000+ ₺	24	32	F(17), F(21)

4M	51	Master	Textile Business	İstanbul	Turkish	Atheist	30000+ ₺	24	32	F(17), F(21)
5F	53	Doctorate	Medical Doctor	İstanbul	Turkish	Muslim	10000- 30000 ₺	18	20	F(17)
5M	59	Master	Former Athlete, Businessman	Kocaeli	Turkish	Deist	10000- 30000 ₺	18	20	F(17)
6F	49	University	Teacher	Rize	Laz	Deist	10000- 30000 ₺	24	30	F(16), F(21)
6M	53	Master	Civil Servant	Konya	Turkish	Muslim	10000- 30000 ₺	24	30	F(16), F(21)
7F	38	Master	Chemist	Afyon	Bulgar Turk	Muslim	10000- 30000 ₺	12	22	F(6)
7M	39	Master	Computer Programmer	İstanbul	Turkish	Muslim	10000- 30000 ₺	12	22	F(6)
8F	40	Master	Mechanical Engineer	Sivas, Germany	Turkish, German	Alevi, Agnostic	30000+ ₺	12	14	M(10), F(12)
8M	41	Master	Civil Engineer, Operating Engineer	Malatya	Turkish	Muslim, Alevi	30000+ ₺	12	14	M(10), F(12)

2.3. MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

After contacting the participants, an appointment time was scheduled with the couples. These appointments took place at participants' homes to preserve confidentiality, provide a comfortable position, and observe the couples in their own living spaces. All procedures with the couples were audio and videotaped. The procedure composed of 4 steps:

- 1. Filling out the forms:** At the beginning of the appointment, the purpose of the study was explained, and the participants were asked to sign the informed consent form. Then, participants were requested to fill out a short demographic form (See Appendix A). After filling out the demographic form, participants were asked to fill a short agreement scale created by the investigator to understand the conflictual issues in the couple relationship (See Appendix B). There was a 10 Likert-type question that asked for the general happiness of the couple relationship in this form. After this question, there was another question that asks three main discussion topics that couples have difficulty solving. With this question, the aim was to understand the main discussion topics, which would also be used in the observational discussion task. Lastly, the form contained eight questions (10 Likert-type) that ask how much couples reach an agreement in 8 different areas: intimacy, shared interests, time spent together, parenting/children, work/money, social life, sexuality, and managing the extended family. With this form, reaching an understanding of where these couples get along well and having difficulty even if these areas would not be mentioned in the interviews was expected.
- 2. Interaction Task:** After filling out the forms, the interaction task of Systems for Coding Interaction in Dyads (SCID) for observation was given to the couples (See Appendix C). In this task, the pair were asked to discuss the most conflictual issue, which they have written in the agreement form for 12-15

minutes (Malik & Lindahl, 2000). In this interaction task, couples were left alone in the room, and they were audio and videotaped.

- 3. Interview with the Couple:** After the interaction task, the researcher conducted a semi-structured face-to-face interview with the couples (See Appendix D). The interview contained seven questions regarding the history of the relationship, individuals' earlier thoughts and emotions about their partner, the most common couple and individual activities, and perceived unique qualities of the relationship. This interview took approximately 40 minutes and be audio and videotaped.
- 4. Interview with Each Partner:** After the couple interview, individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted separately. (See Appendix E). The separate interviews included 15 questions concerning their own definition of happy marriage, perception of partner and self as a spouse, contributions of the two parties, relationship with the parents, parents' relationship, external factors, challenges, coping strategies, expectations and unique qualities of the relationship. These interviews took approximately 45 minutes for each partner and were also audio and videotaped.

2.4. DATA ANALYSIS

In this research, three different methods of data gathering were used. The qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews was the first and primary method of this research. For the analysis of the interviews, the 'Thematic Analysis Method' was used. (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This method was chosen because of its ability to capture participants' own experiences based on not only the content but also on their attitude and mood. In this study, the main focus was on the common themes gathered through participant's answers. In addition to the analysis of interviews, using observational data to support qualitative findings was also intended. The System for Interactions of Dyads (SCID), which was a global measurement system, was used for this purpose. Even

though it was designed to measure dysfunctional patterns of control and power which can signify domestic violence, it contains functional and positive qualities of couple interaction. Thus, it appears to be an efficient system to measure functional dyadic interaction as well as maladaptive ones (Malik & Lindahl, 2000). Considering the additional function of interactional observations, it was believed that the details that could be captured by the thematic analysis method would be sufficient to analyze participants' thoughts and experiences. Lastly, the means of agreement scale scores were taken to investigate partners' level of adjustment on critical aspects of a marital relationship.

2.4.1. Thematic Analysis

Analysis was done following six steps as suggested by Clarke & Braun (2013). First, the researcher transcribed and repeatedly read interviews to get familiar with the data. During this phase, the field notes written by the researcher were also examined to grasp a comprehensive picture. Then, the process of coding the data with protecting loyalty to the participants' own words began. The researcher paid attention to generate various codes as much as possible not to miss any details in the participants' experiences. When all codes of consecutive interviews were listed, the code list was reread and revised. All the codes were taken together; the list was shortened by gathering similar codes to one encompassing code. Then, all established categories were organized from the thematic analysis perspective to be grouped under potential themes. After that, all main emerging themes and subthemes become identified. All through these processes, the researcher took help from the computer-assisted software program MAXQDA to generate codes and to figure out all emerging themes and sub-themes from participants' answers.

For trustworthiness, triangulation and member checking techniques were used. The findings were triangulated with three steps as follows: (1) by both observational and interview data and audio and video recordings; (2) sending raw data and code list

to thesis advisor for confirmation regarding emerged themes; (3) triangulating couple data with husbands' and wives' individual data.

Member checking was used for the qualitative part. As also claimed in the interviews, the final themes were sent to the participants to check whether the overall themes reflected their experiences. At first, only participants from three couples returned saying that the findings captured their experiences well. After a month, a reminder was sent to other couples who did not return. Then, participants from two couples also confirmed the findings. However, there was no return from other three couples.

For confirmability, the researcher referred various documented resources such as audio and video recordings, survey results of demographic forms and agreement scales, and a journal for the whole research process including field notes and reflexive memos. Also, the detailed demographics of the participants were described as well as the context the interviews took place for transferability of the research findings.

2.4.2. SCID Observation System

For the interactional task observation, System for Coding Interaction in Dyads (SCID) was used (Malik & Lindahl, 2000). SCID was chosen for its comprehensiveness, with 14 scales measuring the affective and communicative aspects of couple interaction. It contains individual codes in addition to the dyadic ones. SCID is regarded as a reliable measurement system for a variety of ethnic and cultural groups (Malik & Lindahl, 2000). Hence, it can be applicable to Turkish married couples, too. For using SCID, permission and information for the training procedure were taken from Kristin Lindahl via e-mail. Regarding the suggested proper training procedure, Lindahl noted that reliable results could be achieved without formal training from the authors.

In this study, a research team from eight graduate students of the program was trained for coding. First, the research team has read and discussed the manual with the primary investigator and the advisor. Then they were asked to rate an exemplary tape of a couple's interaction which was shot only for training purposes with a real couple.

To reach a satisfactory intercoder agreement, following reaching an agreement on each code on training sessions, the coders separately watched and coded a 15 minutes segment of another couple's interaction video, which was again shot only for training purposes with a real couple. The process will continue until the coders achieve required agreement on each scale. After the required agreement point was reached, coders were divided into four teams, with two coders in each group. Every team was given a videotape. Coders were instructed to watch each tape at least three times for coding. First, they were asked to code individually. After individually coded scores, they were expected to find an agreement with their teammate if there was a disagreement. Following the team's scores got cleared, the primary investigator, who also individually coded the tape, and the coder team discussed to reach final scores. This procedure was repeated for every seven videotapes.

2.5. RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

While considering a subject to investigate, my vision and interest were more likely to incline to the darker side of the relationships. As a child of conflicting parents and an intern of couple and family therapist, I was aware of the vitality of marital happiness. However, my focus was on the negative aspects of growing up with unhappy parents who could not get divorced for specific reasons. For this purpose, I aimed to investigate the healthier ways of a divorce. However, with the help of my advisor's constructive approach, I realized that shifting my perspective from healthy divorces into healthy marriages would be much more valuable.

Even though the interest in research about healthy relationships is increasing, Turkish literature still lacks solution-focused approaches. In the literature, there is countless research aimed to understand what is not working. Though, what functions well rarely becomes the subject of inquiry. However, focusing on the positive example provides precious information. Instead of presenting what is not working, it gives us a chance to discover what is working, and most importantly, it tells us how it is working.

Moreover, while choosing this topic, I had the most beautiful relationship that I want to protect. Thus, as a young woman who wants to retain her own relational happiness, finding out the factors behind maintaining a happy couple relationship gained another importance for me. With all these respects, I chose to explore the relational dynamics of happy marriages.

While I was preparing the interview questions, I paid attention to cover essential areas as much as possible to have a comprehensive picture. Observing the couples as they interacted was important for me as well as hearing their stories. Thus, I made both couple and individual interviews. In this way, while individual interviews provide required privacy for partners to speak confidentially, couple interviews helped me to witness the couple's interaction as they talk about their relationship.

As a couple and family therapist who was fascinated by the power of healthy relationships, having a chance to help people who suffer from negative relational experiences was the primary reason to choose this profession. However, I should admit that my voyeuristic desires to see the hidden sides of others' lives were also influential for my career choice besides my wish to support others. Unfortunately, as a psychotherapist, I mostly witness fear, anxiety, sorrow, and pain. However, as a researcher, I had a chance to change my perspective to the bright side.

As a person and therapist, I had my own expectancies and ideas about being a happy couple. Most of the experiences and qualities these couples mentioned, such as love, trust, openness, tolerance, and support, were also expected from me. On the other hand, some of the findings were beyond my guess. Even though I knew the vitality of balancing individualism and coupledness, it was still surprising for me to hear that there are some real couples who managed to achieve it in this land. As a therapist, I expected them to have happy parents like themselves. As a person, I expected their passionate love to turn into a compassionate one. As both, I thought that they had a stable marital life instead of reaching happiness after countless ups and downs. However, these couples did surprise me just like they surprised themselves. Maybe the impact of surprise let these specific findings shine among the others.

By doing this research, I found myself in the kitchen of happy marriages. In a way, these couples led me through behind the curtains. I was welcomed to their home and permitted to wander through their living space. I ate their meal, drank their tea, and inhaled the smell of their nest. Through the interviews, they shared almost every aspect of their lives. They disclosed not only their relationship but also their childhood. While I was sitting and listening to them with two different cameras recording them directly near me, I was mesmerized by their brevity and sincerity. Sometimes they shared confidential information and experiences that I never expect to hear. Some of the husbands who seemed extremely unwilling at the beginning of the interviews had the most prolonged and warmest conversations. At the end of each interview, I felt like our relationship transformed from strangers to family only in three hours.

Every time I walked out of their home, my emotions were like a cocktail of happiness, surprise, intimacy, hope, and gloom. I felt sad while I was wearing my shoes to go as I was leaving a loved one. It was a farewell. But for now, I know that it is not. I thought about each one of them a lot, I memorized their words through the months, and I can hear their voice in my mind any time I want. They will always be with me, reminding me of the possibility of happy marriages.

In the past, even the possibility of being happy in marriage was suspicious to me, for now, I know that being married can be the reason which makes someone happy in itself. Hearing these couples' positive experiences escalated my hope, intensified my belief, and lightened my heart. Through the process of finding eligible participants, many friends of mine joked about my criteria claiming that I was looking for a unicorn. I hope this research would not only provide valuable information about happy and long-standing marriages but also give hope for the ones that could never have a chance to believe in the possibility of it.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

3.1. RESULTS OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Qualitative findings obtained from 8 couple and 16 individual interviews present eight main themes: balancing separateness and togetherness, positive change achieved by learning, me in the relationship, my partner in the relationship, us as a couple in the relationship, qualities of our relationship, appreciation of life, and researcher's observations. Including sub-themes, each theme will be explained in detail in this chapter.

Table 3.1. The Themes and the Sub-themes of the Research

Theme	Sub-theme
Balancing Separateness and Togetherness	Family of Origin & In-Laws Balancing Coupledness and Individualism Children in and Out of Couple System
Positive Change Achieved By Learning and Time	Almost Got Divorced – Surviving Hard Times Learning From Difficulties –Transforming Negative Events into Positive Change Intergenerational Transformation Awareness
Me in the Relationship	Loved Respected Safe and Protected Worthy and Valuable
My Partner in the Relationship	Appreciation

Us in the Relationship	Similarities
	Reciprocity
	Equality
	Physical Intimacy
	Specialness
Qualities of Our Relationship	Caring
	Supportive
	Trust
	Tolerance
	Openness
	Friendship
	Togetherness
Appreciation of Life	Financial Power
	Peaceful Home
	Positivity
	Gratitude
	Easy and Pleasant Life
Observations	Humor
	Appreciation
	Flexible Boundaries
	Accordance

3.1.1. BALANCING SEPARATENESS AND TOGETHERNESS

Maintaining a balance between separateness and togetherness appeared as a prominent theme describing participants' approach to their relationships. This approach emerged regarding three areas: relationship with the family of origin and in-laws, couple and personal time/space, and couple's relationship with their children. These three areas framed as three sub-themes illuminate how couples find a balance between autonomy and relatedness in their marriages.

3.1.1.1. Family of Origin & In-laws

According to the participants' accounts, balancing between closeness and distance in relationship with FOO and in-laws contributes to couple happiness significantly. Regarding this balanced relationship, three aspects of their experiences become prominent. First of all, relational ease between partner and parents derived from the positive quality of this relationship seems to have an enormous impact on marital happiness. In addition to that, couples appreciated the supportive role of their parents regarding childcare or finance. At the same time, they underline the importance of differentiation to start a new family with their partner and children.

3.1.1.1.1. Relational Ease between Partner and Foo / Good Relationship With in-laws

Seven of the couples stated that their partner's good relationship with individual's own family members or getting along with partner's close relatives positively impacts couple relationship. Participants valued the benefits of these kinds of close ties and saw it as a chance that is hard to find in other marriages. Six participants stated that they feel that they were never seen as bride or groom by partners' families. Instead, they feel accepted by partners' parents as their own children.

His family always loved me, and my family also loves him. Always as my daughter, my son. Never been my bride or my groom. (4F)

For some, the relationship with in-laws are stronger than the parent-child bond, “Sometimes my mother-in-law looks after me more than my husband. Or it may also happen (otherwise). For example, my mother is very attentive to my husband; she cares. Same with my father.” (8F) Another participant stated that his relationship with his in-laws are better than with his own parents: “My mother-in-law always says that “he's my son; she's my bride.” She calls her daughter as her bride! I loved and respected them more than my own mother and father.” (6M). A kind of open communication cannot take place with her own family was possible with her mother-

in-law for 2F, *“I can tell everything to my mother-in-law. But I say to her, “oh, mom, for the record, my parents don't know about it yet, and I can't bear their grumbling,”*

8M underlined the comfort derived from closeness between partner and the parents: *“My mom and my wife went to Karadeniz a couple of years ago without me. They went together, made a tour with an off-road vehicle traveling around the site. I never called my mom or my wife.”*

Some participants reported that their family members already loved and trusted their partners even before their romantic relationship began. 2F narrated how easily her father permitted her to go out with the accompaniment of 2M in the times they were dating: *“We told him about it. My father was already fond of him. We said that he invited us to go out, can we go? Then he was saying if it's him, it's OK.”* In a way, the family's trust to the partner seemed to facilitate the relational trajectory.

My parents were much content. At least they knew I wasn't going anywhere perverse, sliding into somebody in the university or drugs and stuff. So all of their fears – for example, my mother were permitting me if he was with me. If he was not, she didn't want me to go. (7F)

3.1.1.1.2. Supportive Role of the Family of Origin

Besides having a good relationship with in-laws, feeling the support of parents seems to fuel the marital relationship of these happy couples. All of the participants stated that the supportive role of their families has an enormous impact on their marriage. *“It was positive in that sense, I mean both families tried to protect our togetherness, we always felt that.” (6M)* or 5F emphasized the sacrifice of her mother saying, *“When we were in need, she always supported but even when she should enjoy she gave up on herself and let us have that space, that circumstances, that place.”* For some couples, this support was formed in time, as the families were convinced about these couples' love, *“Their move from negative to positive, their rational attitude and hundred percent support.” (4M)*

Some of this support was financial, "...this house was bought by my father, my husband also had another flat, and I think we happened to be born under a lucky star." (2F) or offering a place to stay after a bankruptcy, "The nice part was that my mother embraced us there, as three people we went her home to stay." (5F) Many couples had support in childcare which helped them to enjoy their time as a couple,

And then our kid, she owns the kid so beautifully, takes care beautifully, our relationship thrives. Because right now when the kid is at my mother's house we are so comfortable because he's so happy there. My mom is a great grandmother. With the kid they become filled with energy and we live happy bachelor life. (7F)

The rapport between two families regarding couples' marital unity was also essential, "For me families are the most important factor. If families can accommodate each other, support each other, not tire each other out, create that big family notion for the kids or families themselves, that creates an exceptional ease, an exceptional comfort zone." (8M) Some couples also felt the in-laws support in difficult situations, such as 8F's mother-in-law supporting her when her son had an extramarital affair, "...I realized how good it felt because she took the weight off of me, as her own they tried to solve the problem between them."

3.1.1.1.3. Positive Impact of Differentiation From the Family of Origin

Despite the positive influence of close family ties, at least one partner from all eight couples reported the vitality of differentiation from their family of origin. In addition to embracing distinct individual thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes with the help of emotional differentiation from parents, setting boundaries to family members and protecting those boundaries are necessary processes for differentiation. 2M explained how experiences in family of origin impacted newly-weds' relationship:

I think it's because of this: at the end of the day we grow up in our own families. Each family has its own path and you grow out of that. Then you assume that

what your family knew, what your family did was right. She thinks what her family did and knew is the ultimate truth. (2M)

However, through maturation emotional separation occurred in time, *“I mean yes, relationship is, in the end, something that evolves a lot and probably I was more like my mother in the beginning. It evolved as I became irritated from that autopilot gradually.” (8F)* And after, conflicts diminished for most of the couples, *“In the beginning both of us protected our families and boundaries with “my mother, your mother” kind of talk. Now we can sincerely tease out.” (2F)*

For some lucky ones, parental interference had never occurred as an issue, *“I mean both parties got along well and act professionally regarding your professions, never intervened. Whatever we did, they didn’t intervene.” (6M)*. Some others chose to live according to their own opinions instead of their families, *“Whenever we realized that families are side factors, as F said, that they have their own rights and wrongs, they have their share in our own upbringing with those rights and wrongs and we took this into account, we started to be relieved.” (1M)*. After that, the parent’s opinions became less important than before, *“Things that made sense to you back then, you look at your parents, you go “ew” how gibberish they talk, how ridiculous, it turns out to be unnecessary stress.” (2F)*

Setting boundaries appears essential. 6M shared an anecdote in which he directly set limits to his own family:

In that sense, a couple times when my family members tried to comment, let alone criticism, on my marriage I told them that this is my home. None of you have right. If I have a bad day you support me, if I have a good day you share my happiness. You don’t have any right, good or bad that’s my decision. (6M)

To safeguard these established boundaries, some of them learned to share limited information about couple relationship with their parents to prevent possible intrusions,

I limited the topic, narrowed down the relationship at some point to pull it together. I didn't share my struggles with her because when I did, I gave too much privilege to her to comment about me. (7F)

Buffering between parents and partners was another essential strategy to diminish potential conflict between family of origin and partner. While one chose to take distance,

Since I felt what irritated F, I moved myself to a certain distance in relation with my family. Because of that other parties are also have the same distance. They moved to this as well. To be honest, this type of relationship is much healthier. We see each other less but when we see it has something more. (4M)

Another preferred to build a wall between his spouse and his family,

When it's like that, when you build walls towards your family side things stay as memories, we do like the groom, the bride is so sweet etc... The other side of the bride, that's the side they wouldn't like and I know it but when I can be the wall... (5M)

3.1.1.2. Balancing Coupledness and Individualism

Another aspect regarding the balance between separateness and togetherness emerged within the couple system. Emphasizing self-care, acknowledging the need for boundaries for interconnectedness, and balancing couple and individual time and space appeared fundamental elements behind this equilibrium.

3.1.1.2.1. Self-care is the Key

The importance of physical and psychological self-care for a functional family and couple relationship was admitted in 13 interviews by eight couples. They shared their awareness regarding the need to caring for themselves to contribute to relationship happiness.

However, participants' self-care routines differed according to their personal preferences and needs. Benefiting from psychotherapy or medication, performing

prayer, pursuing personal interests, creating time for relaxation, or caring for own happiness were among the strategies used for emotional and psychological wellbeing.

That's really important because when I lose my tolerance, when I lose it towards my child and family? When I don't make myself happy, when I don't take care of myself, when I can't spend good time with myself. (7F)

At some point the workload balance was like 70% / 30% or 80% / 20%. 70-80% was on me, he took care of small parts and that made it hard for me to take care of myself, take care of the relationship. It affected everything, his comfort zone, everything, and my husband was in love with another woman for a year. (8F)

One female participant expressed her need to spend time for herself by stating that it would be better not only for herself but also for the relationship.

If I left with some spare time, then I may sit at home, I may take classes, I may travel to different places to different spaces. I feed upon curiosity, learning new things, classes, new places... (5F)

Participants also emphasized the necessity for physical self-care. Following regular physical self-care routines such as shaving and maintaining personal hygiene, wearing clean and sleek clothes, and doing exercises or yoga were among the standard physical self-care practices.

I value self-care. In both summer and winter I value doing manicure and pedicure. I don't say "It's winter who's gonna see my feet." He sees it. I value waxing or epilation too. (4F)

I shave myself everyday, whatever happens. Even if we are on vacation. I sometimes stop for 1 or 2 weeks because some areas get irritated. I think even that's important. (2M)

(In woman's mother's house after the bankruptcy) Even there he would wake up, took his shower and shaved before he went to see usurers as if he was going to work, it was so important that he didn't let go. (5F)

3.1.1.2.2. Boundaries for Interconnectedness

Instead of a fused relationship, most couples appreciated the positive impact of maintaining personal boundaries between each other. Only one couple claimed that they don't prefer spending time apart, including work-life. However, even though they do not complain about the enmeshed nature of their relationship, they still shared the need for having new friends and activate their social life. On the other hand, this couple revealed that they had difficulties in social life when differences emerged, *"We're a little asocial in that sense. We can spend time together but it's hard for us to find common friends, friends that suit us. (3M)*. However, they prefer commonalities in their couple relationship rather than complementarity of differences.

On the other hand, other couples seem like not only benefiting differences but also needing them. They claimed to feel the nurturing impact of having personal time and space. Creating individual time appeared important as they stated, *"Also everybody should have their private life. We never lost that either." (2M)*. And a shared perspective seems to help to achieve it. *"Each of us think that we should have our private time, I sometimes don't come home when I go out with my friends. Each of us creates their own private time." (7M)*

Respecting partners personal time and space is needed *"We usually showed great respect to each other's private space." (6F)* as well as respecting one's own. *"I respect him so much, beyond love, respect his space and his presence. And I mean, I do to myself, I respect my space so much as well, as much as I respect his space." (8F)*

While 5M voiced the vitality of individuality as well as togetherness, *"There are three pillars at the top. If a relationship does not have those there will be trouble. These pillars are, my life, your life and our life. These three pillars are quite solid."* His wife 5F framed it as "space fuels desire, *"We don't do everything together but when we share what we did together things become better, it increase passion."*

Moreover, partners' respect for each other's personal time and space creates a sense of freedom and agency in the relationship. Partners sense that closeness is not an obligation but their preferences. In this way, the ground for their commitment to their

partner becomes more solid each day. By protecting boundaries and personal distance, they have a chance to get closer and contact as two different individuals who prefer to share the time and same space.

Yes, it's precious. For example, we love this house because if everybody disappears, we may not see each other for three days. If you say "everybody to your floors" and say "hi sweetie" from time to time that would be enough. But you have the freedom, personally I sometimes wish to watch volleyball matches upstairs but I like watching it here more, do you see? Maybe our effort to be together feeds upon possibility of break-up. I might leave but I don't. That stands as my choice. (5M)

As a Turkish woman, 7F shared her sense of luck because of the freedom she had in her marriage.

This makes me so happy, so at ease and free. Does this freedom exist in other marriages? I don't know, I rarely see it. I've been into different groups lately, I haven't seen it. I haven't seen someone like my husband, people say that too. I think it's very special that he gives so much freedom. I give this to him too, but as a woman in Turkish society it becomes surprising. (7F)

3.1.1.2.3. Balancing Couple and Individual Time

As a result of preserving personal time and spaces, the value of shared time as couple increases as well as longing for each other. According to the interviews, all of the couples love to spend their time together. Qualitative findings present that there is a balance between individual and couple time in happy long-term marriages. Individual times are spent mainly on self-care activities, working, sparing time for oneself, personal social life, and personal hobbies.

It's same for him too, yes he feeds upon the tranquility in the house though if he would go out to have dinner with his friends or something - if he did it five days in a row he would go "eww"- but he likes doing it from time to time. This also feeds the relationship in a way. (8F)

For example, Fenerbahçe has a football match every other week. But that's so accepted, I have season pass for the last 23 years and I go to matches with my friends, a group of eight to ten people. She has two girlfriends group since university. Approximately once a month she goes out to have dinner, one has three, four girls the other has five. She goes out with them absolutely once. (2M) I relax unbelievably with my friends, every week I learn something new, I enjoy playing music, music that we accompany and listen, I love the space, the instructor, and I drink something after class... (7F)

Most of the couples make an effort to create time and space for themselves as a couple. Some of them does it by organizing a romantic vacation “*Last year we went to far east for a week or ten days, that was the best vacation of my life. I was filled with M on that week.*” (1F) or reserving weekends for each other.

Unless there is an external extreme program on Saturday, we are sure to be together that day, as long as there is nothing to do with work or health. We add friends, we come and go, but we prefer not to hang out separately. We also say that there is always Sunday rule in our relationship. So not spending Saturday night apart. (4F)

Others can enjoy daily activities such as watching movies together in their sanctuary.

...in this chair, when we have half an hour or an hour time we turn on something, a couple common tv series we watch together, it's like “oh my god”. With contact we have there, it gives a special taste, I miss that space, there's something like that, my wife misses too. (5M)

The most common indoor activities couples shared emerged as having meals together, meeting in the couple zone, watching movies/series, listening to music, cooking together, chatting, and playing games. When couples prefer spending their couple time outside, they mostly prefer art activities, sportive activities, having dinners at a restaurant, wandering around the city, vacations, going night outs, having a picnic, socializing with mutual friends, or their couple routines.

3.1.1.3. Children in and Out of Couple System

Beauty created by children comes with related challenges. Hence, having proper boundaries and balancing closeness and separateness between couple and children sub-systems appears essential for long-lasting happiness in marriage. Even though participants were not directly inquired about their children, they mentioned various aspects of being parents in the relationship. According to their accounts, children contribute vastly to marital happiness. However, the importance of keeping individual identity apart from parenthood also appeared critical for personal and couple satisfaction. In addition to that, organizing one-to-one interactions as parent-child pairs is used as a strategy to strengthen personal relationships.

3.1.1.3.1. Children's Contributions to Relationship Happiness

In 11 interviews from eight couples, the existence of children emerged as one of the most prominent factors contributing to marital happiness. Even though some participants admitted the difficulties regarding childrearing, there was a consensus about the positive impact of having children. Mutual love between parents and children, the shared effort between partners, and the process of co-creation were among the favorable aspects of being a parent.

For 5M it was the binding nature *“There’s the triangle happening with our daughter and that’s something so binding, something that keeps the energy high”*, for 6M it was sense of being a family *“Family home, especially children add more value to this, that’s how I see.”* 3F emphasized the parental bond, *“Taking care of them and look after them, however hard it is, surely creates a mutual happiness.”* and 1F stated that children made them happier *“As a couple, if we didn’t have kids, we wouldn’t be a happy couple in my opinion.”*

Beyond the universal gains of having children, some participants also appreciated specific positive qualities of their children, such as being easy-going, understanding, decent, and supportive for couple's private time.

Kids, our happy kids. They don't whine. They make us put effort a bit too much because of this but I think both of our children are decent. I think they are quite important in our happiness. (1M)

When our child wanted to have something, we became happy, even our child never asked something from us. (6M)

I mean her presence, her demeanor, temperament, personality, everything makes us so happy and proud of ourselves. We tell ourselves we made this great. For example, we tell we made great then quit at the top. (7F)

3.1.1.3.2. Boundaries Between Couple and Child Sub-systems

Even though children's presence is highly influential for couple relationships, none of this couple's relationship grounds on the existence of children. One participant referred to their child as *a bonus* that adds extra joy to the already satisfying relationship. However, the limitations of raising a child can negatively affect marital relationships. Even if one of the couples shared their difficulty to achieve it, they underlined the importance of protecting boundaries between couple and child sub-systems. They complained about the inability to leave children to spend time as a couple, *"I mean we couldn't leave the kids and went to a vacation together. We cannot leave them due to our conscience."* (3F)

On the other hand, couples preserving their partner identity after being parents seem not limited by the existence of their children. Instead of changing their lifestyles according to the children's needs, they managed to adapt their children to the couple's lifestyle.

This routine, happy hour routine on Saturdays... We have that even after we had kids. They ask us to play songs, dance together. They grow up in this environment and got used to this. They always send us music telling that we should listen to that on Saturday. (4F)

Yes of course we have kids, we had our time without them but we never experienced children as someone restricting us. (5M)

Three of the couples reported that they regularly organize parent-child occasions to spend private time, “*We do things separately from time to time, sometimes mother daughter days, mother son, father daughter, father son kind of separations.*” (8F) These one-to-one interactions, such as mother-son or father-daughter days, create another boundary between couple and children systems and opens a new door into deepening personal relationships within the family.

After one day, three or four years before, I left with my daughter to take her to a summer camp. On that day we realized we were doing wrong by having our vacations all-together. Because when there's four of us, I would talk with my wife and get along but with the kids we had a limit... And when I got back I said we should do this once every year, one way or another, once with my son, once with my daughter, and you too. And now we are doing this for four years now.
(2M)

3.1.2. POSITIVE CHANGE ACHIEVED BY LEARNING AND TIME

In every single interview, participants mentioned a change in a positive direction. There were several drives behind these positive changes. However, all of them were related to the learning and transforming abilities of these couples. Moreover, time is needed to evaluate, process, and act differently. First of all, all pairs revealed that they could manage to survive hard times in their relationships which almost carried them to a decision to break up. Secondly, most of them could transform adverse events into positive changes by learning from these difficulties. In addition to that, every couple learned from their parents' relationship. Most of them transformed the negative qualities of their parents' marital relationship while others carried positive ones by modeling. Lastly, the awareness gained by self-discovery appears to have a significant role in some of the participants' married lives.

If you would ask these questions 20 years ago, 15 or even 10 years ago we wouldn't come up with same answer or at least with same comfort. Each year we know and connect to each other more. (2M)

We are still the same person, same people around us, kids are the same, but we didn't have that before. Either we had no time or my priorities were different or its value was not appreciated. Now it's much sweeter when we do something, like a rested meal, much more seasoned. (8M)

3.1.2.1. Almost Got Divorced: Surviving Hard Times

None of the couples claimed that their relationship was always as happy as today. On the contrary, qualitative findings reveal that their happiness emerges from their survival as a couple through tough times. Even if not all couples had come to the edge of divorce, difficult times that led to questioning to maintain marriage were voiced in 14 interviews with all eight pairs. However, all of them could deal with these challenges and find ways to grow in the relationship.

7M stated that what they had been through made them stronger as a couple, *“Of course that makes you become stronger, you say “we've been through a lot” and that's surely both about life and your relationship.”* 8F remarked that they fought for this happiness *“I struggled so much but in the end we experiences things related to that, experienced its consequences after that process. We didn't come to this day on a bed of roses, we had ups and downs.”*

Some husbands reported difficulty prioritizing their new family with wife and children at the beginning of their marriage. Instead, they had chosen to spend their time and energy on their family of origin, friends, or work. *“As I mentioned before, my family (family of origin) and my friends was very important. I mean this family was number three.” (2M)* However, with time and repeated marital conflicts or emotional distance and alienation they felt, they could realize the importance of this new family. Now, their family becomes prior, and rewards are fulfilling.

Then the day comes when you start not doing those things, when you spend the the time and energy on things together or the family related things with the

children instead of other things you were looking for, you see that the return to you is much more happiness and permanent. You experience the greatness of something permanent rather than the effect of something temporary, you experience its continuity, something enjoyable. (8M)

An increase of father's involvement in childrearing and equal parenting practices also were gained in time, as three of the couples stated. They were among six couples that have two children. As they reported, especially with the first child, internalizing fatherhood was complicated for them. However, they could learn and accept their responsibilities as a parent. When their parental involvement increased, not only their bonds strengthened with their children but also their relationships with their partners changed for the better.

It's something about the child. I've never nursed a kid. Of course my wife had different expectations. She is asking you to do something you don't know, and that makes you give fatal error. It's like blank, what she says does not come across. But I think it was learned, this didn't happen with our second child. We nursed together. (1M)

Yes, I was a little more individual, I had my own priorities. For example, it was like she was responsible for the children getting up, getting breakfast, going to school or getting ready, it was like her duty. But you see that actually it is not - and it's not because she said so- you see it somehow. (8M)

When I was pregnant, naturally mother's emotions starts early. Father does not feel that. The baby was born in 2002. I was at home for two-three months on maternal leave. M comes home and goes on living as if nothing happened in our lives. He goes to bedroom, changes his clothes and moves to living room. He never cared what the baby is doing, there is a baby in the house, how was today. I was asking him will you check the baby, then he realized and went to check how the baby was doing. I think it took a little too much extra time to get used to it and get into the role. (2F)

While husbands' positive change occurred as they got closer to the relationship, the positive change happened on the wives' side as they withdrew from the relationship. Some female participants revealed that after a major relational crisis, they realized the unhealthy dynamics of their relationship, such as imbalance of responsibility carried by partners or extreme self-devotion. With this realization, they chose to withdraw and saw the positive impact of it.

This was also a bit of my internal feud, like Quasimodo's line "give me water", then pretty girl gives him water. M gave me water. Then I moved out of my Quasimodo mode. I love him still the same but I don't see myself as Quasimodo. (5F)

At some point I was too much of a giving and directive person, I mean really like having control and I still try to work through that side, I mean let go, things get better when you give space to people. (8F)

I think one should find a middle ground. Sacrifice is OK though you should not give it all. I think everything should be kept in proportions, as it should be. Also the one in front of you... Obviously we were not doing that in the beginning. (2F)

As years passed together, some couples stated that their conflicts decreased with the help of knowing each other better, heightened trust, and amplified tolerance. According to their accounts, in addition to diminished vigilance due to increased confidence, their communications skills are improved, too. They mostly prefer talking for conflict resolution rather than former ineffective strategies. *"We were like cats and dogs! You can't even imagine, really like cats and dogs. It almost killed us to live this happiness." (1F)* While increased use of humor softens relational tension, augmented empathy facilitates mutual understanding.

We have had a lot of separation and reconciliation in 17 years. Divorce talks etc... Family is very important to him and to me but now we can even play a jape on each other's families. We've been through so much. After going through all that, I think it's solid. Well, there is no doubt now, let me say that. (1M)

Because we immediately say, talk, do. I mean when we see something we don't like... I used to stay silent and frown, as if he would get me by himself. Then you learn in time that it doesn't work that way. Now we say everything. (2M)

3.1.2.2. Learning From Difficulties: Transforming Negative Events Into Positive Change

Transforming negative events into positive change appeared as another critical strength of these happy couples. Five couples reported that they managed to survive adverse experiences by learning valuable information regarding their relationships.

Dealing with the thirds involved in the couple's relationship emerged as one way to achieve this. In one couple, a familial crisis happened to fortify their emotional bond when the husband stood by his wife's side instead of his family. In another marriage, the husband's extramarital affair led to the wife's realization of their relational need creates the motive for intervention.

I was relieved when I decided to end the relationship, then for one to two years, we started from the top, to work on the relationship and now I say this is definitely much better. M doesn't get it but I tell him that was the best thing ever happened to us. I needed something like that in order to realize myself. You needed that too obviously, I mean to make our relationship a bit more balanced. (8F)

Another female participant shared that she realized her unmet need for sexual satisfaction when she began to desire another man. By choosing to convey her craving to her husband instead of giving up the relationship, they succeeded in re-energizing their sexual life.

Thank God, by talking, getting therapy and support, we surpassed. You know, we are really over. We are currently doing very well in terms of sexual and emotional interest. I am progressing satisfied, but at that time I felt the need to turn to other things when I was struggling and when I was falling into the void, and I think he noticed. (7F)

Three of the eight couples stated that they survived bankruptcy through their marriage. Despite devastating aspects of this adverse experience, all of them appeared to be affected positively at the end of the day. Male partners from these couples shared that they realized the importance of their wives' support in those hard times after ameliorating the financial situation. As they voiced, this sense of support became another factor strengthening their emotional bonds. 2M talked about his business going down and how his wife was on his side: *“I can never forget the support she gave. On that day, just your wife and your family stand by your side, no one else...After you go through, something happens every day, they leave tiny marks, little fragments, something stays.”* For 4M, his wife’s financial support was precious *“In the times of bankruptcy she was definitely working, was earning our bread, bringing money, supported in many ways. I was driving her car etc etc I mean so much, really she supported me.”* For 5M, it was his wife’s presence. *“I bankrupted a big firm. I poured her money, everything down the drain for three-four years yet she always stood by me. Now, these are important challenges. There are many challenges in life for relationships but together we managed, I mean to stick together.” (5M)*

Another couple seemed to manage to survive from a different challenge positively. Along ten years before their wedding day, they dealt with the virginity taboo and tried to live their sexuality limitedly. However, as the wife described, this limitation provided them a chance for discovery and ever-mounting joy in their sexual life. *“It’s a great age of discovery and I think this is the reason, at least one of the reasons that it was joyful and took that long. Because I still think there’s so much to explore, new positions, there must be many that we haven’t done.” (7F)*

3.1.2.3. Intergenerational Transformation

One of the most interesting findings was their parents' relationships' impact on these couples' marriages. Results of the thematic analysis showed that the positive effects of parental relationships were much higher than the negative impacts. While 46 codes emerged for positive impact, there were only seven codes for negative ones. The exciting part about this result was the qualities of parental relationships that have a

positive effect. While 35 codes emerged for the constructive impact of parents' relationships' positive traits, only ten codes appeared for the damaging effect of undesirable qualities.

These two ratios point to two different situations. First, most of the participants witnessed a conflictual or distant relationship between their parents. Second, most of them managed to derive positive impact even from adverse situations in their family of origin. To sum up, they seem to transform negative qualities of their parents' relationship while transporting positive ones. As voiced by 2M, they know what's not working and not repeating the same mistakes, *"You know what's wrong! (laughter) Do you see, you lived and saw that. Simply that."*

Participants who witnessed parental conflict revealed that they prefer avoiding conflict in their own marriage because of their disturbance about quarrels in their past. 1M talking about his parents, *"They find peace prickly, they turned out that way. My wife's family is the same, too, let's just fight about whatever we can. I was always uncomfortable with that."* 4F explained how she got affected from domestic violence in her past:

I grew up in a family where there were fights. I've been beaten by my father too. I witnessed him beating my mom, and because of that I don't like it. Because of that I don't want to raise voice. That surely turned into a trauma, one from childhood. I mean it must be one of the reasons that I don't want to fight or that avoid fighting at all times.

Comparing and observing the differences between parents' relationship and own has an encouraging effect when the parental relationship has problematic features that individual disapproves. After domineering attitude of her father, 2F appreciates the equality in her marriage, *"In the end, I can say what I want. M responds in the same way. I mean we don't have a hierarchical relationship, we are more equal in our relationship."* Similarly, when 4F sees vast differences between her father and her husband, her father's negative qualities helped her appreciate her husband's positive characteristics. *"I might be adoring him because what I see in him is the opposite of my*

father. Maybe that was a factor, a husband like this after a father like that. I might be infatuated because of that.”

3M whose parents got divorced when he is a child stated that growing up in a fatherless home made him understand the importance of familial union: *“Because of that I never thought that I would stay away from my children, that I would disconnect from my family, that’s why its effect is positive. I mean many people who don’t stay together may not realize this but at least I’m aware of it.”*

Observing oneself and intervening if necessary was another strategy used by participants for transformation. Especially women stated that if they find themselves acting like their mothers, they tried to change this destructive behavior to protect their relationship.

My mom likes to direct, interfere, a control freak; I am trying not to do that. Yes, I mean when I catch myself doing that I can restrain myself. I can do that more. ... I especially try not to do the negativity I saw and try to work through the ones I do. (1F)

7F described how her effort not to resemble her mother benefited her marriage: *“I mean the thing about not being like my mom and dad, I think I transformed it into something good by not making the same mistakes they did.”*

In addition to avoiding problematic aspects of parents' relationship, partners expressed that they also see and carry good qualities into their own relationship. Thus, modeling takes place only when there is a good characteristic that is worth imitating.

Because apart from that seeing that no one cheated on the other, lied to each other you tell yourself “Yes, that’s the model” What this does is, the parents to that in health and in sickness, you know the drill, they stay together in all these, always supporting each other, carrying each other, always together and never separate. This structure makes an example, when you marry you think structure should be like that. (8M)

I grew up in a very, I mean normal and stable family life and because of that I am trying to keep my marriage like that. And I cannot even imagine things like

breaking up, divorce or conflict, knock on the wood. Because I don't know anything like that. (3F)

However, the transmission not only appears when the parental relationship is positively valued. Even if the overall relationship was negative, participants stated that they could transport these specific positive aspects to their own relationship.

It was bad. Bad meaning that they were quite disconnected but my mom was very independent and my father never smothered her. I mean I go back and forth on that point, now I realize as I speak. But that was a beautiful space, I mean I saw that in the family and now I cannot think of anything else because of that. (5F)

3.1.2.4. Awareness

Awareness appeared as another factor related to the process of positive change. Five of the couples mentioned the vitality of self-inquiry. As a result of this self-inquiry, participants gain awareness about themselves and the prerequisites of a healthy marriage. Observation, understanding, motivation to change seemed essential for relational growth and development for these participants.

Hmm, I did the same to my daughter and because of this I was always saying "No matter how much you've been educated, when you raise your own kids the education affects 25% of it, 75% of this comes from how you were raised" If I give birth right now would it be the same portion of 25/75? I don't think so. I realize that I used it as an excuse and cut the corner back then. (6F)

8F underlined the importance of self-awareness: *"I mean it's about recognizing one's self. I can speak for myself I recognized everything I did to myself and what happened to myself."* Taking responsibility and accepting fault was also helpful, *"As you live and get experience you say oh I was wrong, this was not the right thing, doesn't matter how old you are."* (2M)

In order to gain awareness, some participants also benefited from the teachings of psychological sciences. Especially women shared their interests in human psychology. Some of them got individual psychotherapy. Some others preferred

reading books or attending seminars. Moreover, two of them (1F and 8F) chose to track a second professional career in psychology.

8F advised couples to gain personal insights for a successful marriage, *“I think one should mess with one’s self first (laughs), really that’s what I advise. Because it’s so, I mean when someone looks for one’s inadequacy on the other it doesn’t work.”* 6F’s doubts about psychotherapy in the past seemed to vanished after her recent interest in psychology, *“Now I say, unless someone learns the language of the unconscious, no one should marry or have a child, especially not have a child.”* Another female participants described how effective transforming her relationship with her mother by getting psychotherapy for her marriage was.

Slowly fixing myself, my mother’s effect by forgiving her, exercises from the those books and therapy, writing letters to her, by redeeming myself from responsibilities towards her, fixing her relationship with me and with this marriage I turned it into something quite positive. (7F)

3.1.3. ME IN THE RELATIONSHIP

The third theme that emerged from thematic analysis captured individuals' perceptions of themselves in their relationships. Even though all participants were unique and diverse, several prominent adjectives were used repeatedly in the interviews. According to participants' accounts, they mostly feel loved, respected, safe and protected, and worthy and valuable in their relationships.

3.1.3.1. Loved

Participants from seven couples mentioned feeling loved by their partners. However, it should be noted that the love they mostly referred to was affectionate and compassionate love instead of passionate and romantic love (aşk). As codes counted, the code of "aşk" appeared six times while the code of love appeared 38 times for signifying the feelings between the couples. Only two couples revealed that they

passionately are in love. On the other hand, some others exhibited a suspicious attitude towards vitality and influences of love (aşk) in marital relationships.

And also truly loving. Because if you don't love this does not work. Love is more important than passionate love. Because passionate love in the beginning surely fades away after a while. (3F)

Passionate love marriages - like slime – don't have a trustworthy structure. It's like a sickness as we all know, and when it goes you should have something in your hands. If you have that too commit to a marriage in passionate love. But if you don't have anything but passionate love... I saw many marriages which had nothing but passionate love, they didn't last long. (1F)

However, the sense of love (sevgi) between the couple emerged as an essential element in happy marriages. Participants voiced that they feel loved by their partners' attitudes, glances, gestures, and behaviors in their relationship.

There's love, because I can see it and feel it easily. I mean I never felt that I was not loved in any way. Never faced with something like that so I don't know what it means not loving, not missing or not wanting. (8M)

You know, sometimes I catch glances. Knowing that you are wanted, knowing that you are loved. Because we transfer these feelings to each other. I also convey it, but I don't think that it comes from her because I convey to her, naturally, I say what comes from her. (5M)

He speaks with love when he's explaining something I find quite wrong or he does something wrong, who likes to touch, sometimes makes me feel it with his touch even though we don't speak a word. These are the things that you can't buy. (5F)

In some couples, the romantic gestures were seemed more prominent for conveying partners' love rather than verbalizing it directly. For example, 1F felt her husband's love when he sent a romantic song to her: “I mean even though he does not tell much you are this or that to me ... I can see that, he expresses his love in this way.” or 7F melts after her husband's amorous words when he saw a childhood picture of

her. *“He saw the photo and said it’s nice that I haven’t seen you when you were six, then I had to love you since then. This was so sweet, these kinds of expressions of him steal me away.”*

3.1.3.2. Respected

The sense of respect from the partner was another crucial element for most couples. Participants from five couples reported that they felt respected by their partners. According to participants' accounts, this sense of respect derived from partners not interfering or criticizing the individual's choices or behaviors. They voiced that they were able to feel respected in their relationship not only as a partner but also as a parent and a person.

Respect is also quite important in our relationship, we have so much respect for each other. I never humiliated M. in public- sometimes it happens sometimes you disagree or says something wrong, I see couples saying “are you stupid is this possible!” I never said something like this, I won’t. (4F)

One of the participants underlined the importance of being respected by her partner in their marriage. Besides her expectancy regarding being respected, she also added how she becomes willing to respond to her husband's attitude in the same way.

If something is really important for me, if I’m telling that this must be this way in a very clear manner I don’t like it to be discussed and I would like to be respected and nothing else and I would do the same. Like our whole financial process is on me, B. came 1.5 months ago and told me to direct our investment to USD, I said ok. I did nothing else (laughs) I mean he doesn’t say a word about this, he came to me once in a blue moon, I didn’t even discuss this, if he came and said this who never said a word before, that’s it, that is to be done. After that day, I made the changes and told him that I did it. (8F)

Interestingly, women seemed to be more appreciated for being respected compared to men. A female participant commented on how employment status shaped men's respect toward women in the Turkish community.

I think this kind of mutual respect, especially man's respect to woman, I am talking from our culture I don't know others, I believe it is exceptionally important that woman's work and successes. Those women who does not work and sit at home all the time don't get same respect in our society. (4F)

3.1.3.3. Safe and Protected

Feeling safe and protected by the presence of their partner was a significant aspect of participants' marital experience from five couples. Partner's calmness and protective approach were among the most prominent reasons for individuals' sense of safety. Additionally, the trust that partners provide by their tenacity, openness, loyalty, and acceptance also appeared influential for individuals being secure in their marriage.

Struggling with migraine, 6F's husband maintains physical safety from pain:

There's only one painkiller, quite strong and also quite problematic- but I became careless and don't take it. My husband buys it from the pharmacy when he remembers, tucks them around the house if I suddenly start to feel pain I can find it somewhere. This, this is tenderness.

Another participant appreciated the emotional safety her husband provided: *"It's precious because it's safe to be myself, to share my feelings with ease and knowing that they won't turn into resentments. I mean, it is a precious space to be myself and to have freedom of speech."* (5F)

One of the participants underlined the importance of feeling certain about her partner's protection in any circumstances: *"Whatever happens, I know that M. will be on my side and defend me even if I'm wrong. If we think this from a perspective regarding trust... From everything, I know that he will protect me and the kids."* (3F)

And another felt powerful to deal with any adversities by the presence of her partner, *"He provides safety... With M, we can start everything from scratch, something totally different. With M, I think we can build a new life from scratch in a different part of the world"* (1F)

Like the perception of respect, feeling safe and protected was also a sub-theme that mainly emerged from the female participants' experiences. However, one of the

male participants shared that his wife's presence provides a safe haven that not only protects but also guides him.

I registered her to my phone as MTYK the Invisible, it's unknowable, I don't know how to say. Really, she's like a safe harbor, a place you can take refuge, protects you and nurtures you and directs you, like a harbor with a lighthouse. Even if you go and live and leave that place, you will come back to it, in good weather, in bad weather you will take refuge there. I mean if you know that place, if you know her presence it's easier to sail to the ocean and knowing that you can take refuge when there's storm... That's totally it, I can say that. (8M)

3.1.3.4. Worthy and Valuable

It would not be surprising to say that seeing our value in the eyes of our life-mate can heighten the satisfaction our marriage offers. Interviewees from three couples mentioned that their self-images in their marriages were positively affected in this respect. They claimed that they felt precious, appreciated, useful, and valued by their partners' attitudes. In fact, two participants stated that the primary factor making them happy in their marriage was being valued by their spouses.

What does a happy marriage mean... I think it's mutual valuation. One of the most important issue in our country is feeling of unworthiness. Because of that most of us experience that in our childhood without being aware or our families or our teacher make us experience that without being aware. So I think a person would mostly want to be valued by one's spouse. I feel happy the most because I feel so. (6F)

To be honest what makes me happy the most... Well, to begin with as I said when we were downstairs, I feel valued when I'm with her, makes me feel good, my existence serves a purpose... Accordingly I do like that feeling, something makes me feel good. (5M)

One of the participants declared her husband's effort to make her comfortable, making her feel like a queen. However, as mentioned by another participant above, this mode of service mutually takes part in the relationship.

To hold me in high esteem, he makes me comfortable. On weekends he tells me that I will not go into the kitchen on weekend, he prepares the breakfast and calls and I just sit, like, like a queen. We have something like that. I do the same to him on weekdays. I sit and he massages my feet. (4F)

Even though all participants shared these self-perceptions in their relationship, their answers primarily focused on how they perceive their partner rather than themselves. They mentioned loving partner more than being loved, feeling the partner's value and worth more than feeling worthy and valued, respecting partner more than feeling respected. Differently, feeling safe and protected appeared more as a personal experience. However, even in the sense of safety and trust, participants evaluated this positive feeling as a product of the partner's attitude and behaviors that strengthening this sense of security and confidence.

These results show that individuals in happy marriages perceive their partner's positive qualities that doing good for themselves higher. If there is beauty in the relationship, they tend to attribute it to their partners' positive attributes instead of an entitlement. As a result, another important theme emerged as the qualities of "my partner."

3.1.4. MY PARTNER IN THE RELATIONSHIP

In a romantic relationship, the way partners seeing each other constitutes the perceived value of their connection. It was remarkable how these happy couples appreciated the favorable characteristics of their spouses. Appreciation appeared as a fundamental approach that these participants utilize when addressing their partners' existence in their marriages.

3.1.4.1. Appreciation

According to the interviews, happy couples highly appreciate the positive aspects of their partners and feel grateful about their contributions to marital happiness. In 20 of the 24 interviews, participants signified a sense of appreciation by appraising

their partners' admirable qualities and roles. They not only appreciate their partners as spouses but also as parents and persons. Moreover, they did not hesitate to express their admiration and gratefulness to their partners or other people, such as a stranger researcher. All through the interviews, every participant expressed what was valuable to them about their partner and showed their appreciation. Expressing appreciation seemed to work as a facilitator for the partner's sense of worth which is essential for a powerful connection. Moreover, it appeared as a motivator for acting on acceptable behaviors more.

2F appreciated to be heard by her husband, *“I’m so glad that I’ve been heard, we couldn’t continue so easily if it was otherwise, maybe we would ended up in some other path. I think he has a huge part in this. He could go offensive on most of the things I said.”* 1F appreciated her husband’s wise approach about his parent’s expectancies from her, *“I am like this yes but it’s also about that M. is smart. He could ask me to do the exact opposite. He could ask me to call his father or something else, he could force me...”*

Not only participants articulated their gratitude to their partners, but they also emphasized the importance of conveying their appreciation towards their partner in their personal and social lives.

She’s so important to me and I enjoy expressing her importance to others when we are together with other people because she is important to me. Whatever she says, she is so valuable to me, she’s someone I love dearly and I can say that sincerely, puts a big smile on my face. (5M)

Comparison emerged as a moderator that facilitates the realization of the valuable features of a partner's attitudes and behaviors. At some points, individuals described their partner's positive aspects by comparing them with other examples they encountered in their social lives. In other times, they explained how admirable their partners were by comparing with themselves.

She’s someone who makes the surprises of my life, puts his mind into that, in my 40th birthday she interviewed people even I forgot, shared images, did

birthday stuff, she put her effort into that. I was tired while watching the video! It's hard. Who does that? I can't. (8M)

I cannot say I have migrane, I've been literally drowning in migrane, since I was eight. It's not easy for someone to truly feel the other's pain. I couldn't stand 30 years to someone who suffered this pain constantly or someone who disconnects from family or social life this much. (6F)

3.1.4.1.1. Appreciating Partner as a Spouse

Not surprisingly, most of the participants considered that their partner was a good spouse with highly positive qualities. They voiced that they found their partners more tolerant, diligent, respecting, and extraordinary when compared to other examples. 4M pointed out a bridge between her wife's ability to convey her love and her excellence in partnership in terms of sentiments: *"Apart from that she is genuinely a good spouse. A good spouse emotionally. I constantly feel her love."*

Some participants declared that their partners appeared distinguishable and unique considering their distinctive attitude compared to the other examples encountered in social life. 7F found her husband's nonrestrictive attitude unique, *"I've not seen someone like him, other people say the same about him. I mean, it's quite special quality that he gives me this much freedom."* 4F appreciate her husband's tolerating and respectful manner,

Many of my friends gain weight over time, because of children or such in that hurdle. What I have seen some of my friends' husbands, you turned into a bear or whatever, you like this you are like that without even looking at themselves. I've not even once heard that from my husband.

One participant described her wife's essential position in their marriage and his life. As he stated, the most influential element for their marriage's happiness was his wife's foundational existence in their relationship.

She's the element in the foundation of the relationship. I can tell that without her, in a structure that she pulls herself away, there won't be a healthy

relationship... That's something in and of itself. It's a chapter on its own, I mean totally the main thing there is. In my opinion. Her presence, her efforts, her actions... When you take that out, yes I am a person who can enjoy by himself, but if it's big enough, if it is shareable, if it's like that I don't know after all this time, I call that into question. I don't think so that would be hard. Again, she is the foundation in all this relationship, element of safety, source of happiness, the surprise... (8M)

3.1.4.1.2. Appreciating Partner as a Parent

Even though the impact of having children or parenthood was not in the scope of this research directly, the perceived quality of partner's parenthood emerged as an important factor behind marital happiness. Six couples underlined the positive effect of appreciating the partner's parenting and seeing a close relationship between partner and children. Possibly related to the social norms and biological disparity regarding motherhood and fatherhood, gender differences were remarkable considering the subject of admiration and appreciation. As they needed time to learn proper parenting, husbands appreciated their wives' ability to carry the labor of motherhood and respected their wives' parental skills. *“She shows interest in many things about the kids quite a lot more than me. Quite a better parent compared to me.” (2M)*

On the other hand, appreciation of women appeared more likely related to men owning their roles and responsibilities as a parent, giving assistance to the mother when needed, or carrying the status of father of the family.

When something happens about the kids because it's not just about our relationship, after we had kids his parenting becomes something deeply affecting our relationship, if something is missing I might have a short-out. I think his relationship with the kids support me in that sense. Like in some contexts for example if I go like “I cannot help with her homework it's so annoying can you take care of the homework” he is immediately there, these are all good stuff. (8F)

Two female participants stated that they were pleased about their husbands' fatherhood. While 7F stated, “*Also his parenting. I cannot skip that I find it awesome.*” 1F remarked, “*It’s also assuring that he is a father. Saying that I’m glad M. is the father of my children is another source of security.*” They mentioned it as a contributor to the relationship happiness. However, the specific characteristics they appreciated were not explained in detail in the interviews.

3.1.4.1.3. Appreciating Partner as a Person

Beyond partnership and parenthood, some participants also stated their liking of their spouses' personalities. The admiration that their partner evoked was significant throughout the interviews. They considered their partners as a lovable, cheerful, peaceful, skillful, respectable, clever, or strong person not only in their marriage but also in public social life.

It is another taste to be with a smart person, you understand it better as you live. For one thing, she is a peaceful person. One feels good next to her. It's not just mine, you'd look for her after you spend some time with her. She makes you feel like you need someone like her in your life. (5M)

He has this side, he’s liked wherever he goes. Because he cares for people and he’s also respectful. (6F)

He is a beautiful person, I mean really. I mean his soul is beautiful. His positive look on life. Obviously, all these have positive effect on our relationship. (4F)

One participant expressed his admiration to his wife for her social skills and efforts at a level unreachable to him.

It’s something that I cannot do, I can say that easily. She is doing things that I can’t do so gracefully, that is she puts her effort but she does it I cannot, I mean handling people. (8M)

3.1.5. US IN THE RELATIONSHIP

Besides describing oneself and his/her partner, couples drew a picture of themselves as a couple in their relationship. In those descriptions, several aspects emerged as constitutional for their relationships' happiness. Similarities between partners, reciprocity, equality, physical intimacy, and perception of specialness appeared as significant features of couples' definitions of themselves.

3.1.5.1. Similarities

All of the eight couples mentioned at least one sort of similarity between them. These similarities included analogous familial and cultural backgrounds, similar traits, common pleasures, and sharing similar views and expectancies in life.

3.1.5.1.1. Similar Backgrounds

Six of the couples referred to a commonality between them regarding cultural and familial backgrounds. These commonalities consisted of being a member of the same social club, equivalent levels of socioeconomic status of their families, having the same level of education, growing up in the same neighborhood. Even though there were two couples among eight that come from different religions and cultures, they still had similar experiences in life in terms of socioeconomic level.

Coming from similar families, having similar backgrounds. You know birds of a feather flock together, I think it is a saying quite important and most of the time you learn how true right now what the elders said. (2F)

Having close families, same education, same culture when talking or conversing they provide so much advantage. (2M)

The facilitating effect of common backgrounds not only enhances communication and understanding between spouses but also between their family of origin. A male participant responded to his wife by underlining the positive impact of sharing the same hometown with his father-in-law when she declared that similar demographics seemed insignificant to their marital accord: *“For example, if they were not from Trabzon I wouldn't be able to get along with your parents.” (1M)*

However, finding the commonalities in distinctness was also possible for happy couples. A couple who come from different cultures and religions explained the positive impact of similarity between two families in the level of religiosity. Even though the different religions seemed to cause conflicts between families at the beginning of the relationship, the resemblance in lower levels of religious practices appeared to diminish possible tensions between the two families.

Of course this has an effect. Actually they reacted in guise of religion but actually both families where not religious. They were not conservative. Both families. Mine do not go to church every Sunday, though we celebrate holidays. M's family too. They don't go to Friday prayer. My father-in-law is immigrant from Bulgaria, my mother-in-law is from Yugoslavia so there were always some west influence in the family. 4F

3.1.5.1.2. Similar Traits

Possessing similar traits was found as a common factor among happy couples. Seven couples revealed some sort of similarity between them. These traits included some earned status such as the same profession, the same level of education, and some inborn qualities such as the same horoscope or age. Beyond these, some partners displayed certain similarities regarding their preferences, such as being a morning person. One participant also mentioned parallel reactions to describe the accord between him and his wife despite their different temperament.

If I were in her shoes what would I do, among people who love each other 90% you would do the same. I asked that many times, I went above 80%, she made it go above 90% but my wife is from Karadeniz region, a little bad tempered because of that there's a 10% loss there but 80% I would do the same, I would think the same, I get the answer that I would have the same reflexes. (6M)

Similarly, another couple voiced their accordance by stating that both of them easygoing going in life. The adaptability they shared seemed like a facilitator for a non-stressed marital and social life.

We have so many friends like that. They are married, they live in the Asian side and invite us to their house saying that my husband would not go to the other side. Isn't it stupid? I mean we don't have like that. I think we are quite easy people to live with and to spend time with. (2F)

3.1.5.1.3. Common Pleasures, Views, Expectancies, and Dreams

Sharing common pleasures emerged as a factor that boosts the enjoyment gained by shared time and activities. This kind of similarity appeared between seven couples. While some of them share resembled pleasures in life, some others were privileged to share identical views, expectancies, and dreams.

As good mates enjoying spending time together, these couples voiced that the resemblance of their sense of entertainment or understanding of vacation appeared highly advantageous for their marital happiness. Having pleasure from the same leisure activities emerged as a supplementary element for strengthening their emotional bond. 1F stated that, *"We both don't use alcohol but can have fun until morning. Our sense of entertainment is common, too."* Another couple underlined the importance of likeness of film taste between partners. They claimed that using some particular movies that were determinant of taste of art can be valuable to understand the relationship's future.

Some people either love or hate, and that means an issue on common background between those people who love and who hate. I don't know if its solveable but maybe one can test them. For example F put me into test, I didn't know at all. (5M)

Having common pleasures eases the decision-making process, which is essential for life-mates. In this way, partners can reach a consensus in life decisions with no trouble. A couple reported that they mostly unite in principal life decisions such as choosing the proper house they want to live in: *"For example, while looking for this house, I can say 99% we mostly had consensus with F. We rarely have split decisions. (3M)"*

Sharing the same worldview appeared as another element that makes partners trust in their correctness of partner choice. A participant explained its vitality while describing the features that make her happy in her marriage most.

That we are on the same page, same perspective towards life, towards living; that we don't discriminate people and consider all as citizens of earth; that we have common attitude towards living; that some common things we enjoy are so spot on. (7F)

Lastly, common purposes in life emerged as another quality shared by some of these happy couples. They proposed that they share dreams and similar understandings of life and death. Especially children appeared as a uniting factor which creates a common goal in life.

We have so many common goals, about the kids, common dreams about the future, same view of the world.. our view of the life, view of afterlife.. But we put so much effort on our children, common effort, common dreams, common goals... (1F)

3.1.5.2. Reciprocity

One of the most repeated elements in the interviews happened to be the reciprocal quality of interactions between partners. As every couple at least once said, most of the positive features of marital interaction appeared mutual between the spouses. Moreover, reciprocity seemed like a necessity for a positive quality's beneficial impact on marital happiness. Statement like 2M made was common in the interviews: “*That's reciprocal. Same goes for both of us. There's no difference.*” For example, to be affected positively by tolerance in the relationship, both parties should embrace it. Otherwise, one-sided tolerance leads to the tolerating partner's resentment instead of the couple's marital happiness.

For us, it's reciprocation of these values. About these values, I value my spouse's behavior as much as she respects mine and because of that what happens makes this space very pleasant. (5M)

If you decide to maintain you need to make sacrifice and wait from the others the same. It can't be one-sided. It has to be reciprocal. I take a step then he takes a step. He will not do something you don't like, you will not do something he does not like. If you want. If you want this relationship. (4F)

The most repeated subject of reciprocal acts appeared as love, respect, prioritization, understanding, and care. Acting without waiting for return was also voiced by some of the participants. However, the importance of mutuality was supported by their sense of getting a return for their positive actions, as voiced by 4F: *“It has to be reciprocal. I take a step then he takes a step... always have been.”* One participant also stated that he could feel her partner's reciprocal response when he showed his care for her: *“I mean of course if you take good care, she realizes that. I mean care for her happiness, she also cares for yours.” (7M)*

3.1.5.3. Equality

The third quality of happy romantic relationships was a sense of equality between spouses. This sense of equality reported by seven couples seemed to be gained by disregarding gender norms, positioning in the relationship as equals, and having a sense of equivalence in the marriage.

Unlike most of the participants' parents' relationships, interviewed happy couples reported no gender-based hierarchy in their marriage. While some participants interpreted this distinction considering generational differences, some others explained it by embracing a more egalitarian approach as a personal preference. 6M stated, *“I didn't see her as a woman, a female who will serve the family. She is always a person to me, has the same rights as I have, works as hard as I do for our family.”* No matter the reason behind this difference, each couple shared their content about this non-hierarchical structure.

In the end, I can say what I want. M responds in the same way. I mean we don't have a hierarchical relationship, we are more equal in our relationship. My

mother have always been kept in the background. It can turn into some effort to keep him silent, give him whatever he wants. (2F)

On the other hand, not all couples preferred going beyond traditional gender roles. 3F narrated her preference for standing behind her husband as a display of respect. *“Even though I share my opinion when we are out, when we have some work to do. But I let M to have the final word. I try not to forestall him. Maybe as a show of respect.”*

Four of the couples mentioned that the cultural gender norms were disregarded in their relationships. According to the participants' accounts, men were quite comfortable in housework traditionally considered as women's responsibility, such as doing chores, childcare, cooking, and serving.

I always remember M. in front of the stove either grilling or whatever. Always supports me; let me wash one, let me put one to bed, let me do that. He does dishes or irons when there is need, does anything. He's so by your side, we are now housemates, like university student have to share in order to get along, it comes us naturally (4F).

Despite the reported positive impact of flexible gender roles, one female participant admitted she found this change a bit strange at the beginning of their relationship.

Say my friends came over, we are in a deep conversation. My spouse never let the conversation interrupted. He went and poured tea. He does whatever he can if my friends are coming over, he is also skillful, he does he garnishes and not superficially, he brings. I was reacting to that in the beginning. Because I saw from my father something else; my father would help cleaning the table at most, that's all. I was getting angry after everyone left, why you didn't give me a sign, why did you bring etc. If they would say henpecked about him (laughs). Later I realized, alright yes he does that to make me comfortable but he also deeply enjoys that. Then I stopped. (6F)

Similarly, women could perform conventional masculine roles such as bread-winning, changing the tire, or being a stern authority figure as a parent. Contrary to the feasible expectations, male participants found these controversial genderless dynamics highly advantageous. Instead of complaining about the relatively feminine roles they conducted, they shared their amusement of shifting in their flexible positions in their marriage. In fact, their wives' ability to achieve various manly roles seemed to provide them the comfort they sought for.

We don't have male female separation. At times F becomes the man of the house, comes up with a harsh decision. I stay modest, she says no, stay radical. At times I act emotional. She acts harsh towards the kids for example, role of a woman is on me there, I tell her not to treat the kids like that. Bodily we are both genders but in the family there is none, we constantly change. According to a situation, to a decision to made, steps to take. (6M)

I mean she' not like a woman in a conventional relationship, if car has flat tire she changes it, doesn't wait for someone to do instead of her. She doesn't see things as they require physical strength or men's job. She does these things with ease without you even noticing. (8M)

Gender equality between partners gains additional value for a woman who suffered from traditional gender-based expectancies in her family of origin. A female participant explained the prominence of sharing equal roles in her marriage. As a daughter of a German mother and a Turkish father, she interpreted the difference between her parent's marriage and her own by considering the positive effect of her economic freedom instead of cultural gender norms. Thus, women's employment appeared influential for maintaining gender equality.

Nice, it was something I needed anyway. In our family when I was growing up it was something I protested a lot since I have both sister and brother but I was questioning why one is not helping or not serving things to guests, why I carried back three plates and the other carried two. I always had something like that and because of that I find it important this equality issue in our family, I cannot

say that for my parents' home. Possibly it's also related a little to economic freedom, in the end dynamics are different. (8F)

Women were not alone to feel the positive impact of female employment. 2M admitted that he perceives a massive difference between working and non-working women. As he stated, *“That’s why I look out for women who doesn’t work. Almost none gets it because she never worked. There is no such thing. I think there’s a huge difference when a woman has a job or not.”* he can relate more to a working woman, and he can easily talk about his work-life and feel understood. As a result, he shared that his respect becomes much higher for a working woman.

On the other hand, one couple admitted that even though roles were not embraced according to their gender in their personal life, they prefer acting on appropriate gender roles in public, especially when they were with elderly family members.

Let me tell you this way, when we are with in-laws or there’s guests, M does not pour tea for me. There is no such thing. That would be totally different I would walk all over his manhood if we would do that, in those spaces those are important things and I respect him. (8F)

The sense of equality was also seemed to increase with men's ability to provide childcare. One of the male participants narrated his capability and enjoyment in childrearing practices as a parent. His wife also mentioned the positive impact of her husband's involvement in childcare.

If you leave me here with the kids and without their mom for a year, I can easily establish order, do things and nothing would happen to them, they would grow into robust kids, look in the pink, not get bored. Maybe they may get angry but they would not lag behind on anything, my that part would kick in. (8M)

In addition to the equality between partners, a sense of equivalence emerged critical as well. Interacting as equals was found as a significant factor increasing the harmony between partners. Regarding power, two participants shared that they found the balance of power essential for a harmonious relationship. 6M stated, *“we never*

tried to use the other, let me make the other do things that I like – I'm not talking about financial stuff – like imposing personal wishes and desires. This is the reason that our relationship survived and survived well.” As 5M underlined the importance of equal intelligence levels to prevent the formation of master/slave dynamics in a marriage, *“That should create a bit of a challenge, did you get it, it's really hard for minds from different levels to create something.”*

3.1.5.4. Physical Intimacy

Physical intimacy emerged as another main sub-theme that defines the characteristics of happy couple relationships. Seven couples reported that their relationship could be described as physically intimate considering high amounts of physical contact, high levels of physical attraction, sexual desire, and satisfaction.

3.1.5.4.1. High amount of physical contact

Five couples narrated that physical contact was higher between them than other examples they encountered in their social lives. Interviewees shared that they enjoy touching and kissing each other, holding hands, hugging, cuddling as ways of physical contact. In interviews, these kinds of connections between partners were also visible. According to their accounts, this high amount of physical contact distinguishes them from other couples.

I don't think every person can get that every minute. I mean we touch, we don't shy away from public display of affection. Now, not all have these, I see my friends they don't even touch but when we find each other we immediately hold hands. I enjoy caressing her, we both have that request. Our skins are beautiful, she touches and I go “man, how soft it that” (5M)

We are a very clingy husband and wife. Our children have always seen us kissing, hugging, watching movies. All the time. They are also in our bosom. We are such a sticky couple. I've never seen my mom and dad kissed on the lips. (4F)

Taste I get when I kiss is very important, I still feel a quite interesting sensation from it, still those tastes from my youth, tastes about discovery and moving forward. It doesn't need to turn into sex. Kissing, caressing are things that I can never give up as long as I receive these from him and these are sufficient for our marriage to move on. (7F)

3.1.5.4.2. Sexual Desire

Intense sexual desire appeared as another feature that was shared among some of these couples. Even though only three couples reported high levels of sexual desire to their partners, considering the difficulty of the subject to talk about, the importance of sex appeal still seems apparent. Moreover, the issue of sexuality was not present among the interview questions.

I always say, I even charmed by his beard and I know I will charmed by something else if he goes bald, because I don't know what kind of chemistry is this but a beautiful one we have. (7F)

I mean when we undress, we find each other sexy. We both feel that way. This is important because after all these years, liking each other and having sex with this much passion is not common. We still have quite an active sex life. (4F)

3.1.5.4.3. Sexual satisfaction

Relevant to the high levels of sexual desire, sexual satisfaction also emerged as one of the key elements in half of the couples interviewed. Four couples revealed the significance of sexual pleasure in their marriage as a contributor to their marital happiness.

Physical compatibility is so important. If there is none sexually it won't last long. That what I believe in. Because one looks for it somewhere else or represses it and it goes away. That would be a shame. Because that nurtures, that gratification nurtures a person. We have stuff. We have toys. We watch porn together. Do you see, I mean this when I say we are different. When we travel abroad, we go to sex shops, look for things that would entertain us. We

buy these things, we try them. We go to Amsterdam, eat mushrooms and get high, try having sex with that etc. (4F)

Look that's a lie, a life without it is impossible. That's so obvious. This is the thing that nurtures the energy the most. We flirt, we do stuff, is it possible without bedtime? How are we supposed to do it, with the electricity coming from somewhere? There's no such thing, without that part. (5M)

One of the participants explained the negative impact of her experienced sexual deprivation in their past. She admitted that because of sensed lack in their sexual life, she not only questioned her marriage but also had an interest in another relationship. However, as she reported, after she spoke about her sexual expectations and suffering, they could manage to rejuvenate their sexual life.

That time was when I tried to get a divorce. I was thinking maybe there is a different life out there, men who can gratify me but I was thinking I was stuck here without my needs met, ungratified, a time I was going crazy. (7F)

3.1.5.4.4. Physical Attraction

Physical attraction appeared as a prerequisite for the elements listed above. Participants from six couples mentioned the physical appeal towards their partners. Some of them reported that physical inclination was the first factor that brings the couple together. Some others shared that they still get attracted by their partners' physical qualities such as body shape and style.

When I look at him I still find M attractive. His style whatever, I like that. (8F)
We like each other. In a real sense, physically like each other. I adore him and he adores me, makes me see that at every opportunity, we mutually appreciate each other (4F)

When he saw me he went "wow". I looked at his teeth again, they were beautiful back then too. I hold his hands all the way to Tünel. I hold, I knew it wouldn't work for me if I didn't. That how our relationship started. (1F)

3.1.5.5. Specialness

The last quality that happy couples articulated to define themselves was the specialty of their relationship stated by five couples. The contrast between their own relational dynamics and the witnessed others seemed to astonish some of the couples. Being the last happy couple who survived marriage in social life or feeling lucky while listening to other people's relational issues signifies that their relationship is unique.

(After meeting with his friends) I leave the dinner get in the car and I thank god then. These (problems) don't exist. And what I told now present in many of my friend circles. I sometimes don't share some of the things in my life. I'm afraid of evil eye, not to seem like I'm comparing my relationship with them and that's why I sometimes talk shitty about my relationship in order to blend in. (2M)

We were 8 friends, 4 couples, when we first married, they are all divorced now, it's just us. We just have one couple hanging together, there are a few more couples as friends, they are still married but not so much on the same page. (4F)

One participant revealed that she felt the specialness of their relationship with her partner, considering their funny yet tricky past experiences. Dealing with virginity taboo 10 years before their wedding despite their sexual yearnings seemed to create a sense of invincibility as a couple for her.

I think we are special, and I want to share it via a book, or a story or a stand-up show. I am sure that we are special, believe in it from the bottom of my heart and I think this story makes us unique and I find that story narratable. (7F)

3.1.6. QUALITIES OF OUR RELATIONSHIP

Along with themes defining personal and relational aspects of happy couples, representing the most prominent qualities of their relationships developed was another rich theme as the result of thematic analysis. Seven specific qualities emerged to frame

these happy couples' relationships. These were caring, supportive, trustful, tolerant, open, friendly, and united.

3.1.6.1. Caring

Caring for the partner and the relationship appeared as the most prominent value in happy couples' marriages. In all 24 interviews, at least several aspects of relational care mentioned by the participants to elaborate on their relationships. Pronounced categories forming a caring marital relationship were: an effort to protect the relationship, caring for each other's wellbeing and happiness, prioritizing partner and family, compliance and harmony between partners, filtering manners and behaviors by using self-control, and making an effort to make romantic gestures for the partner.

3.1.6.1.1. Effort to Protect Relationship

Participants from the eight couples narrated their efforts to protect their relational happiness. This protective approach showed itself through actions, considerations, reflecting on the relational situation, and awareness regarding the vitality of relational peace.

Some participants declared that they tried to stop the rot when they realized something was off their relational dynamics. As 6M described, *“I saw this cliff, dire situation, made a snap decision, we arrived. After 1.5 years my spouse acknowledged too, understood, because she saw.”* and 8M explained, *“What happens is, for example you come home or try to do stuff while everyone separate in their own rooms, with different priorities, without hearing each other you start to think that something is going wrong.”* Luckily, their efforts were seen, and their partners understood their interventions as declared by 7F, *“I’ve been to those situations, I became distant when he abandoned. These are all happened, I always tried to pull myself together, I made my requests visible, he won me back.”* As a result, they could succeed in their attempt to protect their relationship.

The care for protecting relational peace even in the middle of a conflict was also essential. Hesitating before saying hurtful things, preventing resentments rather than causing a need for repair, and care more about happiness than being right appeared crucial for the protection of marital bliss.

Not breaking the spell. It's easy to fight, struggle to not to fight. Solution through communication. Not when it's at the top, communicating when the iron is cold. (4F)

Needs to put his heart into getting along. Will it be my pride or my happiness? She should choose happiness, because pride may lead to unhappiness but happiness may lead to softening of pride that we consider negative, a wall actually and happiness may remove it (1F)

External threats to the relationship were as dangerous as internal ones for a few couples. With a wish to protect the relationship, they prefer staying out of sight. As quoted in the section on specialness, one male participant revealed that he deliberately denigrated his marriage to protect from the evil eyes. One another explained his wish to maintain the marital peace:

Because of that, I want it (the relationship) to remain like this, it doesn't have to be in the light. In the end, it should move smoothly, joyfully and peacefully and doesn't have to be in the light. In the end, at the end of the day one looks for peace. (8M)

3.1.6.1.2. Caring for Each Other's Wellbeing and Happiness

Participants from all eight couples reported that their care for their partners' wellbeing and happiness was paramount. As they suggested, they not only thought about the ways of doing good for their partners but also behaved accordingly. Aiming to please the partner by various altruistic acts were narrated all through the interviews.

Make them happy, as they want it, as they please. I mean I feel more of a self-sacrificial attitude. Yeah sure, to make M happy and comfortable I might do many extra stuff if I can. (2F)

I mean how I try to make him comfortable – I’m into interior decoration, also work as a decorator – for me, interior decoration is making people comfortable in their home, I think about how one can be comfortable and try to work accordingly. What my husband likes, he likes this and that, likes his food this way... I always keep that in mind, he does the same too. (4F)

As an act of care, withdrawal from behaviors that will bother the partner was also indicated. 8F stated that she behaves carefully not to damage her husband's masculinity in the presence of elder family members, even though this kind of positioning did not take place in their private life: *“I wouldn’t say B. “bring me a cup of tea”, you see because I would shake his whole, a part of his way of defining himself is the people around us. That would be too much.”* An effort to do things that partner likes was also stated by 7M, *“Actually you try to be liked by your spouse, try not to do or do things that you know she will like. Even though you cannot do that all the time, even that care can be slightly elating.”*

In addition to the refrain from unwanted behaviors and reinforcing the desired ones, providing attuned support for partner's emotional wellbeing when needed was also emphasized by some participants.

Be careful not to push delicate matters. When there are ups and downs, good analysis of downs and doing the moves that can lift her up, giving that emotion. When your spouse is down, thinking about how you can help. Pulling yourself, your needs back. (4M)

3.1.6.1.3. Prioritization

As explained in the section on positive change, prioritization gained weight in time for some couples. Currently, for three of the pairs, it emerged as a key element for a caring relationship. For these happy couples, prioritization refers to put the partner and connection at the center of one's life.

She puts me to center in most of my life – I can even say all of my life -. One of the important reasons that our relationship is this successful is that we both put each other into center. If she's happy, kids are happy, family is happy etc. (4M)

Several participants voiced the positive contributions of prioritizing. According to their accounts, centering couple and family relationships not only positively affected their marriage but also increased the joy experienced in the family life. 2F voiced how her husband began to prioritize the new family, “*But, well, A. changed more in our relationship. I had this reasoning since I don't know when, that family should be the priority etc. A. evolved more on these.*” Another male participant explained how he realize the vitality of prioritization,

I am a person who reads a lot, loves himself a lot but I might have hid behind that and didn't do the things I should have done. Now I can see those... What are those, things I did when I was single, cooking, I postponed that and then quit. I have missed the fun of it, missed the joy and beauty. Then one day you rediscover, you say yes and then you start doing these for the kids or your spouse, you start making them happy and today you do things you were doing better and that makes you happy. I mean it's about spending time, about prioritizing. (8M)

3.1.6.1.4. Compliance and Harmony

Qualitative findings proposed that compliance between partners results in a harmonious marital relationship. Compliance signifies accordance with the partner's needs and wishes, meeting in-laws' expectancies, adaptability to cultural differences, and orienting oneself in a situation of deficiency. All of the eight couples remarked on the contributions of compliance to their relational happiness.

As I said, he is easy going, fine with moving on different ways, even though he talks from a rational point he says yes eventually. Even accepting this session, although he's not that into these things, does not consider them beneficial he accepts. These are his awesome attributes. (7F)

He is also quite easy going he approves everything, nothing can be a problem for him, everything can be solved in one way or another. Eee.. he does not meddle too much. (2F)

A male participant whose wife's mother was German shared his astonishment about their ability to orientate as a couple. According to him, their success was related to their aptitude for adaptability and compliance.

In the end my mother is Anatolian, there are differences in perspectives and in behavior. Sometimes we are astonished or things can happen you can't even imagine, some of them are abnormal and some of them are quite normal actually. Among these things you adapt and nothing becomes a problem. I don't get that is there no conflict about families, about your family-in-law or your own? There is none. It is also a lot about compliance. You comply. (8M)

Self-sacrifice appeared to function as a vital facilitator for increased harmony between couples. Seven couples referred to their selfless acts to achieve a coherent marital relationship. However, it was remarkable that the practice of self-sacrifice was voiced mainly by female participants.

He will not do something you don't like, you will not do something he does not like. If you want. If you want this relationship, right? A friendship does not work without sacrifice, nor does a mother-daughter relationship work. I mean, it doesn't work, somehow it breaks off, something goes away. (4F)

Participants gave several concrete examples of their self-sacrifices. While one of them chose to give up her squeamishness, “*I mean we can have countless arguments about this, If I kept my tidiness without making any self-sacrifice we couldn't be happy because we are not compatible on that*” (7F); another managed to quit smoking for the sake of her marriage,

Balcony of the living room is a closed one. Computer is there, my coffee is there, I go there after we have dinner, so smoke. On the other side of the window is my spouse and the kids. One day I said to myself, on this place you connect with

people from around the world you say, connect beautifully and do not connect with people right next to you because of your thingies. And I quit smoking. (6F)

On the other hand, one participant expressed her stress to contribute to other family members' happiness. *“Do I get unhappy? Actually yes. It’s exhausting when I try to make them happy or please them with their requests. Do they give me this necessary thing? Maybe not but I try to make them happy in this way.” (3F)* According to her experience, extreme levels of self-sacrifice for the sake of others' satisfaction led to a decrease in personal happiness.

3.1.6.1.5. Self-control

Relational wounds can be detrimental and hard to recover. Most of the time, a repair is much more complicated than prevention. Thus, controlling self not to make a wound becomes precious. Seven of the couples also underlined the importance of self-control in marital life. According to participants' accounts, embracing non-violence, holding oneself back, and showing respect towards the partner can be highly beneficial.

Half of the couples underlined that they actively endeavor not to hurt each other. One pair described how they were careful not to offend each other. As they stated, to prevent hurtful interactions, self-control has a vital role.

We care not to hurt each other. We know our sensitive points, so we take care not to go over each other. Solving through talking... and I don't know, well hurting you know, sometimes they hurt intentionally, so it hurts the other person. One gets upset and wants to hurt deliberately, so we never did it. (4F)

Although the subject of religion and its effects on marriage was out of the scope of the majority of the participants, powerful religious beliefs' positive influence was mentioned by one interviewee. As a devout man with a strict conscience, he suggested that the fear of sinning causes him to withdraw any possibility of unfaithfulness.

I go back to the same point, I wouldn't do anything like that. What keeps me is not my respect and love towards F. but my perspective and stuff. This is sin and doing it is out of question. I generally think that this weight more (3M)

A female participant suggested refraining from a judgmental attitude towards the partner as a piece of advice for a happy marriage. As a result of caring about the relationship's sake, knowing where to stop and filtering reactions in conflicts also provide favorable outcomes.

Even though he might want to show me a very different reaction, he knows that he shouldn't show it at that moment, or the same goes for me. Even if you want to say something else, you know your stopping point because you value it. (5F)

Holding oneself back and showing respect to the partner's opinions were arisen as a necessary part of self-control. Participants from five couples mentioned that they pay attention not to cross their lines in their marital relationship.

About respect, no one blames each other about any decision, whether be it about work or anything else, we express so much respect. When you say I will not work tomorrow no one asks why, there must be something anyway for the other, when you say I will not be here or I don't want to do this or I want to read something like this. (8M)

3.1.6.1.6. Romantic Gestures

Lastly, several participants underlined the positive impact of making romantic gestures as a product of relational care. Four couples narrated incidents of romantic jests which strengthening the caring nature of their relationships. Lovely and kind moves were not limited to the partner. As one participant stated, her husband not only cared for her but also make an effort to surprise her friends too.

My friends wouldn't stay in the dormitory at the midterm exams. Eight girls, we would go to M.'s house, cushions would turn into pillows on the ground and when we woke up we would see M. prepared breakfast for us. Or M. goes to his hometown, before that someone might make a remark about liking that old time chocolate bars or roasted chickpeas, he would keep these and would bring us a box full of those. (6F)

Last year in October he turned 40. I did a huge video with all his friends, with his ex-girlfriends. What comes to your mind when you hear his name, what is your wish for his 40th birthday etc. It was a 45 minutes video, it was quite a labor, editing and more, yeah it was a serious labor. (8F)

3.1.6.2. Supportive

The supportive quality of these happy marriages was significant. All of the couples underlined the positive impact of feeling supported in their relationships. Support was mentioned in 21 of 24 interviews with various manners. Making each other's life easier, sharing the emotional burden, supporting each's self-improvement, showing unconditional support, and giving financial support were the most prominent ones.

3.1.6.2.1. Making Life Easier for Each Other

Easing each other's lives emerged as an element of supportive quality of happy marriages. Supporting each other by backing when needed or carrying the partner's extra load was highlighted by participants. A female participant resembled herself to a toolbox with her capability to resolve issues and perform necessary actions.

If there needs to take on something I do that and if I can't do that then I pass it to him or I say I don't want to bother you do that. In that sense he's really my spouse. Or, I don't know, in hard times I think it's nice if I'm around, I don't know what would be the word for it. (thinks) It's like a toolbox yeah, I feel like a toolbox. (8F)

Instead of strict roles, partners doing what they can do in specific circumstances were not seen problematic. As opposed, workload happens to be shared by partners according to their convenience.

Apart from my vocation I am actively working on some other projects. Some things I'm supposed to do passed on to her, she cares her vocation incredibly she teaches with joy, then I do some of the things she is supposed to do. About

that our solidarity is really good. I think we shattered the idea that this is your stuff, this is mine or this is your job and this is mine. (6M)

The support we provide to each other is important. For example F. is studying and I supported, moreover my worklife takes so much of my time and with that many of my responsibilities are passed onto F and she does that without doing complaining. (1M)

Beyond collaboration and taking burdens off partner's hands, being there for emotional support in the time of crisis was also seemed to function as a facilitator.

It was a very difficult time for him in those difficult times. At that time, I was with him materially and spiritually, without ever causing any problems. It was a very traumatic and very difficult period for me during my mother's illness in 2007, I will not say material at that time but spiritually, materially he was always, spiritually with me. (4F)

3.1.6.2.2. Sharing Emotional Burden

Reliving the partner from emotional burden by sharing it was another example of the supportive nature of happy relationships. Every person and every marriage face difficult times. The couple's fashion of dealing with these challenges determines the future of the relationship. When partners can find ways to support and raise each other, the marriage gains a supportive quality.

One is that we help each other. It's one of the important factor. If I feel like F. is feeling blue at that moment – I mean since generally she is at the center of my life – I move that moment towards her, move my emotions, stuff, like how can I help her. It's not necessarily physical, I can suppress emotionally, my priorities. I can put her into that moment's center, thereby sharing her struggles or any way that I can help physically, time-wise, that kind of help. (4M)

But the most important effect, in my vocation 12 years ago right at the 2008 crisis I was doing an investment. There was the crisis, I was building houses

but couldn't sell them. Instantly I was in so much debt. I can never forget the support she gave. (2M)

As one participant stated, consulting his wife and getting approval from her creates a sense of shared responsibility and self-confidence. Beyond hearing her ideas, he feels not alone in front of a risky business with this dialogue.

When she says do it in a way – let's say I'm going to change my vocation, do something new, I think it's risky or I cannot evaluate the risks. It's nice to hear from her "do it" after I present all the information I have, all the pros and cons, it's comfy. I mean she provides that comfort. She has this thing. Things might not go well or what she says might be wrong but in order to actualize one needs that feedback. (8M)

Another participant emphasized the value of her husband's emotional and practical support when dealing with psychological challenges. *"He saw my state in heightened anxiety, lived through it, managed it, supported, took me to therapy sessions, took care of the baby I mean did everything to help me move away from that state."* (7F)

3.1.6.2.3. Supporting Self-improvement

The supportive nature of these happy marriages includes encouraging each other in personal life goals and dreams. While some husbands support their wives' objectives by funding for a hobby class or second university education, wives foster their husbands' risky career choices. Beyond financial or emotional support for partner's self-improvement, providing time and space for each other's personal pursuits was also narrated.

Now, M. has dreams, if one is actualized that number will be something I can never earn. And I provide that space to him. Go, make your dream come true, do that. Don't think about the house expenses. I provide that freedom. (5F)
Back then I would say "Are you kidding me?" or something else or maybe underestimate. But when you think how enriching it would be or see, you say

yes there's this, if she wants something else, let's say she goes into medical school it's no big deal we can support all necessary requirements, I can provide. (8M)

Witnessing the partner's support for personally desired goals increases the appreciation and creates a chance for growth.

For example F supported me. For some time while working in a pharmaceutical company I quit and said I will not do this job. I was a medical representative. I said absolutely I will not do this, this doesn't suit me and I will quit. She said OK, nothing else. (3M)

I constantly said I was going to run my own business, and we were always rising to the bait about it, always went back into private sector. When I quit the first time, my father cried. How could you quit a job like that, you see? But my spouse was always telling me to do whatever I want and that she will support me and things will be better, I guess she's been telling that for almost 10 years now. (7M)

3.1.6.2.4. Unconditional Support

Unconditional support between partners also had a significant role in the supportive quality of happy marriages. It refers to the support between partners independent from the quality of a situation. The participants mentioned their partners' unconditional support claimed that their spouses stood by them no matter the situation. As remarked by 4F, *"He always supported me, stood at my side, whatever I leaped into. He always supported me positively."* these couples' past experiences proved that the partner's supportive roles will always be present through thick and thin.

Helpful, you always know that she'll be there for you. I mean I went bankrupt, you know after a certain age in marriages economically – I bankrupted a big firm. I poured her money, everything down the drain for three-four years yet she always stood by me. (5M)

She supports you in every situation. You know people say in good days and in bad, whatever your situation is, whether it brings happiness or unhappiness, she supports you with right or wrong. That makes person a good spouse, I mean these are my criteria. You need someone to stay right by you in the decisions you make whether the result is good or bad, if this is your spouse that makes this person a good one. (7M)

A sense of certainty regarding the partner's unconditional support was also voiced by 3F: “*Whatever happens, I know that M will be on my side and defend me even if I’m wrong.*” Being sure about the partner's possible supportive attitude creates a sense of security and trust regarding the relationship's future.

3.1.6.2.5. Financial Support

These couples seemed to benefit from the earner positions of two parties. As both partners had a profession and a decent income, they could manage the bygone financial crisis by supporting each other financially. Even though both genders appeared to appreciate their partner's economic collaboration, there were also nuances regarding the conditions which required assistance. The traditional understanding, which suggests men be the family's primary bread-winner, also seemed to be persevered. As a result of this notion, men's appreciation was more related to their wives' financial support when they failed to bring sufficient income.

In the times of bankruptcy she was definitely working, was earning our bread, bringing money, supported in many ways. I was driving her car etc etc. I mean so much, really she supported me. (4M)

Of course it was hard for us in times of financial distress. Think of it this way, Y. worked as a doctor and provided financially and home was supported with that, I paid my debts outside for 3.5-4 years. (5M)

On the other hand, women shared their gratitude for their husbands' financial support when their expenditure exceeded their individual income level. 2F was thankful for her husband’s hardwork, “*Well, of course the reason that we live this life*

and we have this financial possibility is mostly his. Yes I work too but I don't earn enough to live a life like this” while 6F felt gratitude about her husband’s help to pay credit cards, “Lately there were times I pushed him a little. Times in which he protested but even then there’s none. When I look back, when I am tight he is the one supports me, let me put it this way.”

While men were thankful for the possibility of switching traditional roles, women were grateful for what traditional approaches proposed as a norm. This difference indicates that while women embraced financial equality more, men still think of it as their responsibility.

3.1.6.3. Trust

Trust was the third sub-theme that appeared as a prominent element in happy marriages. All of the couples emphasized the trustful nature of their marriages. As a broad concept, trust emerged in different aspects and significances. Results of the thematic analysis presented three characteristics that signify their relationships' trustful quality. These were a sense of security created by relationship and partner, being able to trust partner due to past experiences, and having a strong belief in the relationship.

3.1.6.3.1. Sense of Security Created by the Partner

For one of the participants, the sense of security and absence of any concern related to his marriage was the most superior quality of his relationship that makes him happy, *“The things that makes me so happy: sense of security, absence of anxiety. There’s no obligation to prove or show anything inside or outside in any way.” (8M)*

Most of the participants underlined that trust formation took a long process, and their current sense of security blossomed forth through this progression. As a result of this gained trust, the jealousy diminishes while feelings of safety increase. Some couples reported that conflicts related to jealousy had been frequent in the first years of their relationship. However, due to the provided trust in years, none of the couples mentioned that jealousy occurs as a relational issue nowadays.

For example I told you every week, this is about the last six months but there is more to that, if I'm going to a place to stay with my girlfriends he does not mind. He is never jealous, I even try to make him jealous because he's so confident in himself, in me, values me as a person and accordingly we don't have that male female stuff. (7F)

There quite a difference between my trust then and now. Then it was more like, if it's like this or that, a world of questions was going through my mind and now, so what's he gonna do (laughs) whatever sure they can go. Going to vacation with his friends for example. Then it was different and now you say you can go, knowing that they will rent a yacht, going to drink, enjoying, laughing... (2F)

The subject of trust was not limited to the issue of faithfulness. Being able to trust the partner in every subject seemed to increase sharing and transparency between partners. Consequently, the emotional bond between the couple also strengthens when the partner never abuses this trust.

That closeness, sincerity, belief, trust... I'm telling you, she knows everything and not just about money, she has authority on everything. She says "Please don't tell me" but i say "you can never know what will happen maybe you might need that information". If I have a debt owed or I'm in debt, material or moral I share it all. And I have no question marks in my mind thank goodness. That's a very pleasant feeling. To be able to trust and being trusted. (2M)

3.1.6.3.2. Being Able to Trust Partner

Being able to trust the partner was an important signifier of the happy marriages' characteristics of trust. Participants also emphasized the mutuality of reliance. Being seen as trustworthy by the partner and sense that the partner can also trust the person was also rewarding.

Support I receive when I say I really can't do that. This was always present. It's a perfect thing about giving support and trust. Both providing trust and being able to trust, it's reciprocal. Not just my trust but feeling that I am trusted. (8M)

Believing in the dependability of a partner was another sign of the trustfulness of a relationship. 3F explained her trust by stating that her partner had never disappointed her: *"I do think that he's very trustworthy. I've always trusted him. In all these years he never disappointed me. I pray to god this will continue to be so."*

For one participant, to trust his partner was a choice rather than a gained ability. As he stated, he prefers not being curious or suspicious and not poking if something is not revealed.

Hmm I don't question anything, never show curiosity but if someone wants to share I'm a good listener but asking what did you do doesn't even comes to my mind, who did what. If you want to share go on and if you don't mind, I don't care. (5M)

The presence of a trusted one can ease through challenges of life. Having guidance when needed and depending on the led route make life much more comfortable. One of the male participants disclosed his trust to his partner as follows:

Until this day we did not err on points she touched or supported, we were not surprised with stuff, things went as we expected. In that regard, if I were to use my phone a friend lifeline, I think I would call her. (8M)

3.1.6.3.3. Belief in Relationship

Seven couples reported a strong belief in their relationship. Some pairs stated that their trust in their relationship was already solid even at the beginning of their affiliation. As they reported, they could even stand for their relationship in front of their parents' oppositions, *"I stood quite strong. I said, I want to marry. We've been together for so many years already. I love and I think M could overcome this situation one way or another, that he can handle our marriage."* (3F)

For some others, years of experience were required to trust in their relationship. As 1M put it, *“We’ve been through a lot. After all we’ve been through I think this is solid. There is no suspicion let me put it this way.”* For now, they were confident about their bonds, and there was no place for doubt.

In that sense I think now is my most comfortable, most anxiety-free period. Maybe now we don’t need to prove anything to each other. In the beginning of a relationship people may be like, you know people hold on to life differently, work differently, accepted by other people differently, in the end everyone is presenting something to someone under the name of success, education, earlier these anxieties were higher. (8M)

3.1.6.4. Tolerance

In a marriage, facing situations and behaviors that are bothering and compelling is inescapable. For couples who would like to maintain a long-term marriage, the vitality of indulgence is inevitable. As expected, the importance of tolerance was mentioned by participants in all of the 24 interviews. As a broad concept, several aspects of tolerance were emphasized.

3.1.6.4.1. It's OK Not to Have It All

First of all, the ability to show tolerance for not having all of one’s expectancies from a partner and marriage appeared as fundamental for a happy marital relationship. Participants narrated that they accepted what was available at hand and they can show tolerance towards some missing parts in their relationship. However, to be tolerant towards lack, abandoning some expectancies is necessary as mentioned by 8F, *“Yeah, it’s not complete about it but that can stay incomplete in the end. We are not like 100%, like two lego pieces fit perfectly but a piece can be incomplete, it’s not that horrible.”* Another participant also seemed to accepted some negative qualities of her husband,

You know I mentioned in a table for 30 he pays for everyone... that look into finances is nonexistent and will never exist. I am a little irritated, irritated

meaning I cannot solve it and it's unsolveable. Again it's a space he wants to see as he wants to see it. (5F)

A male participant takes it further by adding tolerance a positive perspective. He proposed that he did not perceive personal flaws as a deficiency. Instead, he goes beyond acceptance and sees them as a chance for complementation.

I have so many deficits, she has many deficits, alright. I mean according to me, she has many deficits and benefits. Opposite is valid for her too. Let me put it this way, I don't fancy house chores. I do office design, when you look at it this should be my job. I hate it. F Loves it. It's more like we are filling each other deficits, something like that. (2M)

Similarly, 7F revealed that she was willing to pay wished couple times on weekdays spend. Instead, she can be content if they could have their time together on weekends, “*Not being able to see each other, being disconnected on weekdays – he's more work focused and I'm kid focused – I accepted, got used to living like this on week days. I'm happy as long as we have weekends.*” Apparently, instead of focusing on what is missing, turning attention to what can be acquired is critical in happy marriages.

3.1.6.4.2. It's OK to Be Different

Marriage is a relational structure that is formed between two distinct individuals from separate families. Thus, the ability to stand with differences and to tolerate them becomes essential for a coherent relationship. The differences can occur in behaviors and thoughts as well as emotions. Moreover, numerous critical points of decisions occur through the marital life circle such as where to live, how many children wanted, which school they will be signed and go on. As emphasized by interviewed couples, spouses need to show tolerance towards differences to survive marital life.

Marriage in and of itself is like that, two different cultures unknown to each other comes together, and it falls apart if you cannot create this structure or have this harmony. You may have a happy relationship or life as long as you keep it together albeit your differences. (7M)

One participant shared that divergences between him and his wife regarding certain life decisions have never had the power to diverge them as life-mates.

We have separation at that point. I mean about kids' education, what we are going to do when we retire... Last summer we were talking about moving to a seaside town. We have disagreements in miniscule issues like that but in the end we are always together. (6M)

For another participant, considering the conditions in which her husband grew up helps her understand the exigence behind her husband's different attitude in life.

It's not something that's gonna change, maybe it's his comfort zone. Because in order to protect his energy he needs to keep these very bad things away from his life or exclude them from his life otherwise things won't work. He would lose his energy. He was raised like that, grew up like that. I grew up differently, he grew up differently. Yeah. (5F)

The enabling effect of love between the partners on tolerance was also emphasized. 3F interpreted that their love could facilitate their tolerant attitude despite the vast characteristic disparity between them, "*We tolerate our differences probably because we love each other so much. Yeah maybe we are quite tolerant towards each other.*"

Another participant shared his changed perspective regarding differences. According to him, differences are not something to be tolerant of but become something that is needed.

(Responding to the question of how can this relationship get better) If I were to answer this question back then I would say if she would think like me, but no, she should not think like me. Maybe if that was the case she would be someone like me, would I like to be with me, I guess not. Two me would be too much. (8M)

3.1.6.4.3 Tolerance Toward Thirds

Showing patience and open-mindedness towards thirds that interfered with couple relationship was another challenging yet growing aspect of happy marriages.

These thirds can be issues related to work or other family members as well as extramarital interests in some of the cases.

A female participant explained how she was forbearing to her husband's family's expectations.

Even though no one asked me to do so, when we went to his hometown I covered my head, arranged my clothes accordingly, to keep people away from questioning what kind of bride Hafiz Master M. Took in, my father-in-law - may he rest in peace he passed away last year – or telling he is that kind of man, I by my own will kept pace with him. I mean I will go for 10 days, if I struggle with it in 10 days that's on me. (6F)

Worklife also can interfere with married life. 6M stated how he held himself back from complaining about his wife's particular investment in her profession despite his reproachful emotions, "*As my spouse gained experience in her vocation her passion increased more. I never expressed this to her as criticism.*"

Even though it sounds extraordinary, dealing with an extramarital relationship was not discrete and exceptional for the interviewed couples. For example, one female participant revealed that she had secretly texted another man in an erotic fashion when their marriage was on the rocks. However, according to her accounts, instead of continuing this secret communication, she chose to talk to her husband about their relational crisis and found ways to rescue it. Another female participant narrated that she discovered her husband's messages to his girlfriend from 30 years ago. She stated that after her puzzling, she confronted her husband, and the continual discussions they made enabled them to overcome this incident. Even more challenging from these two examples, one female participant reported that her husband was in love with another woman for one year.

M was like, in love with another woman for a year. It was horrible. It was horrible. And as I said it's about not giving up because of this, I would sit with M and argue about it. We would talk his feelings towards this woman. (15088 Female, Pos. 82)

3.1.6.4.4. Empathy and Understanding

All couples underlined the power of empathy and understanding in their relationship. To achieve an emphatic stance, showing effort to understand the other by putting oneself in the other's shoes was appeared an active strategy used by some of the partners. 6M expressed how he used empathy, "*You know the saying, don't ask from others what you ask from yourself, good or bad. Don't ask for anything. Don't decide on serious stuff without putting yourself in other's shoes constantly.*" According to participants' accounts, it provides empathy towards partners, prevents possible resentments, and enhances appreciation. While one of the husbands understands his wife's burden,

Apart from that while F was working and she was putting me in the center of her life and in the system we had kids. She works all day, on weekends she wants to take care of herself, take care of the kids. Kids were infants back then, my weekend, kids' birthday etc., our Saturdays were valid even then. Catching up on Saturday, getting ready for Saturday night, these are quite tiring and stuff for a woman when you add all these up. (4M)

A wife considered her attitude's impact on her husband,

Because I sometimes take the man's all adequacy away from him and do everything and when I look in that sense he probably felt more manly when he was with someone else. Because I have a quite dominant, controlling and direct character. So therefore it's hard for a man to experience his manliness with me. (8F)

Showing understanding towards the partner's adverse reactions and behaving accordingly also appeared helpful in conflict resolution. One participant described how he and his wife benefited from this during conflicts interchangeably.

She would get angry at unexpectedly, I would wait for her to calm down as she roared. I am not someone who easily gets angry, I mean I am quite patient, always keep my foot on the brake, think of it as going down the hill and foot on

the brake all the time, when it bursts I'm so, and then she sits, doesn't say a word, waits for me to calm down. (6M)

It may not be possible to resolve every issue in a marital relationship. In some circumstances, an agreement may be out of reach. At those moments, being able to agree to disagree can be vital to maintain the connection. Several participants explained that they preferred to move on despite no resolution. As they stated, unresolved conflicts did not negatively affect their emotional connection.

Sometimes both parties can be on opposite edges and then we agree to disagree. F also says that. In the end sometimes you need to wrap it up, you don't have to solve everything, you cannot solve everything because we don't have to be on the same page all the time, we can't, sometimes you should not argue. (7M) I mean we don't necessarily finish things but we don't leave bad feelings hanging around, in the end I surely go and kiss and hug, you see, we finish it like that but it's not like I made her accept, my word is law, we leave things hanging but everyone's opinion is obvious. (5M)

Sticking on to an unresolved conflict and giving a silent treatment can be enormously detrimental. One couple stated that even if they got upset after an argument, they had never cut their communication off.

M: Since '95, a day we never spoke

F: Never had

M: Never had

F: We solve everything by talking

M: I mean either solved on that day or the day after, even if we fight, we never said that ok I'm out I will not talk

R: Even if you can't solve

M: Even if we can't solve the fight goes on, new topics emerge but we never disconnected.

F: We always tried to solve by talking (3C)

3.1.6.4.5. Flexibility

Flexibility emerged as a critical aspect to preserve a long-term romantic relationship. Seven couples mentioned the positive impact of it throughout their marriage. This flexibility contained adaptability to new situations and needs as well as an elasticity regarding embraced roles and attitudes. One female participant described her flexibility and tolerance to change her behaviors and attitude according to the in-laws' expectations using a metaphor of wearing a jacket.

It's like, yes now I'm putting on my bride jacket, ok for the next four hours I am the bride and then I move out of it. In that sense. What I meant is that, I walk into that role, but I can't stay for too long, because it's exhausting. But if it is what should be done, because I don't have to show everyone who I am at that point (8F)

Being flexible according to various circumstances, which requires different actions, not only appeared crucial in relational interactions but also in specific responsibilities. 1F explained how she accorded to keep track of housework while she was busy with other commitments, “*There's no order, no program, nothing. Whatever is urgent, sometimes I pull that up front, always stretch, adapt, comply, a way of tumbling on.*” As a full-time student who had two little children, tolerating chaos and trying to adapt to changing needs as much as possible appeared a strength of her and her family. Another participant voiced their flexibility in terms of chores:

We don't distribute tasks, we do things together. When she does not have time I do that or vice versa, she can take on any role... We shattered the idea that this is your job to do and this is mine. 6M

The cycle of marriage demands adaptation in every stage. Being flexible to adapt to inevitable changes over the marital life course becomes essential. 7F expressed their flexibility through their marriage as a unique quality of their own: “*In our process of 20 years, we were flexible towards changing needs, changing lives, changing periods. I think being flexible mutually is what separates us from the rest and makes us joyful.*”

3.1.6.5. Openness

The fifth quality of happy marriages was openness. The vitality of open communication was underlined by all couples in 22 of 24 interviews. It contained various aspects such as having no secrets or lies between partners, sharing needs and expectancies, resolving issues promptly, not giving a silent treatment, and expressing negative emotions.

3.1.6.5.1. No Secrets, No Lies

Having no secrets between partners and never lying to each other appeared as the most prominent aspect of openness in communication. All of the couples mentioned that they didn't like to hide something from their spouses. According to their accounts, they prefer sharing every bit of information, and in this way, they feel much comfortable in their relationships.

For example we don't lie to each other, we never do. I've never told him. I don't like lying anyway. It's like that towards the kids, too. You know people sometimes hide things from the kids. I don't like that either. Same with the family. (3F)

I think our biggest advantage. I have nothing to hide, it's comfortable. What should I hide, why should I hide? Just knowing it is comforting. If I forget to say something, when I think of it later, I say I forgot to tell you. Even if it is irrelevant, it seems to wrong to me that she doesn't know something that I know. (2M)

Most of the participants voiced that they can maintain the transparency between them with the help of trust in each other. Being able to openly express themselves not only strengthens the emotional bond between them but also facilitates to know each other better. As one participant stated, openly communicating about sexual preferences and activities also contributes to sexual satisfaction.

We can talk about everything. Say what we want. For sexual satisfaction or whatever. I don't go and say did you masturbate how can. We don't have that.

Do I make myself clear? We can share that yes, we can say I masturbated by myself. He can say that too. I wanted and you were not there and I did it. I watched porn and did, so what? (4F)

It's really rare for yourself to open so naked with someone. I really can do that. I can't to that with myself but if M would know a bit of psychotherapy and analyse me, if he would I would open myself fully to him. I think M also opens himself up comfortably, shares things with me comfortably that he does not share with anyone. (1F)

Freely sharing everything not needing to hide was one of the most appreciated and liberating features of their relationship for some of the participants. While one of the female participants shared that she realized the unique quality of her experience when witnessed others' need for secrecy, a male participant used a rich metaphor to describe his comfort gained by transparency in his marriage.

It's been like that for some time now, I go on Tuesdays and drink and we are a mixed group with men too. Others are mostly single or divorced, us married people are just a few and happily married is just me. And there's no one like me that... most of them lie to their spouse to come, telling them we are drinking tea, do I make myself clear, but I don't have such a thing. (7F)

It's joyful like listening to music while riding to a seaside town on a summer sunset when you are open about everything or transparent and don't have anything to hide. Why would I feel like I'm sitting in a room in 50 degrees celcius without air conditioning, sweat all day? With all that stress is turns persecutory and people don't get that. Everyone knows that she'll know where I am, with who I am, if my phone will be turned off. Never I have hid anything. (8M)

On the other hand, it was not always easy to talk to each other on difficult subjects for one couple. The participant reported how tormenting for her not to reach her husband after a marital crisis. As she said, the reticence of her husband was more

distressing than the injurious incident. Fortunately, they could manage to talk about it openly, and communication helped them overcome this negative experience.

In the beginning, his refusal to talk really got into me. He seriously did not speak with me. When he didn't speak, you start to become suspicious, if there's something else I don't know, if he doesn't speak because he is afraid that he will get caught, like that. After that with all his explanations, with all his talks we overcome them but I feel bad even while we speak about it. (6F)

3.1.6.5.2. Sharing Needs and Expectancies

In order to communicate openly, sharing needs and expectancies with the partner becomes essential. Instead of waiting for the partner to accomplish a task that he does not know, informing him about needs and wishes appeared as a central element of open communication. In this way, not only unspoken agendas do not take place between the couple but also the possibility to satisfy these expectancies becomes higher.

I think I give my all to the relationship, that might not be enough, and this might upset the other and then the other should express what is needed. Also generally we express these to each other which make things better. (7M)

But of course by talking. Without me saying it, you know the squeaking wheel gets the oil. There are times that I don't receive what I need when I don't say it. I say it, he tries to implement, does his best, puts his effort and you see that effort. (7F)

When I say this, people find it funny, I did something, I gave him a list at the time, a list of "what needs to be done so that Meryem does not go into a breakdown". Like I have officially described my own language of love, these things need to be done periodically. I'm saying that I want flowers in certain periods, it's as it is, now on knowing it... It seems silly to me to sit by oneself expecting without articulating certain things. (8F)

3.1.6.5.3. Resolving Issues Promptly

Bottling negative feelings away and cumulating resentments was avoided by these couples. Instead, they prefer to resolve any relational issue promptly. Luckily, both partners in the marriage embraced this approach in most couples. In this way, spouses do not find themselves in the pursuit/withdrawal pattern, which prevents effective communication. Moreover, dealing with problems when they are little becomes much easier, and as a result, these minor issues never need to grow.

Apart from that not doing something hidden, one should not keep anything within and be open. I think one problem everyone does is that they keep things inside one after another until there is no way out. Then they explode and then there is no turning back. Whatever the issue just say it up front, try to solve it or find a middle ground somehow. (2F)

We never said let's keep it in the background. F is not like that anyway, F always expresses what's bothering her and so do I. I am quite straightforward too, I like to talk about issues, discuss them in detail. When I say we solved, actually I don't feel bothered I don't have anything in me, like I should say this or talk about that. (4M)

It's very rare that we slept while crossed. And as I said our arguments, frowns does not even take an hour because we want to solve, want to solve and move on. If we don't, it comes up later on anyway. Then we say we cannot agree, then we agree to disagree. (7F)

Sticking on to a subject of conflict and giving silent treatment after getting upset by the partner were two things avoided by these couples. They mentioned that they actively show effort not to continue emotional tension or distance. Keep on talking, softening each other or, agreeing to disagree were among the strategies used by partners after a conflict.

If we really had a bad fight we stay silent or something like that, I cook meatballs and potato fries the next day with salad on the side it may get better.

In that sense men are quite easy (laughs), that's how I think but I appreciate him in that like I said he does not stretch it out. (8F)

Not stay crossed. I think not staying crossed is very, very important. I think it's very influential for us being like this. Because it means that we can solve or if you think you cannot solve then you can move on neutral, move on cleared. (7F)

We generally share everything with each other. As I said we don't hide things from each other and always try to find a solution, about our worries and issues. We try to solve by talking face to face. As we did before we try not to stay crossed. That's the most important, yes. (3F)

Expression of negative emotions plays a great part in open communication. Exhibiting these feelings was found acceptable and necessary for some of the couples. Articulating rather than holding in also seemed to foster rapid solutions in conflictual situations. One pair described their shared attitude regarding the expression of negative feelings. As they stated, their anger does not lead to resentments and hurt feelings between them. On the contrary, the release of these emotions seemed to help to move on peacefully.

M: It echoes on everything as much as you can manage this, on the relationship, on your life... If you are angry, get angry, if you want to swear, swear, allow ups and downs of life but don't hold onto them. (5M)

F: Yes if it's not spilled over even though you get angry at each other, you share your feelings and then it's another level. It's the same with our daughter too, we went through this but after 10 minutes we may hug each other, after an hour we may want to pull each others' hair, and sometimes we do. (5F)

Some of the participants also appreciated a sense of comfort to express any disturbances. These partners can feel secure to share their annoyance and know that it will not change the climate of their relationship.

There should be. There should be anger, and we get angry but. Once or twice this happens too, I don't remember what what is though. We might get irritated

by each other and say “you irritate me now, don’t mess with me” and hang up the phone. We have that comfort too. (2M)

I also think this while you speak, we don’t keep back too much. When something happens or if we are troubled with something it does not wait for several days. It comes up at that time. There are no unexpressed expectations. Maybe that part might be, at least it feels good to me. Because I speak straightforward whether it is negative or positive, I may directly empty on someone. If I have to grunt or he has to grunt that’s OK too. If we are happy that’s OK, we also share if we feel troubled with something like “this troubled me now we need to talk”. That does not pile up. (8F)

Distinctly, one female participant shared how her husband’s emotional caginess was compelling for her. *This is the biggest dilemma for me right now. I mean when there is some intellectual issue, for example kid’s education, we may argue, we may fight whatever we can discuss things but about emotional issues he is close-tongued. (6F)* Her statements support the cruciality of the expression of negative emotions. According to her, even though sharing opinions was present, the lack of emotional communication still impairs their connection.

3.1.6.6. Friendship

A strong bond of friendship emerged as a crucial factor providing a solid base for these couples’ relationships. Qualities signifying a good companionship were mentioned in all interviews. As good friends, these couples shared that they enjoyed spending time together, talking about everything, wishing to spend more time together, and thinking of themselves as best friends.

3.1.6.6.1. Joyful Time Together

All of the couples stated that they highly enjoy spending time together as a couple. Beyond special activities, having a joyful time while doing daily routine was also apparent. While some couples reported how pleasant their vacations were, some others voiced the delightfulness of cooking together.

Because I think friendship, to really enjoy spending time together is a very important indicator. First of all, I think it should be at a certain level, above that level. (4M)

2F underlined the importance of enjoyment while defining a happy marriage: *Without fighting or arguing, getting along well with each other, having a good time... enjoying life together, sharing many things together in my opinion.* Another interviewee revealed that she was even getting pleasure from completing a task with her husband.

(After giving several examples of their enjoyed activities) But generally with B. it so easy to enjoy everything, there's that. (To her husband) You know what, actually I enjoy working with you too. Normally if there's something to be done and we are going to do it together that's fun too, because if some heavy lifting is going to be done and we get to it together that's fine too, we both can work. (8F)

One couple described how they were having fun together in a manner that explained their shared sense of humor.

M: We enjoy, that's there in the deepest level. We have fun, enjoy, laugh. If someone would hear us talk

F: They would think our IQ scores are more or less 30

M: Maximum of 30 (laughs) they might say we went mental but we didn't miss those parts. (5C)

3.1.6.6.2. Talking About Everything

The ability to talk about every possible subject seemed to nurture the quality of friendship between partners. Participants from seven couples reported that they could converse about every matter. According to their account, the topics mostly were related to daily life, social interactions and friends, work-life, and personal interest such as art and science.

F and I are also good friends. We talk a lot about any topic. About world, about life, about our experiences, our wisdom, we still have that conversation going on that does not end. But surely I think it's vital and expanding for relationship. (5M)

While describing how they like talking with each other, one couple revealed that at the moment which the well-known earthquake happened at 3 am in 1999; they were chatting on the phone as usual:

F: There was heavy phone traffic, until 2-3 am and in later stages we were talking on the phone. There was no cell phones back then, bills were quite severe.

M: Where have you been, what have you done, did you managed to do that, did you come... then we had talks before bed.

F: There were many times we fell asleep on the phone, until 3 am or so.

M: We were talking on the phone on August 17th earthquake, think of it that way (3C)

A male participant shared that his friends found it odd when he revealed talking with his wife about his business. Similarly, he seemed to find his friends' reactions strange, too. For him, everything could be the subject of conversation with his wife, including work.

Daily phone calls, on books, on work. I can tell 90% of my friend circle... for example no one believes I talk about my work. Most of them say like "how come, you don't talk about your job to a woman", that your job is your private area. I don't understand what the matter is. ... They think she would not understand. Though we talk about everything. There's nothing we don't talk. (2M)

3.1.6.6.3. Wish to Spend More Time Together

Participants from all eight couples articulated their longing for spending more time with their spouses. The main reason hindering the desired amount of couple time appeared as their time-consuming work-life. The majority of the couples shared their

plans about lessening the time reserved for work in order to allocate their time. Some others could only dream about their retirement to spend more time as a couple.

If we set the clinic we will have more chance to spend time together. At least I will have more but first thing we want to do is to go to vacation together, going somewhere. Maybe going abroad, we have never been abroad with F.
(3M)

And if we retire, we will have much more time to spend together because we will have 24 hours. Now because of our jobs, we work at least eight hours, plus couple hours for work extensions. So it's 11 hours, 10-11 hours are too long. And when we retire, even spending three hours just two of us, that's a whole different joy, a different value. (6M)

I'd like to spend more time. Both with K. and as a family. Yes, I think that would be nice, very nice I'd like that. I don't think there is anything else, as I said I'm happy but I guess we need more time. I mean both as a family and as a couple. (1F)

There was a longing for each other behind their wish to consort as a couple. Some participants reported how they missed their partner when they were apart. Seemingly because of preserving personal time and space, the sense of yearning was still apparent despite the length of their relationship.

I like being with her, when I'm not – I am not a man drowns in longing – I don't have a feeling like "Ohh F!" I've never felt like this in my life, from time to time I feel that for our daughter. But when time for our meeting comes close or when I think of it, I feel it in me. Still, and we've been together for so long.
(5M)

I mean if we could really spend some good time together we would be recharged. I miss K. I miss him. (1F)

I constantly tell that I've fallen in love again. This is so clear I call it love because I always have this feeling, a yearning. (7F)

3.1.6.6.4. We're BFF

The strong friendship between spouses appeared a prominent factor contributing to the adjustment level of these couples. Participants from six couples declared that they felt like very best friends with their partners. For some of them, their friendship was the thing that starts their relationship. For some others, the years passed together strengthened their friendship.

We laugh so much, a person can only laugh so much with a best friend. We do laugh so much. All the time, really we laugh real good. Let me knock on the wood, really we have so much fun... I mean he's my best friend. Really my best friend is M. (1F)

This is friendship. Surely are we like that or is it because we have been together for so long that things we like and enjoy and our socialization matched and evolved that way I cannot know though it's psychological. But we are very good friends I mean I'd like to go everywhere together, anywhere possible. There's friendship. (4M)

One participant stated that their friendship was even overshadowing their identities as husband and wife.

In this sense, I don't see her as a spouse to me, we are friends. We are still friends. Two friends who can do similar things, think and feel in similar ways. This is in a way friendship, I cannot say that this is marriage. (6M)

Another husband revealed that he and his wife had concerns about getting bored about staying alone together at the beginning of their marriage. As he said, the friendship with his wife was developed through the years.

Our biggest thing is that we get along, we talk about everything. She turned into my best friend in the last few years. Back then we were... We didn't go to our honeymoon just two of us, worrying that we might get bored! (2M)

3.1.6.7. Togetherness

The sense of cohesion and togetherness seemed a crucial aspect for happy marriages. Factors related to this subtheme were mentioned in 22 interviews and, all

couples signified a high level of cohesiveness. These aspects emerged as a sense of coupledness, cooperation and collaboration, fighting against difficulties together, and complementarity.

3.1.6.7.1. Coupledness

These pairs' sense of coupledness and partnership was perceivable. Besides the content signifies a union that all couples articulated, they mostly used "we language" throughout the interviews to describe their way of living. Having a trusted lifemate and congenial companion also emerged as a substantial element creating this sense of coupledness, "*You know what they call lifemate, that's a beautiful force. Lifemate. That means someone is at your side.*" (1F)

One participant expressed the moments of amazement when he shared a matched reaction about an art performance with his wife.

Living that moment is so enjoyable. And with what, from the moment you met till that moment you have a foundation and then there's life experience of 30 years, when you combine these it creates a synthesis in the family. That lightning is valueable because of that. I mean it's colorful like a rainbow. (6M)

The mental connection, which was strengthened through the years, also seemed to foster the sense of oneness between the couple. One participant shared their astonishment about the similarity of their thoughts and comments.

We have telepathy between us, it's like we are one body. He says what I think of, I say what he thinks of. He tells me to slow down, that he is scared of thinking anything because I know them. We have this interesting interaction, it's something else (4F)

Not only sharing life but also sharing feelings were voiced by some of the participants. As companions, they appeared to attune each other's emotions, too.

For example I pour myself a drink and not to her, then I give it to her and she sips joyfully. We escalate together at that moment. At that moment, I, our emotions escalate. In life, truly all our ups and downs are together, coincides

a lot. If I escalate a little she comes up with me, If I go down she goes down as well. The opposite is also true, if she feels down I feel the same emotion-wise. (4M)

One participant described how like-minded they were with his wife in the decision-making process. As he stated, they show identical preferences and accord each other in important choices.

Things that we are satisfied with are always like, I mean we leave from the same house at the same time, telling that this house does not work for us. Or if we are going to buy a car we decide on it together, it's not just my wish. (3M)

3.1.6.7.2. Cooperation & Collaboration

Marriage and parenthood bring numerous responsibilities to one's life. To maintain a healthy marriage, it may require efficient cooperation skills. Collaboration between partners becomes a necessity. Participants from five couples reported that they were good at cooperating and collaborating as partners. The most repeated areas, which these skills were needed, were parenting, finance and housework. One participant described her marriage as:

I think it's a good collaboration, would be a good teamwork. I mean sometimes people compare marriage to running a business maybe it's partially true. Truly collaboration, distribution of tasks. Everybody knows their tasks. Sometimes the tasks are common and sometimes not. (1F)

In certain periods, the vitality of collaboration in marriage can heighten. A female participant narrated the configuration of financial apportionment between spouses after her husband's bankruptcy.

We shared our house and kids' school. I'm gonna pay this and you're gonna pay that. It developed so naturally. I was paying for cleaning lady, groceries, kids' clothing. M would pay the school, rent and our vacations. I would pay M's clothes, I even got a supplementary card for him in the first two years, we've been through a process like that. (4F)

When children get into the picture, the workload of a family increases and effective cooperation and ability to bridge the gap becomes crucial.

We do that like a task distribution, there are truly so many things to do, something like integrated, you do this and I do that and we do seamlessly... There's quite a workload too that's why it's fun to do it with M because we attune quite beautifully. When he doesn't want to do or cannot do he says I can never do it find a way, and I know that he cannot. (8F)

The division of labor was not always decided after a verbal contract. Mainly, the distribution between partners was developed through the years naturally.

We have something like "let me do that". This is not written in words, it just developed in time, as we observed each other, going like "hmmm I can do that better and you can do this better" which developed over time. (2M)

3.1.6.7.3. Fighting Against Difficulties Together

Seven couples highlighted that they had been united in the face of a challenge. Difficulties that they fought against together were various. Bankruptcy, extramarital relationship, and disagreements with the family of origin were among these challenges. Instead of weakening their bonds, these difficulties appeared to strengthen these couples' sense of togetherness.

That makes you realize the stability and that's actually boring.. Moves away from monotony. Sometimes you think what we will face today. Surely that makes you stronger, you tell yourself what've been through and that's related to both life and your relationship. (7M)

Even though I have to do stuff by myself, in the end I tell myself that F and I can to that together. I think it makes life easier. (8M)

Suddenly minus, always been plus but suddenly minus. For two years I paid for all house expenses. I never did, we never talked about money between us. You bought, I bought, I brought, when you brought, when, why... we never discussed such things. (4F)

One of them could struggle together even in the face of extradyadic involvement, “*I would sit with M and argue about it. We would talk his feelings towards this woman.*” (8F)

Participants from four couples declared that they preferred standing beside their partners in a conflict with their family members. Prioritizing their marriage and differentiation from the family of origin seemed to operate behind their ability to take sides together in the face of any relational struggle.

But to be honest I perceived F as justified in all situations. (5M)

His father was definitely not like that. Their expectations of me was different. He expected everyone to obey him, I think he expected from me too with frequent calls etc. (After explaining how she stood tall in front of in-laws) I’m like this yes but it’s about M’s cleverness. He could ask the opposite. “Call my dad” or something else, he could force me... (1F)

3.1.6.7.4. Complementarity

Despite high levels of similarity between spouses, differences were also inevitable. According to seven pairs’ accounts, these couples managed to benefit from diverse abilities that they had. In this way, they became a good team complementing each other’s deficits and saw differences as advantages in their marriage.

How can I say, we are basically something like we are closing each other's gaps. We started to look at it that way. While you used to look at it as a contradiction, now you say that “I don't know this, I don't understand it, she knows and you trust her, you say OK she can do it”. Then it becomes something else, you think of her as a complement. (2M)

Besides complementing each other according to different strengths and weaknesses, balancing one another in terms of individual characteristics appeared valuable for these couples.

Balances that, not to edgy. It prevents changing the best thing in one moment into the worst in another or prevents pursuing some comments she made

emotionally. Provides a different perspective and she does the same to me. Sure because I'm like this she provides stuff from her side. (1M)

We provided different modelling to each other, things that we don't have. I imitated things that I didn't see in my family, took it and completed. I think it's the same for M. I also observe, M also completed his deficits like that. He saw, transformed, looked and saw totally different perspective and life from my side. We truly did each other good (1F)

(As an advice for a happy marriage) Try to grasp your good and bad sides and try to balance them out. Meaning that if both parties know their strenghts and weaknesses, both personally and with each other, it becomes easy to know who will step in and who will balance things out. (6F)

3.1.7. APPRECIATION OF LIFE

3.1.7.1. Financial Power

As well as relational dynamics, external circumstances play a major role in every individual's life. The financial status also appeared as an important determinant of these couples' marital happiness. As a result of their high socioeconomic levels, all participants had a significant amount of income. They had large and well-appointed houses in decent districts. Most of them had a maid and sent their children to private schools. Hence, the positive impact of having a large amount of money was voiced by all couples. When asked about external factors contributing to their happiness, most participants revealed that their financial power had an enormous effect on their marital satisfaction. Some of them claimed that they could not be as happy as they were if they had economic struggles.

In today's Turkey since if you don't have money it creates unhappiness, you can't do anything, can't even move. When you have money and you leave behind troubles about life, since we get along well and enjoy each other's company,

spending time, talking, doing things together. It's as if spending time with yourself and leaving the life aside when you have Money. (7M)

Surely happiness is very important, being understood is very important etc. but this is also reality, if you have some financial power, these things become much beautiful with that power, meaning it might be hard to keep its balance. In some way it's truly important that you earn enough for your living. (2F)

Economically we're good. I think it provides ease of mind. I mean I cannot deny that it's good. Because even though you love, it might be troubling for a family to discuss an economic issue every day. Even though how much they love each other. At least we don't have that. I think that's a plus. Meaning that economic power, takes away one deficit from the family, takes away a negativity that needs to be discussed. (1F)

I don't know, you see, your house... sure it's also about money. Without money you may not be able to do anything. (3M)

With the help of having sufficient income, getting additional external support for housework, which could cause distress otherwise, becomes also possible. As some of the participants suggested, money could also be consumed to provide some basic needs such as home cleaning or meals at certain moments. In this way, any lack in the execution of these duties, which would generally be expected from wives, becomes no longer a problem for these couples.

For example when I say that - we do cleaning one day in our house, we do the kitchen etc. but we don't do general cleaning - when I say that let's make it two instead of one, especially when the kids are in the house, being able to do it is an external factor. These are quite important, since love in a cottage doesn't work, there's no such thing. You need so, so different of a mindset, it's not so sustainable in the long run. I mean I feel gratitude about environment for this. (8F)

In our 24-25 years of marriage, I didn't say even 5 times "why we don't have food for dinner". She works, if we don't have food we are financially secure enough to order food, either we place an order or go out to have dinner. (6M)

3.1.7.2. Peaceful Home

Having a peaceful home away from negativity was another point appreciated by these couples, *"I don't need big things to be happy, peacefulness and ease of mind is enough for me."* (1M) Participants from seven couples emphasized the importance of their homes' calm nature. This serenity led them to want to be home as much as possible, which was resulted in an increased time of their presence. Circularly, when they spend more time at home, their marital happiness also increases.

In the end, at the end of the day one looks for peace. If you have that, if you are with people who provides that in your life, I describe as such I have a peaceful relationship, a peaceful marriage. ... In the end we are out for work related stuff or something else, with daily worries and anxieties in the country you live, in the area you live and at the end of the day, it's a place you take refuge. Shelter in your place of refuge, peace despite everything and that people here, inside the family sharing with a smile or with trust or with love. (8M)

Most of the participants had a similar response when there were asked to define "happy marriage." In their definitions, a happy marriage appeared as a place where they were willing to come, *"Coming home willingly... Because I experienced this with many of my friends. He doesn't want to go home. Because he is not peaceful or happy there. I don't have such thing. If it's on me, to be honest I'd come running."* (2M), *"I think it's a place where you come running instead of dragging your feet."* (7F), where they found peace *"Happy marriage is when you're coming home, you come peacefully, not by dragging your feet."* (3M) and joy *"Let me say that it's a marriage I enjoy coming home."* (8F) by the existence of loved ones.

An environment where I come running. An environment with people I want to make happy. In other words, when I leave work or when I go somewhere,

coming back will make me say “oh, my home”, an order with the person I created a comfortable space, a life. (5F)

Well, this is my new description, I didn't describe it as such in the past. When I do have a scheduled event outside and it was postponed – what I mean by event is having dinner etc. something that I'd like – when it's postponed I sincerely started to feel happy. Like “Oh god I'm going home”. (5M)

3.1.7.3. Positivity

Seeing the bright side of every situation emerged as another critical factor increasing perceived happiness. Embraced positivity of these individuals was remarkable. Participants from six couples expressed how they chose to see the positive aspects of their experiences. While some of them could manage to see always the glass half full, some others preferred remembering mostly positive sides of their relationships.

I said “An incredible forest smell, an incredible rain, greenery, very beautiful, strangely beautiful” Of course, he knows me too. He said “Brother, you are in traffic, right?” I didn't realize it until then, I said yes, there is a strange traffic. My reflection; in fact, the traffic I'm in may be the first priority, but I already accepted it as a part of life. I catch the perception in the right place once. I have already taken it, there is nothing to do with it, but there is the other side. (5M) Depends on the perspective you'd like to see life. I would never say that the glass is half empty. For me, it's always full... I've been always like this and so does F mostly. (2M)

We may have clashed on many things, that I left the house, that we come to a point of leaving the house but I'm telling you about my connection about that, right after that short talk I erase that negativity in my mind totally and I don't remember neither the date or, I mean I recall an event roughly but how did it come up, where it went, what happened I have no idea about it. Because I erased it as I did with all the negative stuff in life. (7M)

3.1.7.4. Gratitude

With the help of their positivity, their gratitude for life also appeared greater. Participants from six couples shared that they were grateful for their life, the resources they had, and conditions they had no power to control. Most of them repeatedly praised throughout the interviews for several reasons, such as their health, financial strength, or personal abilities.

Very pleased I mean I am very pleased with myself, consider myself good, I mean I love myself and I feel gratitude towards me that loves myself. I don't have any religious belief left but gratitude is not about belief because I feel gratitude towards life. (5M)

We bought a new house now. It made us really happy. Meaning that we are very pleased with this situation. Brought a new color into our lives. After so many years, something we wanted so much has happened, something that we always dreamed of. (3F)

3.1.7.5. Easy and Pleasant Life

Having an easy and pleasant life emerged as a subtheme under the theme of appreciation of life. Participants from seven couples highlighted the positive influence of having a smooth life on their marital happiness. According to them, their current health, having no previous trauma, and easiness of their children were among the factors affecting their marriage supportively.

Participants from six couples appreciated their current health. They underlined the vitality of health as one of the critical determinants of general happiness, which indirectly affects marital bliss.

If you are in good health, one thing is that you can eat whatever you want without doctor's restriction, that is wealth. You can go wherever you want. Sure there's something better than good but does this make you happy, is it enough, yes it is. (4F)

A few participants also mentioned the positive impact of having no previous trauma in their lives. They suggested that maintaining a happy marriage would not be

that easy if they had traumatic experiences such as significant losses, struggling with diseases or, poverty in their pasts.

We always had a stable life with moderate happiness, sometimes a lot of happiness, with little sadness. I didn't have a very traumatic situation in my childhood and that turned me into a steady and calm man. (7M)

We are in good health, our parents are alive and in good health. You know sometimes I compare this with some others' lives, what people experience, what life brings, diseases, losses, divorces... so many factors can disrupt the dynamics of the family. Thank god we have no trouble. (2F)

While all of the couples mentioned the contributions of having children to their marital happiness, participants from five couples highlighted that the definite characteristics of their children had a fundamental impact on this positive influence. They stated that they found their children easier compared to other examples. According to their accounts, their children were healthy, compliant, successful, and happy. These characteristics seemed to diminish parental stress and increase general happiness level as well as marital one.

What else, there are children. We are in good health after all and so they are, there's no major problem. Yes sure they yell at each other or fight etc. yes these make you uncomfortable but ultimately I think, I don't know if one gets cancer or becomes paralyzed that would probably... (8F)

I mean even if you compare with many of our friends they are quite successful kids. And they are smart, they can perceive life. (6M)

Thank god we have two brilliant children who grew nicely with good vision and goals, hardworking, respectful. I don't know, not like those who burn through the money or profligate. (4F)

3.1.8. OBSERVATIONS

Beyond the content of the interviews, specific approaches and features were attracted the researcher's attention during the interviews. It was deemed appropriate to gather these qualities under an independent main theme. These features are gathered around four sub-themes. These sub-themes are the use of humor, appreciation, flexible boundaries, and accordance, respectively.

3.1.8.1. Humor

It has been observed that most of the couples benefit from humor during the interviews. It has been noticed that a humorous tone gains weight between partners, especially when talking about an intellectual conflict or tense issues. It has been thought that humor was an element that was feeding the sense of friendship between the partners, and it makes interaction more enjoyable by increasing the couple's playfulness.

During the interviews, the participants stated an increase in their capacity to make fun of situations and events over time, likewise many other positive qualities in their relationship. Based on this, it was understood that with the increase in the trust in the spouse and a sense of safety in the relationship, couples could use elevated levels of humor in possibly tensional subjects.

3.1.8.2. Appreciation

The couples' appreciation of each other was also included in the main themes during the meetings. In addition, it was noteworthy that the participants emphasized many positive features while talking about their spouses. It was felt that the participants focused more on the positive aspects of their spouses and that they further increased the value of their already existing positive characteristics. Many participants shared that they thought their spouse was incredibly smart, very handsome, extremely resourceful, or a highly beloved person. During thematic analysis, the positive attribution towards partners has gained attention as a prominent feature of these

couples' relational experiences. Thus, positive attribution was decided to be included as an aspect of appreciation under the theme of observations.

3.1.8.3. Flexible Boundaries

Another feature that can be considered typical in all of these couples is to have flexible boundaries. Their agreement to participate in such a study shows how much these couples can stretch over their edges. In certain situations, their borders to outside hold a capacity to stretch. Consequently, they could accept a stranger in their home to answer her unspecified intimate questions in front of a camera. They were not only self-confident but also able to trust any other. Thus, considering their ability to open their inner worlds to the outside, the flexibility of their outer borders was found notable.

3.1.8.4. Accordance

Considering the study's participation requirements, high levels of accordance between partners also come to the fore. These couples not only agreed on the happiness in their marriage but also agreed to participate in such a study, taking into account their spouses' aspirations. This compliance can be framed in two ways as intentional and unintentional.

The intentional accordance between couples was appeared through the acceptance towards partner's desire and acting accordingly. In 6 pairs in the study, the appeal and demand for participation came from women. It was observed even during interviews that men were more reluctant and distant. However, even if they were not voluntary, all husbands adapted to their wives' requests and agreed to participate in this study, which required a great deal of emotional and temporal investment.

The unintentional accordance was seen among the statements of the partners during the interviews. During the individual interviews, most of the partners made similar statements in separate interviews and presented harmony in their opinions with their spouses. Similarly, during the couple interviews, it was observed that many couples completed or repeated each other's sentences and agreed on many issues.

3.1.8.5. Comparing Couple and Individual Interviews

Even though the data analysis process was not separated, an observation was made to compare and contrast between couple and individual interviews. As well as differences, remarkable similarities were observed.

Individual interviews were more self-disclosive than couple ones. Possibly, talking to the interviewer one-on-one about the relationship also made it more emotional. On the other hand, the couple interviews passed in a way that the couples talked about themselves and told their stories by passing each other in their own rhythm. Some of them constantly validated each other while some of them clashed more, according to the couple's dynamic. In most, women took a more active role. It was also noteworthy that several men, who were more silent next to their wives, shared readily in individual interviews for a more extended time.

On the other hand, there were some striking similarities between partners in individual interviews. It was remarkable that the spouses chose similar words while describing each other or their relationships in individual interviews. Thus, it was understood that these spouses shared the same approach on the specific issues and had similar views in life, independently of each other. For example, when a female participant said that "my husband's family is awful.", her husband also said that "my family was awful.". Likewise, when another said that "my wife had an issue on money.", that person's wife also said, "I had an issue on money.". In a sense, perhaps over time, perhaps from the very beginning, it was seen that they had a common view on their relationships and life.

Some differences were also observed between two genders in individual interviews. Despite the more distant attitude of the men, it was surprising how they talked about their wives with praise and intense affection. Still, for the most part, men were more distracted, tending to go off topic or talk in devious ways. On the other hand, it was felt that women were able to reveal their secrets more easily as a result of being same-sex with the interviewer. For instance, mostly sexual issues were elaborated by female participants. Similarly, an extramarital affair or desire was also voiced by

women while men preferred to keep these issues for themselves. Besides, women also seemed eager because of their interest in psychology.

3.2. SYSTEM FOR CODING INTERACTIONS IN DYADS (SCID) RESULTS

SCID has total of fourteen codes to assess individual and relational qualities of couple interaction. While 9 codes are used to examine individual characteristics, 5 of them are used for measuring the features of couple interaction. 12 codes measured in scales from low to high, whereas the last two code have categorical measures.

Table 3.2.

Mean Scores of Codes in System for Coding Interaction in Dyads

Individual and Couple Codes	Means of Female Scores	Means of Male Scores	Means of Couple Scores
Verbal Aggression	1,00	1,00	
Coerciveness	1,43	1,71	
Attempts to Control	1,86	2,57	
Negativity & Conflict	1,57	2,14	
Withdrawal	1,43	2,29	
Dysphoric Affect	1,71	1,86	
Problem Solving Communication	4,14	2,43	
Support	3,43	2,43	
Positive Affect	3,57	2,57	
Negative Escalation			1,00
Cohesiveness			3,86
Pursuit/Withdrawal Pattern			1,86

Conflict	NA*
Management Style	
Balance of Power	NA*

*Not Applicable: Scorings of codes for Conflict Management Style and Balance of Power was categorical. Thus, scores for these two codes were explained in section 3.2.2.

3.2.1. INDIVIDUAL CODES

There were nine individual codes to assess participants' personal scores on verbal aggression, coerciveness, attempt to control, negativity and conflict, withdrawal, dysphoric affect, problem-solving communication, support, and positive affect. Each code had five scores that indicated five levels, such as low, moderately low, moderate, moderately high, and high. While low level scored as 1, high level scored as 5 in the coding process.

3.2.1.1. Verbal Aggression

The code of verbal aggression signified aggressive and hostile statements on the individual level. These remarks included offensive, blaming, or critical comments in a manner of cruelty, mockery, or contempt. These hurtful messages could be about the partner as well as the partner's close friends or relatives.

Fortunately, none of the participants used any kind of statements in their interactions.

3.2.1.2. Coerciveness

Coercive behaviors were characterized with a tone of threat or manipulation. The coercive acts aimed to make the partner small and intimidated in a sneaky way to change her behaviors. It may include threatening body language such as extreme closeness as well as verbal manipulations.

As opposed to verbal aggression, eight of the 14 participants showed coercive behavior in their interaction. Five of these eight individuals were among men. However, none of the participants exceed one coercive act, and the highest score was still coded as low in coerciveness.

3.2.1.3. Attempts to Control

This code signified any kind of attempt to change other's behaviors, thoughts, or emotions. It included any behavior from an upper position to dominate and control the other. It should be noted that efforts were sufficient to get this code; achievement was not necessary. Scores were based on the frequency of these attempts.

Surprisingly, only half of the participants had never demonstrated any attempt to control their partners. The others differed in frequency in their efforts to change their partners. Especially, male participants had higher scores on this code. One male participant (1M) was scored high, while two others' scores (2M, 6M) appeared moderately high. Three female participants' scores varied from low to moderately high. On the other hand, six participants from three couples (C3, C4, C8) had no attempt to control each other.

3.2.1.4. Negativity & Conflict

This code assessed negative tone and conflictual behaviors such as defensive responses, sarcastic comments, irritated mood, or tensional body language. Any blaming or criticizing comment without aggressiveness was scored under this code.

While nine of the 14 participants exhibited negativity and conflictual behavior, none of them exceeded moderate levels. However, the only three people who got moderate scores were male (1M, 6M, 7M). These participants expressed anger or a tensional attitude a couple of times throughout the interactions. Four women who had low scores exhibited mild levels of negativity for shorter moments. On the other hand, four participants from two couples (C3, C8) never showed any negative or conflictual behavior.

3.2.1.5. Withdrawal

The code of withdrawal referred to the behaviors or attitudes to avoid interaction or discussion. The withdrawal code could include voice tone, attitude, or body language. A withdrawn partner could shut himself off in the arguments or look disinterested and distracted. Keeping oneself busy by fidgeting with other objects such as hair, clothes, nails, or any other item was also included in withdrawal.

Nine of the participants exhibited various levels of withdrawal in the interactions. While six participants from three couples got the same scores as low, partners from one pair (C3) show no withdrawal signs. Men had higher scores in this code, too. While one of the male participants (6M) got the highest score with a moderately high level, another (8M) was rated as the second-highest score with moderate level. The scored withdrawal acts contained a range of behaviors from crossing arms to eating nuts.

3.2.1.6. Dysphoric Affect

The code of dysphoric affect signified a general tone of sadness through body language, facial expressions, and verbalization. Any signs of grief, sorrow, regret, and disappointment were included under this code.

While half of the participants never showed any kinds of dysphoric affect during the interaction, the other half expressed various levels of it. Regarding the mean levels, a significant difference between genders was apparent. The highest score belonged to a male participant (3M) with a moderately high level. As a result, men's mean was meaningfully higher than women's. One female (3F) and one male participant (6M) from different pairs also exhibited moderate levels of dysphoric affect. The other four showed only mild levels with a score of low. A specific couple (C3) had remarkably higher scores in this code. There was only one couple (C4) who had never exhibit any signs of sadness.

3.2.1.7. Problem Solving Communication

The code of problem-solving communication assessed the level of constructive communication skills, such as articulating thoughts and feelings to the other effectively. Expressing oneself in an understandable manner by using self-disclosures, owning responsibility, presenting a summary, asking for the other's perspective, offering solutions, and being willing to compromise led to higher scores in this code. Additionally, behavioral cues such as an engaged body posture and eye contact were also inspected.

Results showed that there was a significant divergence between men and women regarding problem-solving communication skills. While all female participants scored at least moderately high, none of the male participants could exceed moderate levels. One female participant (8F) exhibit excellent skills with the highest score. While more than half of the male participants had low scores, three could reach moderate levels. During the interactions, while wives communicate effectively in a constructive way, husbands' communication skills contributed less to problem-solving and appeared weaker. Remarkably, in every couple, women had higher scores than men.

3.2.1.8. Support

According to the SCID system, higher levels of support were characterized with attuned listening, validating comments, an effort to understand the other, a sensibility to other's emotions, and presenting a supportive attitude.

All of the participants got scored low and above in support. Like the code of PS communication, women could reach significantly higher scores than men. Women's scores were ranged between very high (8F) and moderate, while men had a narrow range between low and moderate. Except one couple (C2), who both showed moderate levels of support, in every other couple, wives had higher scores than their husbands on this code. During the interactions, women acknowledged and validated their partners' statements more by supportive verbal responses or nodding. On the other hand, men voiced less supportive comments, looked less to their partner in the eyes, and appeared less attuned to their partners' emotions.

3.2.1.9. Positive Affect

Positive affect is assessed through body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions. It contained signs of joy, happiness, satisfaction, or relaxation. Behavioral cues such as laughter and smile indicated positive affect as well as touching and kissing.

Women expressed a meaningfully higher amount of positive affect than men during the interactions. While three participants (2F, 2M, 8F) exhibited high levels of positive affect, only one participant (3M) got low scores. Two couples' interactions

were highly positive and in accord with rates of high (C2) and moderately high (C7). The distinction between partners' scores was remarkable in two couples. In couple 2, the wife got scored moderately high, whereas the husband's score was moderately low. In couple 8, the wife's score was high, whereas the husband got a rate of moderately low.

3.2.2. COUPLE CODES

There were five couple codes to assess the various aspects of the interaction between dyads. These codes focused on the relational features instead of individuals' distinct qualities. Thus, every dyad had one score for a couple code instead of two. These were negative escalation, cohesiveness, pursuit/withdrawal pattern, conflict management style, and balance of power. While the first three couple codes had a similar scoring system as a scale from one to five, the last two couple codes' scores were categorical.

3.2.2.1. Negative Escalation

The code of negative escalation assessed the chain of negative interaction between partners. For the occurrence of negative escalation, three steps should take place: firstly, one partner should behave negatively, then this negative behavior should be responded with another negative behavior of the other partner, and lastly, this negative response should also be returned negatively by the partner who acts in this way at the beginning. When one step of this cycle was missing, negative escalation could not be rated.

Fortunately, none of the couples complete a negative escalation cycle in their interaction. In other words, even if there was a negative behavior of one party, which was also responded negatively by the other partner, the valance of the subsequent response was neutral or positive. Or even better, the cycle ended without beginning when a hostile act was not responded to negatively by the other partner.

3.2.2.2. Cohesiveness

This couple code assessed the level of togetherness, sense of unity, and closeness between partners. A good connection and a common goal signified high cohesion, while disengagement and a sense of distance were considered as low cohesiveness.

Most of the couples exhibit high or moderately high levels of cohesion. However, one pair (C6) seemed to be slightly disengaged and distant and rated as moderately low in this code. Another couple (C4) could only reach a moderate level of cohesion because a deep connection between them could not be perceived. Two couples (C1, C8) had the highest scores with a high level of cohesiveness as they conveyed a remarkable sense of unity and teamwork.

3.2.2.3. Pursuit/Withdrawal Pattern

This code is used to examine a relational pattern of communication called pursuit/withdrawal. In this pattern, one partner actively chases the other to discuss an issue while the other partner uses various strategies to escape from the discussion. The pursuer partner can use complaints or demands to engage the other in the argument. However, this pursuing behavior fosters the other partner's avoidance instead of engaging. Moreover, the withdrawal behaviors such as denying the problem, changing the topic, or expressing a lack of interest can cause an increase in complaints of the pursuing partner. As a result, the dyad becomes stuck in this vicious cycle. To be rated in this code, a pursuing behavior should be responded to a withdrawal behavior or vice versa.

During the interactions, most of the couples rarely exhibited signs of this pattern in mild levels. While two dyads (C1, C3) showed no indicator of this pattern, the interactions of four of them were rated as moderately low. Different than others, one couple (C6) express moderate levels of pursuit/withdrawal pattern. In all dyads that showed signs of this pattern, women were the pursuer, and the men were the withdrawer.

3.2.2.4. Conflict Management Style

To assess the conflict management style of dyads, six different categories to describe various styles were considered. These categories were female pursuit/male withdrawal, male pursuit/female withdrawal, disengaged, high conflict-hostile, high conflict-expressive, and harmonious.

The first two categories represent a high level of pursuit/withdrawal pattern in which the discussion continues with the effort of only one party. In disengaged couples, none of the partners seems interested in conversation, and their communication appeared fragmented. In the other three styles, both partners seem actively engaged, but their manners differ. In high conflict-hostile couples, the tension, negativity, and hostility become apparent and intense on both sides. On the other hand, high conflict-expressive teams manage to maintain their emotional bond and respect for each other even though they expressed high levels of anger and conflictual behavior. Lastly, harmonious couples tend to discuss without any conflict by using constructive communication skills, preserving respect, and maintaining physical contact and positive affect.

Two different conflict management styles were prominent in these happy couples' interactions. Three couples' style was rated as high conflict-expressive (C1, C2, C4). Despite their quick-tempered and conflictual attitude, these couples managed to resolve their argument positively. Even though they increased their voices during the conflict, they always maintained their respectful stance and never showed any hostility towards each other. The other three couples (C3, C7, C8) who were rated as harmonious could endure their accord during their discussion. They never raised their voices, and they could express their thoughts to each other calmly. Their emotional and physical connection was visible, and their body language was relaxed and positive. One couple (C6) differed from these two groups regarding their conflict management styles. With higher withdrawal scores on the male side and women's pursuing behavior, their management style was rated as female pursuit/male withdrawal.

3.2.2.5. Balance of Power

This code assessed the power dynamics within couple relationship. Four distinct categories were defined to describe the distribution of power. The first one was balanced. In a balanced relationship, no dominance can be perceived in the interaction. Independent from the amount of talking, both partners seem to have equal weight in the process of decision-making and respect each other. The second and third categories represent inequality in power. In male-dominant relationships, decisions are made by the husband and wife's thoughts left disregarded. Despite her demands, the woman appears to have no power to change any aspect of the relationship or her husband. In female-dominant couples, these roles appear as reversed, and the woman seems to have more control. In the last category of conflictual imbalance, an active power struggle becomes apparent in the interaction. Even though none of the partners can achieve, they keep their effort to dominate the other.

While three of the couples (C3, C4, C8) appeared to have a balanced distribution of power, the other four differed regarding their power dynamics. In two couples (C1, C7), men seem to have more control during the interactions. In couple 1, the husband seemed unwilling to compromise, and his thoughts gained more respect from his wife, whereas the wife's opinions cannot carry weight in the discussion. In couple 7, the husband seemed to slide over his wife's demands, and her remarks became disregarded by him. Only one couple (C6) presented female-dominant characteristics. In this couple, the wife directed the flow of conversation, and she appeared to have more power in the decision-making process. In addition to that, the relational complaint came from the husband. Again, only one couple exhibited the features of conflictual imbalance during the interaction. Even though no dominance of one on another was observable, both partners appeared unwilling to compromise and seemed determined to make the other accept their personal offers.

3.3. RESULTS OF AGREEMENT SCALE

Each participant was asked to fill an agreement scale asking how they agree on specific issues as a couple. The means of the agreement scale scores are shown in the table. In this scale, participants were asked how they evaluated their relationships in eight different areas in addition to their general perceptions of marital happiness.

In total, the highest scores were given in marital happiness. While the perceptions of agreement on specific issues were lower, it can be said that problems were seen less for these couples when looking at the whole quality of their relationship, and satisfaction perceived becomes higher. On the other hand, among specific subjects, emotional intimacy had the highest score. The issue couples thought the least likely to agree on was the common interests between partners. This result can be interpreted as a finding that supports the separation that emerged in the thematic analysis. While they preserve their individual interests and personal lives, it can be thought that they could manage to get closer emotionally.

The responses to the agreement scale were also evaluated separately for men and women. The highest scores of women's perceived agreement belonged to the subject of child-rearing. These scores showed that women's appreciation of men's parenting significantly contributes to women's marital happiness. On the other hand, common interest had the lowest agreement scores for women. Interestingly, the highest and lowest means of scores in men differed from women's scores. The highest scores were seen in overall marital happiness, and the general happiness score was followed by emotional intimacy for men. Yet, in agreement with women, the lowest means were regarding common interests.

When the agreement scale scores are examined, there are striking differences between men and women. It is interesting to note that while women stated high satisfaction on a practical issue such as childcare, men thought that they had the highest adjustment in a sensitive area such as emotional intimacy. On the other hand, it has been observed that men and women agreed on the least compatible area of common

interest. Agreement scale results showed that men's scores appeared higher than women's, except for social life, managing extended family, and child-rearing. Also, the most significant disagreement was seen in social life; while women were quite satisfied with their agreement levels on socializing, men could not see themselves as compatible in this regard.

Table 3.3.

Means Scores in Agreement Scale

	Means of Female Scores	Means of Male Scores	Means of All Scores
Overall Marital Happiness	8,62	9,19	8,90
Emotional Intimacy	8,37	8,87	8,62
Time Spent Together	8,37	8,62	8,50
Common Interest	7,14	7,00	7,06
Social Life	8,43	7,62	8,00
Managing Extended Family	8,29	8,00	8,13
Child-rearing	8,71	8,00	8,33
Sexuality	8,29	8,50	8,40
Finance/Work	7,57	7,87	7,73

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the relational experiences and interactional dynamics of self-reported happy couples who were at least ten years married with at least one child. The thematic analysis presents eight main themes to portray participants' marriage in terms of their perceptions, relationship history, family structure, interpersonal and external factors, and prominent characteristics of their relationship. Participants' reports were also investigated through observation of their interactions.

Some of the findings appeared to be thought-provoking regarding their indications about characteristics of happy marriages. Increased divorce rates indicate that maintaining a satisfying marital relationship can be highly challenging (Cohen, 2019; Eurostat, 2018; TUIK, 2018). While conflicts are increasing with new challenges each year, the inability to adapt to changing roles and needs can set partners apart or decrease perceived satisfaction (James, 2015; VanLaningham et al., 2001). However, the current study shows that a decline in marital happiness is not inevitable. Enhancing marital relationship and transforming adversities into positive change through learning is possible despite faced challenges. Beyond that, contrary to previous literature, witnessing a negative model of marriage in the family of origin may not always lead to dysfunctional relationships in adult life (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998; Rhoades et al., 2012). Transforming adversities perceived in parents' relationship and transmission of the positive qualities can help individuals overcome the potential negative impact of their past experiences.

Another finding that differed from the world literature was about the feelings that prevail in the romantic relationship. Contrary to claims showing the increase in love marriages today, the dominant emotions in the relationship of happy couples participating in this study were companionate love and a sense of friendship (Perel, 2006). Even though none of the couples were married in an arranged fashion, they seemed still to consider respectability, property, security, and equivalence.

According to Olson's Circumplex Model (2000), the balance regarding flexibility and cohesion is vital. These couples presented higher levels of flexibility with their ability to adapt to changing circumstances such as having children or empty nest after children's leave. Besides, they managed to overcome significant crises such as bankruptcy or extramarital relationships by accepting and adapting to change and exchanging roles when needed. The balance of cohesion was achieved by setting boundaries to the family of origin as well as within the nuclear family. However, they also maintained a connection with their families and valued their support. Similarly, they preserved their personal time and space as well as showing effort to create time for the couple. Additionally, they were able to differentiate their roles of parent and spouse.

Even though the attachment styles of participants were not assessed, their narratives give clues about their attitudes and reactions in times of relational stress as well as situations of closeness and distance. The balanced levels of cohesion hint about their comfort to get close as well as their ability to be apart. In this sense, they exhibit secure attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). However, it did not mean that all participants are securely attached from the beginning of their relationships. Studies suggest that attachment styles are not rigid and stable over the life course (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). Even though the majority of the population preserves their attachment style due to the patterns caused by their internal working model, several factors seem to lead to alterations in attachment styles. However, the possible change depends on different and complex mechanisms such as intrapsychic processes, interpersonal relations, and situational events and circumstances (Davila et al., 1999). Davila and colleagues claim that attachment security increases with marital duration. Partners begin to feel safer in their relationship with increased trust and a decrease in fear of abandonment. The reports of current participants also support his findings. On the other hand, previous studies also suggest that securely attached individuals feel greater satisfaction in their marriages, and the duration of marriages appears higher with greater commitment

(Duemmler & Kobak, 2001; Feeney, 1994; Fuller & Fincham, 1995; Simpson, 1990). Thus, the processes behind the change in attachment styles appear to be bidirectional. The more securely attached individuals have longer and satisfying marriages, leading to positive changes in their attachment styles.

In certain cultures, which place more emphasis on the group's well-being, it may be tricky to preserve one's individuality in marital union. In a culture of relatedness (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1985), the Turkish family structure embraces particular qualities that signify a higher level of cohesion to the point of enmeshment (Sunar & Fisek, 2005; Turkdogan et al., 2019). However, participants in the current study presented a balanced picture regarding separateness and togetherness. Moreover, their experiences regarding equality and disregard of gender roles also contradicted previous claims about the hierarchical structure of the Turkish family (Boratav et al., 2017; Sunar & Fisek, 2005). The previous studies suggest an impact of socioeconomic level on embraced family structure and couple dynamics in Turkey (Bayer, 2020; Fişek, 1993; Zeybekoğlu, 2013). While a more egalitarian and modern approach in the couple relationship is reported in upper-class families, a hierarchical and enmeshed structure appears in lower-class rural families. Thus, the difference in marital configuration can be explained by the unique socioeconomic qualities of these current participants.

The social and economic features can determine the barriers and resources of a marital relationship. The ecological model proposes that resources such as social status, financial stability, employment, and social support appear to be highly effective in a marriage (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). The current participants seemed to benefit from these resources with their higher income levels, higher levels of education and remarkable careers, and support from their friends, families, or paid housekeepers. Moreover, they had significant characteristics at the individual level to facilitate their marital relationship, such as being healthy, educated, mindful, tolerant, appreciating, supportive, aggregable, open, and trustful. At the interpersonal level, these characteristics lead to attitudes such as reciprocity, equality, intimacy, respect, and a sense of uniqueness in time. As a result, their relationship created emotions such as

trust, love, friendship, togetherness they wish to presume. Nevertheless, they had to deal with specific barriers, too. One partner's anxiety and depression, another's an extramarital affair, and some other's bankruptcy appeared to be barriers overcome by these couples in three levels.

When the communication strategies were examined, it was seen that couples looked for solutions without allowing the problems to grow, and they preferred to talk immediately instead of accumulating. According to Gottman and colleagues (1998), several features of interaction such as de-escalation, high levels of positivity, low wife's low negativity, and husband's acceptance of wife's influence appear crucial for marital stability and happiness. Therefore, considering the presence of all these qualities in the current sample, it can be said that the couples had relatively healthier communication according to the observational findings. However, it has been observed that positive communication skills are much higher in women than in men. In accordance with the existing literature, it can be said that women's social skills are much more developed, and they have a higher share in the constructive course of the discussions (Carstensen et al., 1995).

In this section, the remarkable findings that emerged from thematic analysis and observation will be discussed in detail according to the distinctive features of participants' experiences. The discussion will be carried out considering the parallelism and divergence of the findings with the previous literature.

4.1. REMARKABLE FINDINGS OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

4.1.1. Positive Change

One of the most prominent findings of this research was the perceived positive change in marital happiness. Nearly all couples stated that their relationships were at their best time and getting better every day. According to their accounts, their marriage was not as positively valenced in the past as today. Emotional differentiation from the family of origin, prioritization of the nuclear family instead of the family of origin,

friends, or work, men's improved involvement in childrearing, and intensified trust between the couple were among the subjects of this change.

The impact of time on marital happiness differs across models and perspectives (Amato & James, 2018). While some models propose that marital satisfaction declines over time (Huston et al., 2001; James, 2015), some others claim that marriages are mostly stable, and duration has no effect on spouses' happiness (Amato & James, 2018; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Different then these two perspectives, our results support the model of resilience that offers an amelioration in marital happiness (Alea et al., 2015; Reid & Ahmad, 2015). This model suggests that the we-ness sensed by spouses contributes to marriage satisfaction (Reid & Ahmad, 2015), and coping skills gained through the challenges strengthen the intimacy between partners (Fergus & Skerrett, 2015) as well as the improved communication strategies (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Becoming less reactive in older ages as a result of maturation also enhance marital quality (Carstensen et al., 1995). However, these kinds of progress can only take place in intact, flexible, and well-functioning relationships. Nevertheless, we should also take into account that marriages that do not evolve over time or those that decline, may already be divorced or even stayed married do not describe themselves as happy. Therefore, our sample is only the couples whose marriage was happy since the beginning or became happier with time. As relationships that are unstable or do not improve over time do not survive, the possible impact of this factor should be considered while making inferences about positive change in long-term relationships (Glenn, 1990; Umberson et al., 2005).

Apart from these factors, the perception of positive change claimed in the current study can also be interpreted considering the positive influence of time on the perception of marital happiness. Some studies suggest that people who are currently happy and satisfied in their relationships can feel that their relationship improved in time even though there is no actual change (Ross, 1989; Sprecher, 1999). Real or perceived, according to the existing literature, either way, the positive change can only

be perceived if the relationship functions well. At least, we can presume that the claimed happiness by participants seemed to be confirmed by the previous findings.

4.1.2. Impact of Parents' Relationship

The most exciting finding of the study was about the parents' relationship quality of the participants. The negative impact of conflictual marriages on children's romantic relationships is well-established in the existing literature. Children of unhappy parents can have pessimistic beliefs about being married as well as their lack of sound modeling (Amato & Booth, 2001; Dallos et al., 2016; Melo & Mota, 2014). Thus, it was reasonable to expect happy couples to have reliable parental models. Interestingly, the majority of the pair in the current study revealed that the negative qualities of their parent's marital relationship were quite remarkable while the positive ones were inconsiderable. However, instead of getting affected by these unfavorable qualities negatively, they could manage to transform these adversities into strengths in their own marriage. Even though what these couples achieved is a difficult task, a highly similar study in Turkey also presents similar findings (Özdemir-Kemahli, 2019).

There are some previous findings suggest that a favorable parent-child relationship can mediate the negative impact of parents' marital discord on children's relationship (Caspi & Elder, 1988; Conger et al., 2000). However, most of the participants who had witnessed unhappy couple relationship in their childhood also had negative experiences at least one of the parents. Moreover, there are other findings suggests that the impact of parental relationship appears independent from the parent-child relationship (Amato & Booth, 2001).

On the other hand, the ability to alter the adverse features of parental relationships by means of reversal can be explained through the process of differentiation (Gerson et al., 1993). According to Bowen, individuals can differentiate themselves from their parents by gaining awareness about the influences of their past familial experiences on their current life and relationships (Bowen, 1978). Bearing in mind the participants' narrations regarding their understanding of the destructive

patterns they witness in their family of origin and effort to overcome them by not repeating, their ability to transform these adversities can be understood.

As well as differentiation itself, the harmony between partners in terms of emotional separation from the family of origin predicts marital adjustment (Rodríguez-González et al., 2016). Even though for some participants differentiation could occur later in the marital course, the current similarity about the spouses' levels of differentiation was remarkable. Bowen (1978) also suggests that, higher or lower, people tend to match with a partner who has similar level of differentiation with themselves. Thus, the positive impact of the concordance in differentiation levels should also be considered.

In addition to transforming negative qualities, transporting the favorable aspects of parents' partnership through modeling was also used as a beneficial strategy by these happy couples (Gerson et al., 1993). Instead of rejecting all features of parental relationships, the participants also seemed to carry the positive aspects of their parents' marriage into their own marriage. Bowen emphasizes a distinction between processes of emotional cut-off and differentiation. When individuals choose to deal with negativities in their family history by cutting off, differentiation is not possible. In order to differentiate properly, one should be able to step back emotionally and evaluate both the positive and negative aspects of their parents. As a result, instead of being dispersed to the totally opposite site, they can find their own way as a differentiated individual (Bowen, 1978). Moreover, the maintenance of the parents' marriages may also positively affect marital (Booth & White, 1980; Gottman, 1994). Except for one participant, there was no history of divorce in the family of origin. Hence, these participants may not consider divorce as an option.

Furthermore, comparing parents' marriage and one's own also seems to increase the perceived happiness of the participants. Considering that the majority of the participants shared negative qualities of their parent's marriage, the positive impact of comparison appears understandable. Seeing the enormous distinction seems to help the individual to appreciate their marital relationship. In this way, negative qualities of

parents' relationships work as facilitators for enjoying the favorable features of the current marriage.

Similarly, Özdemir-Kemahlı (2019) shows that experiences in the family of origin have a positive effect on happy couples. In line with the current research, three different processes work behind this impact: 1- transferring the positive aspects by modeling 2- reversing the negative characteristics by doing the opposite 3- appreciating partner more comparing to the parents' negative experiences. On the other hand, in Özdemir-Kemahlı's study, a tiny portion of the participants mentioned negative family experiences in their pasts. However, in the current study, the majority of the sample admitted a conflictual or distant relationship between their parents.

There is no doubt that these couples were resilient. It is expected that those who were adversely affected by their parents' negative experiences were not eligible to participate in this study because they could not continue their marriages happily. Yet, it does not give any reasons why most participants had negative models in their past. However, the significant changes in the social context in the last decades can provide a possible explanation. Turkey had a rapid social change that leads modifications in family structure and expectations from marriage (Beşpınar, 2014; Bozok, 2018; Gazioğlu, 2014). Maybe, the parents' relationship was not that awful for them. Still, the changing social structure and expectations about marriage may have caused these participants to perceive their parents' relationship negatively. According to their accounts, in parents' marriage, a hierarchical structure was apparent, women were not working and had no economic independence, and gender equality was not achieved. Perhaps viewing the past from today, when more egalitarian and modern approaches are adopted, may have created additional negativity in their perception.

4.1.3. The Balance Between Separateness and Togetherness

The importance of balance between togetherness and separateness appeared as another critical factor that contributes to marital happiness. According to the Circumplex Model (2000), balanced levels of cohesion are vital for a family functioning. The balance of cohesiveness is characterized by both togetherness and

separateness. Family members should both feel the emotional connection and personal boundaries between them (Olson, 2000).

The participants of the current study presented a balanced picture regarding cohesiveness in terms of their relationship with their parents, children, and each other. Even though establishing interpersonal boundaries was apparent, one should keep in mind that the appropriate level of cohesion differs across cultures. What is normative and functioning differs according to the cultural norms and expectancies (Olson, 2000). In "a culture of relatedness" (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1985), Turkish couples balanced levels of cohesion can be perceived as extremely high from a Western perspective. Normative Turkish family can be recognized as enmeshed considering diffused boundaries, prioritizing family's needs over individuals, and extreme closeness (Sunar & Fisek, 2005; Turkdogan et al., 2019). However, it is possible to say that the level of cohesion that the current participants described seemed lower than the norms of the Turkish population. Setting boundaries to parents, discriminating parental identity and partnership, and protecting interpersonal borders can be counted as the factors that moderate the cohesiveness.

On the other hand, they also differed from the Western standards in respect to low levels of individualism. Fitting to Kağıtçıbaşı's model of interrelatedness, the closeness between family members was also crucial (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). These couples seemed to benefit from their parents' financial and practical support when needed. Thus, having boundaries did not seem to prevent getting assistance. However, concordant with the circumplex model's propositions, several participants revealed that while a certain amount of closeness contributed to their happiness, in any circumstances signifying enmeshed levels of connection, the impact's valence has been turned to negative (Olson, 2000).

What was significant about these couples was their levels of awareness and ability to intervene. Their emotional differentiation can explain their aptitude for not only protecting boundaries but also preserving closeness. Bowen's family systems theory (1974) also explains the resilience regarding negative past experiences of the

couples, which they could manage to overcome. If the differentiation from the family of origin is not achieved, individuals can struggle between their expectations which are familiar, and their experiences which will be strange to them. This struggle may increase relational stress and alienation between spouses. On the other hand, through emotional differentiation, spouses can revise their expectancies and form a brand new configuration in their relationship (Bowen, 1978).

Lastly, the family structure and the boundaries within and between sub-systems significantly impact the family's functioning (Minuchin, 2018). Minuchin's structural family therapy model mainly focuses on the hierarchical structure and the organization of sub-systems. According to him, the couple sub-system should be above the child sub-system. Moreover, the boundaries between these two sub-systems should be well-established (Minuchin, 2018). Considering the distinction between parent and partner roles emphasized in the interviews, it is possible to say that these couples could preserve the functional family structure.

4.1.4. Gender Roles and Equality

One of the most remarkable qualities of these happy couples was the perception of equality between partners. Most of the participants emphasized the sense of equality regarding the distribution of roles in family life. Even though wives and husbands undertook different responsibilities, only a few female participants revealed disturbances regarding sensed gender-based inequity in the relationship. Similar to the literature, their complaints primarily focused on childcare and housework (Çopur & Gürel, 2020). Apart from the few, most couples seemed content about the configured role division.

Gender roles and the hierarchical structure appeared to impact marital happiness according to their level of traditionality (Asoodeh et al., 2010). The current findings also supported this claim about the influence of traditionality on perceived satisfaction regarding gender roles. For example, the wife's staying behind the husband while taking care of children and the family seemed to foster marital happiness for a couple who embraced religious values and traditional family structure. On the contrary,

for the couples, which incorporated an egalitarian approach into their lives, the equity and flexibility in roles appeared as contributors to their happiness.

The majority of the women in this study had a remarkable amount of income. As a result, their contributions to the household income were significant. As stated in the interviews, some of them had been able to provide for all family's financial needs alone in the past. However, as opposed to Alola and colleagues' findings, women's economic independence and power increase marital happiness by fostering equality between partners in these couples' marriages (Alola et al., 2020). All of the male participants seemed pleased with their wives' high level of education and income. In fact, for one couple, the most conflicting issue between them was related to the wife's wish to retire despite the husband's opposition. The socioeconomic level of the sample can explain this discrepancy. The findings proposing a relationship between marital dissatisfaction and women's employment and financial income are from the research conducted with middle or low-SES couples (Bolak, 2002). However, other research suggests that the impact of women's participation in household income varies across different socioeconomic levels and levels of traditionality (Hajdu & Hajdu, 2018; Sunar & Fisek, 2005). The results of this investigation also support these previous findings.

Satisfaction about partner's contribution and role is crucial for a sense of equity. In line with previous findings, spouses have a perception of efficiency in their partner's role performance (Özdemir-Kemahlı, 2019). In this sense, it is seen that spouses fulfill each other's expectations regarding their roles as a spouse and a parent. However, Özdemir-Kemahlı also suggests that spouses evaluate each other flexibly in terms of any insufficiency. The findings of the current study seem to take this flexibility one step further. Spouses not only tolerate each other's minor deficiency in their role but also manage to overcome major difficulties and relational crises that can be seen as critical flaws. Considering these difficulties, although the couples find each other sufficient today, the tolerance and endurance they have shown in the problems experienced in their past appears remarkable.

4.1.5. Friends More Than Lovers

The love between the partners emerged as an essential element in the participants' relationship. However, the words used to refer to the affection of love differed across the couples. In the Turkish language, there are two separate terms to describe the different ways of love. The first one of them is "aşk," which is used to denote passionate romantic love. This kind of love signifies a romantic and sexual desire toward another person and is generally used to describe the emotions between lovers. On the other hand, the other term called "sevgi" in Turkish is usually used to refer to the compassionate and affectionate love between two people. This expression can be used to designate between friends and family as well as spouses.

Even though the same division was not commonly documented in Western literature because of the language limit, the nuanced versions of love were explored and defined by some scholars. Hatfield & Rapson (in press) underline a distinction between passionate and companionate love. They define passionate love as "a state of intense longing for union with another." In contrast, they define companionate love as "The affection and tenderness we feel for those with whom our lives are deeply entwined." While passionate love was characterized with powerful emotions such as exhilaration, desire, anxiety, longing, jealousy, and obsession (Aron et al., 2006; Sternberg, 1997), the companionate love was distinguished with attachment, tenderness, commitment, and intimacy (Mikulincer & Goodman, 2006; Sternberg & Sternberg, 2018).

The majority of the participants' descriptions of love seemed to agree with the definition of companionate love instead of a passionate one. Even though none of the couples were united through an arranged marriage, their convenience-based preferences and reasoning were remarkable. They underlined the importance of equivalence and accord between each other rather than intense emotions regarding their marriage decision. This finding differs from the proposition about the new concept of love marriages claiming that emotions have a higher impact than reasoning in the conclusion of marriage (Perel, 2006). Some of the participants particularly mentioned

how distinct their feelings were from passionate love. However, they also reported that the feelings of love intensified through their marriage, and the love bond strengthened in time.

Stage theories about the developmental trajectory of marital life suggest a passionate beginning turning into a companionate relationship (Coleman, 1977). For the lucky ones, this passionate love turns into a companionate one that gives rise to a stable marriage (Huesmann, 1980; Sternberg, 1998). Interestingly, most of the current participants claimed that companionship and convenience outweighed the passion even at the beginning of their relationship. Besides, Hatfield and Rapson (in press) propose that for most of the marriage, not only passionate love but also companionate affections diminish in time. However, as opposed to a decline, the compassionate bond between these couples appeared to increase.

Similarities between them seemed to facilitate their companionship. Concordant with the previous literature, it appears that similarities have a more positive effect on relationship happiness and stability in long-term marriages than differences (Asoodeh et al., 2010; Bachand & Caron, 2001). Even in multicultural couples with diverse ethnic, national and cultural backgrounds, focusing on the resemblances instead of disparities appears to strengthen the emotional bond and enhance couple relationship (Doğan, 2019). Likewise, although there are many differences between the couples in this study, it is seen that couples benefit from the unifying power of these similarities by finding and underlining them. As suggested by the literature, they see the differences mentioned as a chance to complement each other and become stronger as a couple (Yelsma, 1981). In case of differences that cannot be evaluated positively, approaches such as respect, tolerance, and being able to stand together with differences are used as coping methods.

Moreover, their emotions of love appeared to be nurtured by their friendship. The cherishing effect of friendship was expected considering the vast literature about the vitality of companionship in happy marriages (Asoodeh et al., 2011; Asoodeh et al., 2010; Bachand & Caron, 2001; Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Lauer et al., 1990; Reibstein,

1997). Consonant with this literature, the friendship between them seemed to have more weight in their accordance, and they perceived themselves as friends more than lovers.

4.1.6. Communication Strategies

These happy couples embraced several communication strategies. Resolving conflicts through talking, open communication, and agreeing to disagree on some subjects were the ones that became prominent. Despite high levels of harmony and accordance, these couples did not present a relational structure of complete unity which is not permitting any conflict. On the other hand, they displayed strong disagreements about various subjects. Moreover, they also expressed difficulty in resolving several issues in their life and marriage. In fact, the expression of negative emotions such as anger was also apparent. However, what distinguished them from unhappy couples were their conflict resolution styles and manner of dispute.

According to Gottman (1995), destructive communication patterns such as stonewalling, criticism, contempt, and defensiveness prevent conflict resolution and weakens the emotional bond in dysfunctional relationships. Instead of using these harmful and ineffective ways, the happy couples preferred solution-focused discussions to resolve problems through talking promptly, openly communicating the issue, and accepting different perspectives when they could not reach an agreement.

While these effective approaches emerged in the thematic analysis of the interviews, the actual interactional patterns of these couples were also scrutinized by using an observational coding system. In the following section, the observational findings and the matching between interview and observation data will be discussed.

4.2. REMARKABLE FINDINGS OF INTERACTIONAL OBSERVATION

The main reason behind adding the observation method was to investigate the relevance between self-report and actual (or enacted) interaction of the participants. As a result, it is possible to say that the SCID scores supported the qualitative findings.

Compared to couples who use dysfunctional communication patterns, the participants' scores were relatively lower in negatively valued behaviors and higher in the positive ones (Carstensen et al., 1995; Margolin, 1981). For example, verbal aggression and negative escalation had never been seen in these couples' interactions. The pursuit-withdrawal pattern, which occurs when a partner pursues while the other withdraws, is highly prevalent in dysfunctional couples who come to therapy (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Johnson, 2019). Besides, numerous studies suggest an association between demand/withdraw pattern and marital dissolution (Fogarty, 1976; Heavey et al., 1995; Noller et al., 1994). This destructive pattern was appeared low in the current sample except for only one couple who had moderate scores. As stated in the interviews, these couples could calmly talk about their relational conflicts instead of withdrawing or escalating.

There are different perspectives in determining the structure of the demand/withdrawal pattern. Gender differences perspective suggest that because of the specific distinct characteristics of two genders, women tend to be pursuer while men mostly prefer withdrawal (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). The social structure view claims that, especially in traditional marriages, men benefit more from marital relationship and wish to preserve the status quo while women seek change (Jacobson, 1990; Margolin et al., 1983). Another perspective suggests that the demand/withdrawal structure is related to the topic chosen. According to the conflict structure perspective, if the topic discussed is about the man's demand for a change, the man will be the pursuer, and the woman becomes the withdrawer. When the current sample was investigated from these two perspectives, a balanced picture was seen. While one couple chose to discuss a joint topic, three of them discussed men's topics demanding a change, and three others discussed women's ones. As opposed to the social structure view, these couples present a balanced distribution between genders, implying an equal and balanced marital relationship (Jacobson, 1990). Moreover, the subjects they chose were regarding an issue affecting both parties and acknowledged by them both. For example, none of the husbands withdrew from the discussion about their wives' will.

Thus, the union was still remarkable, independent from the demand's owner. On the other hand, another perspective claims that gender differences and conflict structure affect positioning in a mixed fashion (Christen & Heavey, 1990). Thus, the structure not only depends on gender but also on the side of demand for change. The couple who exhibits pursuit/withdrawal pattern seems to suit this perspective. Even though it was the husband who demands change, he was still in the withdrawer position.

Another thematic finding supported in the observations was the emotional closeness between the partners. Accordant with the sense of togetherness was emphasized in the interviews, these couples exhibited higher levels of cohesion during their discussions. Instead of splitting, they appeared emotionally close, united against the problem, and fought together. Concordant with the thematic findings, the use of humor, especially when the tension escalated, was observed during the interviews. According to previous findings, in happy and stable relationships, women tend to use humor in order to soothe their husbands. In return, men respond with positive affect, which helps de-escalation (Gottman et al., 1998). This soothing pattern was also apparent in current participants' interactions.

The healthy interactional dynamics can explain these optimistic results between these couples. On the other hand, it is also possible to interpret this finding from another perspective. The scores of the pair, who had moderate scores on the pursuit-withdrawal pattern, were distinct from the other six couples on most of the codes were distinct. Concordant with the pursuit-withdrawal patterns, higher withdrawal scores appeared on the male side, and their conflict management style was distinctive as female pursuit-male withdrawer. As a result, this couple had the lowest scores in cohesion among seven couples.

Even though it is reasonable to recognize this couple as an outlier, it is also possible to understand their discrete scores from another perspective. Considering observed tension in their affective states even at the beginning of their discussion, the potential impact of their acute distress seems critical. These distinctions can be related to their higher stress levels at the time of observation. It should be noted that only this

specific couple chose to discuss a topic that emotionally affected them at the current time. Their conflict was active, and their stress was already elevated. According to Haynes (2001), the rates of behavior can be influenced by situational context. The experimental setting can alter the actual interactions of participants. For example, negative behaviors occur less in a lab context than in home-based observations (Gottman, 1979). However, observation methods can provide relatively accurate information about the couple's stress level (Haynes, 2001).

Moreover, the couples' current stress levels can affect negative behaviors in discussion tasks (Weiss & Heyman, 1990). Likewise, adult attachment styles can govern the emotional reactions of individuals, especially in a stressful situation; spouses' conflict resolution strategies may also differ regarding the stress level of interactions (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Johnson, 2019). Considering these factors, higher scores of this specific couple can be related to their existing stress at the time of observation. The home setting that facilitates the occurrence of natural interaction might also foster the natural conflict that was already present. Thus, discriminating their relationship quality through this observation can be tricky because it was difficult to decide whether their relational stress was acute or chronic confidently.

The SCID results presented several remarkable differences between genders. First of all, the problem-solving communication skills of women were significantly higher than the of men. Moreover, in the discussion, women used more elevated amounts of supportive responses and behaviors than men. Similarly, while their positive affect was considerably higher than men's, they had relatively lower scores not only on negativity and control but also on attempts to control. As expected, they withdrew less in the interaction than men.

The high levels of men's attempts to control were noteworthy. Even though these couples expressed a more egalitarian dynamic than their parents and the rest of the population, men still seem to pursue and protect their position of authority in the relationship. However, considering that these attempts have remained in an effort rather than an accomplishment, it may be related to the women's positional strength in the

relationship. In the traditional normative structure, it can be said that men have more say and ideas, and women adapt to their husbands. Though, this kind of configuration does not seem to appear in these couples' interactions.

These results are supported by the previous literature suggesting that women are better in social interaction than men with their superiority in communicational skills. Considering the necessity of abilities such as emotional expression and empathic attunement in childcare, women's superiority can be understood (Ablon et al., 2013). Moreover, women appear to perceive communication as a way of connection, while men aim to establish dominance and preserve their status through communication (Gray, 1992; Tannen, 1991). Women in this sample also appeared to use these skills to resolve conflicts and convey their thoughts. They were more empathic, supportive, and attuned to their partner's reactions, and they expressed higher levels of positivity.

Though, research shows that women tend to articulate more negativity and criticism regarding relational issues in a demanding manner (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). However, women exhibit less negativity compared to their husbands in this study. In a way, they used their communication skills to reach a solution in conflicts and make their ideas heard instead of nagging and complaining. In a way, the positive features of these happy couples seemed to be more related to the positive attitude of wives. Yet, it is known that men's openness to women's influence is crucial for a happy and stable marital relationship. Husbands who accept their wife's influence are able to de-escalate conflict and prevent the increase of wife's negativity (Gottman et al., 1998). Thus, the positive interaction of these happy couples may be related to men's openness and acceptance as well as women's positive attitudes.

On the other hand, it should be considered that women may have been careful to present an attitude that they thought appropriate (being non-critical, supportive, expressing their own feelings and thoughts). Hawthorne Effect (French, 1953), which describes this situation, suggests increased positive results due to the awareness of being observed. Thus, women might be performed better because of knowing that they were subjected to an evaluation. Except for one couple in all pairs, wives were the ones

to propose to attend this research with a claim of happiness. Thus, they might feel responsible for showing their functionality not only to the researcher but also to themselves. On the other hand, men might be less aware of the significance of these skills, even if they knew it. Else, they may have trouble applying it or do not care about how they will look as much as women. Still, even if wives were affected by being observed, their positive scores show that women can embrace and perform positive interactional patterns more than men.

Regarding conflict management skills, it was seen that the majority of the observed couples' styles were harmonious or high-conflict expressive. This finding also supports the qualitative data regarding couples' preferences for talking to resolve conflicts, which is emphasized in the interviews. While three couples exchanged ideas quite harmoniously and calmly, it was seen that three of them were more emotionally elevated and defended their ideas more passionately. However, at the end of the discussion, they showed reconciliation with positive emotions and calming down. Gottman (1995) suggest three types of couples who are successful in marital relationship. These are validating, volatile, and avoidant types. From his definitions, three couples who exhibit harmonious interactional skills seem to fit validating ones with empathy, listening skills, and accordance through conflict. The other three who exhibit high-conflict expressive suit the definition of volatile couples with their heated arguments ending calmly.

The normative conflict management styles used by couples differ across distinct cultures. A recent study exploring the conflict management styles of couples from different ethnic groups by using SCID shows that functional and dysfunctional interactions of Latino/Hispanic couples and European couples vary (Lindahl et al., 2020). While withdrawal behavior increases relational stress and marital satisfaction in Latino/Hispanic couples, expressing high conflict through interaction signifies marital distress in European couples. European happy couples remarkably use a harmonious style, and a harmonious style correlates with high levels of marital satisfaction in those

couples. On the other hand, in Latino/Hispanic couples, happy couples mostly use a high conflict expressive style.

These differences were explained with the concepts of familism, personalismo, and respeto embraced in Latino cultures which emphasize high cohesion, strong familial bonds, inter-dependence, and mutual respect (Bermudez & Mancini, 2013; Campos et al., 2014). As a result, having conflicts and resolving them within the family was preferred by Latino/Hispanic couples, while withdrawal was perceived as threatening. In contrast to Latino/Hispanic couples, those who use high conflict expressive management styles report moderate levels of marital stress (Lindahl et al., 2020).

The resemblance between Latino and Turkish culture regarding collectivistic tendencies such as familism, interconnectedness, and interdependence was documented (Erol & Düztaş, 2016). Hence, embracing a high conflict expressive style seems to be validating the happiness levels of the couples in the current sample. On the other hand, the Turkish culture appears to be bridging Western and Eastern cultures. Whereas a strong presence of traditional configuration, modern qualities of Western culture also are present, especially in the urban side of the country (Sunar & Fisek, 2005). Thus, two main presentations of conflict resolution styles as harmonious and high conflict expressive can be understood by the dual quality of Turkish culture. Considering that almost all couples except acutely distressed one, who presented pursuit-withdrawal pattern, in the study exhibited these two functional styles, it can be said that these couples' happiness levels were confirmed with the previous literature.

When power dynamics were investigated, the balance of power was the most prevalent pattern among these couples. However, each category representing different management of power distribution could be perceived. Thus, each couple had their own configuration, and a variety regarding power dynamics was present. Nevertheless, in a culture which can be considered as male-dominant with gender-based hierarchical family structure (Boratav et al., 2017; Sunar & Fisek, 2005), it becomes interesting when only two couple had a male-dominant interaction. Hence, it is possible to say that

equality and equivalence emphasized in the interviews were supported by observational data.

4.3. CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

As a result of the vitality of marital happiness and stability, many people refer to couple and family therapists when they have relational difficulties that threaten their marital union. The current study hopes to illuminate prominent factors related to marital happiness to provide valuable information that couple and family therapists may benefit from while helping their clients. In this section, some of the findings will be discussed regarding possible clinical implications.

First of all, considering the emphasis on balancing separateness and togetherness voiced by happy couples, a few suggestions to clinicians who work with couples can be made. In couple therapy, spouses can generally exhibit diverse positions regarding their needs about separateness and closeness. While one partner wishes to get closer, the other usually tries to expand relational distance. As they sense each other's distinct will, their sense of threat increases, and they intensify their effort to achieve their needs. Unfortunately, instead of finding a balance between them, these efforts only increase their polarization. As a result, their positions become fixed in two distinct sides and cannot reach one another (Johnson, 2019). Even though the closeness between spouses can indicate relational health, it should be noted that in order to strengthen the emotional bond and increase contact, the establishment of differentiation becomes necessary (Kağıtçibasi, 1996). The current findings also imply the vitality of a balance between separateness and closeness. Thus, couple therapists also should keep in mind that both of these needs are valid and serve a purpose in romantic relationships. Perhaps it would be beneficial to use interventions to meet and balance the needs of both sides. Reframing the situation by highlighting that the underlying aim of both parties' efforts was to balance the needs of their relationship instead of pulling and pushing each other to opposite ends can also help. In this way, each side can be heard

and validated, and this may allow them to relax the ropes a little. And only after that may it be possible and central to work on how partners can satisfy these needs and find a balance between them.

As mentioned above, when partners got stuck in only one specific role, it becomes complicated to achieve constructive communication. Deficits in communication lead to a negative cycle characterized by negative reciprocal behaviors between partners (Johnson, 2019). Couples who come to therapy usually appear to be the victim of this negative cycle. However, the current findings propose that a positive cycle between spouses which is distinguished with positive reciprocal responses, is crucial for relational happiness. According to the qualitative and observational investigation, reciprocity of optimistic view and appreciation seemed to be a key element contributing to these couples' happiness. Hence, interventions focusing on breaking the negative cycle appear to be a good start in couple therapy.

Another prominent outcome of this study was the positive impact of having good relationships with in-laws on marital happiness. However, it may not always be easy to construct and maintain good connections with the partner's family. Results indicate that to achieve it, individuals should position themselves in between their own family and their partner as a buffer and preserve an optimal distance between the two parts. Moreover, they should be good at setting and maintaining boundaries with their own families. Couple and family therapists may benefit from assessing the organizational arrangement of the family from this perspective and use structural interventions to change dysfunctional configurations within the relational system. For example, with a couple who are struggling with intrusions of the husband's parents, changing the roles by taking responsibility to set boundaries from the wife and giving it to the husband can be highly helpful to enhance the relationship between the wife and her in-laws.

Although this research aimed to draw inferences from common factors related to marital happiness and stability, the results of this study suggest that we should also consider the differences, especially in the clinical setting. Even though there were

numerous commonalities between eight couples, each of them also had unique features. For example, unlike other teams, one pair stated that they did not exhibit or like physical intimacy behaviors such as touching or kissing, especially in public. On the other hand, the relational dynamics that they shared seemed to be considered enmeshment according to the circumplex model. They stated they worked in the same workplace, their social life is minimal, and they do not spend much time apart.

On the other hand, it is understood that this couple was also able to unite in the face of the difficulties created by their children. Consequently, they were appeared to get closer while fighting against the problems in their lives. Even though they shared their wish to socialize more, they did not complain about the extreme levels of closeness. These findings are consistent with the argument suggesting that functionality depends on the embraced norms rather than a standard measure (Turkdogan et al., 2019). Thus, it should be remembered that what works for each couple can be different. Embracing the same approach with different couples and expecting the same results can be disappointing for everyone in the therapy room.

Apart from these, it may be beneficial to consider all the findings of the thematic analysis and observation about the characteristics of a happy and long-term couple relationship to assess and predict marital stability and happiness in couple and family therapy. Moreover, these findings may function as a guide for couple education and prevention programs. As well, this study highlights several key points for pre-marital counselling that aiming for a stable and happy marriage.

4.4. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study investigated the factors contributing to marital happiness and stability by focusing on the experiences and interactions of happy couples through qualitative and observational methods. It is unique combining these two methods, which both provide richness in data regarding participants' relational dynamics. The sample consists of 16 participants, and both individual and couple interviews were

conducted to assure the adequacy of the information. Nevertheless, some limitations about the process of analysis and sample also existed in this study.

With a similar subject, the recent investigation of Özdemir-Kemahlı (2019) fills an important gap in the Turkish literature. Hence, the presence of a comparable study can be considered as a drawback of this research. On the other hand, it should be noted that there are significant differences between the two studies. The major distinction between the two investigations appears to be their discrete focus. Özdemir-Kemahlı's sample consists of couples married for 2-9 years with an average of 6 years. Therefore, it focuses only on relationship satisfaction rather than providing information about marital stability and long-term relationship. Due to this distinction in focus, there are also differences in samples regarding the duration of the relationship, socioeconomic status, age of the participants, and education and income levels. In addition to the younger age of the sample, they have remarkably lower levels of income and education. Moreover, the criteria of having children was not sought. Apart from these, the research method chosen is also different. As opposed to Özdemir-Kemahlı's study, the present qualitative findings were supported with observational data.

In order to reach an appropriate sample for this research, self-reports of the prospecting participants were taken into account. However, the concept of marital happiness happened to be entirely subjective, and a standard definition between participants could not be guaranteed. For example, in one couple, it was recognized that both partners were unhappy with their life individually in the current period. Still, their happiness regarding their relationship appeared to be relatively high, according to their statements. This disparity may be related to their expectations from marriage as well as the external challenges they were dealing with. Yet, the aim of this research was not to judge the perceptions of participants. Considering the intangibility of happiness and the inability to measure it, respecting participants' claims was preferred.

However, to overcome this limitation, qualitative findings were supported by observational results. Still, confirming the emphasized features in qualitative interviews with observation may be valuable for examining the reliability of qualitative

studies. For example, a comparative study that focuses on the areas of the SCID system in qualitative interviews in addition to the observation data will be precious in evaluating the accord between the couples' perceptions of themselves and their actual interactions.

It was noteworthy that women were more willing while men were more abstaining during the process of participating in the interview. This situation may be due to men's unwillingness to talk about relationships, not wanting to open their intimates to the outside, or because they do not have a clear stance about their happiness in marriage as much as women. After all, when a spouse states that she wants to participate in research as a happy couple, it may not always be easy for the other partner to share his doubts about his marital happiness. Although such a situation is not mentioned in any couple, the possibility of it should be considered. Moreover, the remarkable difference in men's attitudes between the beginning and the end of the interviews should be noted. While the majority of the male participants seemed distant and uneasy at the beginning of the meeting, they appeared much comfortable and forthcoming after a little while. However, the observation of interaction was the first part of the meeting; thus, the relatively negative scores on the men's part may also be related to their unease. Hence, considering the men's need time to warm up, it may be beneficial to create extra time for familiarization before the discussion task in order to equate the participants' emotional states in the further investigations.

It should also be taken into account that participating in the research as a happy couple might put pressure on the participants in the interviews. As a result, the possible impact of the Hawthorne Effect should be considered (French, 1953). These couples might focus more on the positive aspects of their relationship and tried to appear happier than they were with the concern of being subjected to an evaluation. Nevertheless, it has been observed that no couple hesitated to share their conflicts and difficulties, neither in the past nor today.

As well as verbal reports about conflictual areas, the observation of couples' conflictual interactions was also made. However, the subject of conflict appeared to

differ in terms of emotional weight across couples. Contrary to other six, one couple prefer to discuss a topic that cause an acute stress in their relationship. Thus, their conflict and emotional reactions were more intense and their scores on SCID codes were remarkable different. To prevent this kind of heterogeneity, guiding participants to choose a more homogenous topic which minimize the difference between couples may be beneficial.

The effects of parenthood and child-rearing practices on the couple's relationship were not directly examined in this study. However, in a country like Turkey, where parenting is a central part of the family structure (Bayer, 2020), balancing parenting and couple relationship in happy marriages appears to be crucial and needs to be examined.

Since not many people meet the research criteria in the population, it will be meaningful to conduct this research with samples from middle and low socioeconomic groups to increase generalizability. In this way, it may be possible to understand how economic power and education affect marital life. On the other hand, the criteria will need to be changed in order to research with low or medium level. Although couples with an income below 10000 TL were planned to be excluded in this study to preserve aimed socioeconomic status, such a requirement did not arise as no participant had an income lower than 10000 TL. Thus, it is possible to conclude that in samples where the education level is high, and both spouses work, the socioeconomic level automatically rises to medium and above. With a change in criteria, a study that examines how women's work and education level shape their position in marriage and marital happiness will also be valuable.

Unfortunately, not all participants in the study met the planned conditions. Although the criteria were clearly stated before the interviews, one female participant revealed that she was a high school graduate after filling out the forms. However, since the reason behind this criterion was to ensure the economic independence of the women and the high socioeconomic level of the couples, taking into account the participant's fulfillment of these conditions (a decent education, a respectable job, a remarkable

career, and a considerable income), it was decided to include them as a couple in the study.

Likewise, inconsistent with the research criteria, another participant was not currently working. However, she was included in the study, considering that she took a break from her profession after working for many years. Now, she was studying in a graduate program to have a different career. Thus, she was considered to meet the requirements of the criteria about working. Nevertheless, as she did not have any economic income at the time of the interviews, she provided a living with her husband's income, which can be considered a factor that disrupts the homogeneity of the sample.

Another factor that may threaten the homogeneity is that one of the participants had a second marriage with his partner, unlike other couples. However, this situation was not considered as a restriction but as a diversity. On the other hand, no distinctive situation emerged regarding this participant or her marriage.

Although eight couples participated in the study, only seven of them agreed to be videotaped. Thus, their interaction was only audiotaped, and they could not join the study's observational part. After a discussion with the advisor, instead of excluding all valuable information about this couple, it was decided to include their qualitative data from the interviews.

The fact that a single researcher made thematic analysis can be considered as a constraint. However, emerged themes were shared with participants to check whether they reflect their experiences or not. None of the participants declared any inconsistency. Still, an additional researcher will be needed to increase interrater reliability for a possible publication of the study.

Even though separate interviews were conducted as individual and couple, there was no division of data during the process of analysis. Still, coding part of couple interviews, codes were named with a signifier of gender. However, a separate analysis regarding emerged codes and themes was not made. Thus, themes were not emerged distinctly according to modality or gender. Hence, analyzing couple and individual

data separately may be fruitful for understanding the couple and individual dynamics as well as gender differences.

As a result of financial and locational restrictions, an approved trainer did not provide observation coding training. The creators of SCID were contacted to confirm the suitability of this situation, and it was ensured that appropriate procedures were followed. After the training, coders teams coded the videos in groups of two, and each coder team and the researcher went through the coding of the couple one by one, and a joint decision was reached. Thus, it was ensured that the interaction of each pair was coded with the same approach.

Lastly, the subjective view of the researcher should be contemplated. Just like couples, the researcher might tend to focus on the positive aspects, as participated teams needed to set an example for a happy couple relationship. Considering the research question may have facilitated these critical aspects' emergence and added a biased perspective.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to explore the relational experiences and characteristics of long-term happily married couples. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews and interactional observation were conducted with eight self-reported happy couples married at least ten years with at least one child. Despite the great interest in the healthy couple relationship, the previous research focusing on couples' experiences and relational dynamics maintaining marital happiness are limited. Thus, the present study endeavored to provide comprehensive information for researchers and clinicians who search for the general characteristics of a happy marriage.

The findings suggest that happy couples who preserve their marriage can change positively by overcoming challenges they faced. According to their accounts, in time, they differentiated more, prioritized their spouse and children, achieved equality in childrearing practices with men's increased involvement in parenting, and trusted each other more. Their ability to balance separateness and togetherness was also

remarkable. While maintaining the boundaries between their family of origin and couple relationship, they also preserved the required connection to get support from them. Moreover, they got impacted positively regardless of the valance of their past experiences about marriage learned through the parents' relationship. Most of them could transform the negative qualities of their parents while they could transport the positive ones through modeling. The gender roles appeared to be disregarded, and equality between partners was achieved through the years. They reported that they use constructive communication strategies such as being open and transparent, resolving conflicts through talking, and agreeing to disagree when they cannot reach a consensus.

The observational findings supported their claims. According to their SCID scores, they exhibit no verbal aggression and never got into negative escalation. However, gender differences were remarkable in individual scores. While men's scores were generally moderate, women had higher scores on positive codes such as support, positive affect, problem-solving communication, and lower scores on negative codes such as attempts to control, negativity and conflict, and withdrawal. On the other hand, despite gender differences in individual codes, couple codes presented harmonious interaction between partners.

As a couple and family therapist and as a person in a romantic relationship, I highly benefited from these happy couples' experiences. As human beings, we keep longing for intimacy and connection despite the difficulties of preserving a satisfying couple relationship. These couples survived through the challenges of their marriages by fitting changing needs and conditions. Hence, their experiences shed light on long-term marital happiness and strengthen the hope to find peace in a couple relationship.

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APPENDIX A: Demographic Form

Doğum Yılı: _____

Eğitim Durumu: İlkokul Ortaokul Lise Üniversite Yüksek Lisans Doktora

Meslek: _____

Memleket: _____

İrk/Etnik Köken: _____

Din/Mezhep: _____

Ekonomik Durum (Hanenize giren toplam aylık gelirin bulunduğu aralığı işaretleyiniz)

0-4000 TL 4000-7000 TL 7000-10000 TL 10000-30000 TL 30000+ TL

Evlilik Tarihi: _____

Kaç yıldır birliktesiniz? _____

Kaç çocuğunuz var? _____

Yaşları? _____

APPENDIX B: Agreement Scale

Sizce ne kadar mutlu bir ilişkiniz var? 1'den 10'a olumlu artacak şekilde düşündüğünüzde 1= hiç mutlu değil, 10 = çok mutlu olsa; bu ilişkinin mutluluk puanı kaç olurdu? (Yuvarlak içine alınız)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Çift olarak en sık anlaşmazlık yaşadığınız konular nelerdir?

1- _____

2- _____

3- _____

1'den 10'a olumlu artacak şekilde 1 = "hiç anlaşıyoruz", 10 = "tamamen anlaşıyoruz" olsa, eşinizle aşağıdaki konular hakkında ne kadar anlaştığınızı düşünüyorsunuz? (Lütfen yuvarlak içine alınız)

Duygusal yakınlıkla ilgili ilişkinizi nasıl görüyorsunuz? 1 hiç anlamıyoruz, 10 tamamen anlaşıyoruz olsa; kaç verirsiniz?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Birlikte geçirilen zamanla ilgili ilişkinizi nasıl görüyorsunuz? 1 hiç anlamıyoruz, 10 tamamen anlaşıyoruz olsa; kaç verirsiniz?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Ortak ilgi alanlarıyla ilgili ilişkinizi nasıl görüyorsunuz? 1 hiç anlamıyoruz, 10 tamamen anlaşıyoruz olsa; kaç verirsiniz?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Sosyalleşmeyle ilgili ilişkinizi nasıl görüyorsunuz? 1 hiç anlamıyoruz, 10 tamamen anlaşıyoruz olsa; kaç verirsiniz?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Geniş aileyi (sizin ve eşinizin kök aile üyeleri, anne ve babalarınız, varsa kardeşleriniz, akrabalar) yönetmekle ilgili ilişkinizi nasıl görüyorsunuz? 1 hiç anlamıyoruz, 10 tamamen anlaşıyoruz olsa; kaç verirsiniz?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Çocuklarınızı yetiştirmekle ilgili ilişkinizi nasıl görüyorsunuz?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Cinsellikle ilgili ilişkinizi nasıl görüyorsunuz? 1 hiç anlamıyoruz, 10 tamamen anlaşıyoruz olsa; kaç verirsiniz?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

İş/para ile ilgili ilişkinizi nasıl görüyorsunuz? 1 hiç anlamıyoruz, 10 tamamen anlaşıyoruz olsa; kaç verirsiniz?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

APPENDIX C: Systems for Coding Interaction in Dyads (SCID)

<https://local.psy.miami.edu/media/college-of-arts-and-sciences/psychology/documents/faculty/publications/scid.pdf>

APPENDIX D: Couple Interview

1. Nasıl tanıştınız? ilk tanıştığınız zamanı hatırlıyor musunuz?
2. Eşinizle ilk tanıştığınızda birbiriniz hakkında ne düşünmüştünüz?
3. Eşinizle ilk tanıştığınızda nasıl hissetmiştiniz?
4. Hayatımı geçirmek istediğim kişi bu kişi dediğiniz bir an oldu mu?
5. Birlikte neler yaparsınız? Birlikte yapmaktan en çok keyif aldığınız aktivite nedir?
6. Birbirinizden ayrı neler yaparsınız?
7. İlişkinizi diğer ilişkilerden farklı kılan şey nedir?

APPENDIX E: Individual Interview

- 1) Mutlu bir evliliğiniz olduğunu belirttiniz, sizin için mutlu evlilik ne demektir?
- 2) Sizin ilişkinizde sizi en mutlu eden şeyler nelerdir?
- 3) Eşinizle ilişkiniz için bir sıfat verebilir misiniz? İlişkinizin olmasına örnek bir anı/durum anlatır mısınız?
- 4) Bu mutluluğa sizce siz nasıl katkıda bulunuyor olabilirsiniz?
- 5) Bana bu ilişkideki kendinizden bahseder misiniz? İlişkideki kendiniz için 1 sıfat verecek olsanız bu ne olurdu? olmanıza örnek bir anı/durum anlatır mısınız?
- 6) Bu mutluluğa sizce eşiniz nasıl katkıda bulunuyor olabilir?
- 7) Bana bu ilişkideki eşinizden bahseder misiniz? İlişkideki eşiniz için 1 sıfat verecek olsanız bu ne olurdu? olmasına örnek bir anı/durum anlatır mısınız?

- 8) Sizle ve eşinizle ilgili olmayan ama ilişkinizi olumlu etkileyen başka faktörler ne olabilir?
- 9) Sizin anne ve babanızla olan ilişkiniz sizin eşinizle ilişkinizi nasıl etkilemiş olabilir?
- 10) Anne babanızın kendi aralarındaki ilişki sizin eşinizle ilişkinizi nasıl etkilemiş olabilir?
- 11) İlişkinizde zorlandığınız dönemler oldu mu? O dönemdeki zorlukların üstesinden nasıl geldiniz?
- 12) Şimdi ilişkinizde sizi zorlayan şey nedir? Bununla nasıl başa çıkıyorsunuz?
- 13) Bundan sonrasında ilişkinizin daha da iyi olması için hem eşinizden hem kendinizden neler bekliyorsunuz?
- 14) Sizin gibi mutlu ve uzun sürebilen bir ilişkisi olmasını isteyen birine ne tavsiye verirdiniz?
- 15) Değinemediğimiz ama sizin önemli bulduğunuz ve eklemek istediğiniz şeyler var mı?**

I. ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL

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