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RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF MULTICULTURAL COUPLES IN  
TURKEY AND THE IMPACT OF ETHNIC CULTURE ON ROMANTIC  
RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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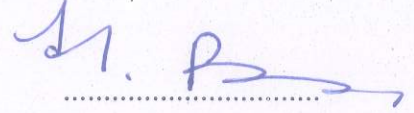
RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF MULTICULTURAL COUPLES IN TURKEY AND THE IMPACT  
OF ETHNIC CULTURE ON ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ ÇOKKÜLTÜRLÜ ÇİFTLERİN İLİŞKİ DENEYİMLERİ VE ETNİK  
KÜLTÜRÜN ROMANTİK BİRLİKTELİKLER ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ: NİTEL BİR ARAŞTIRMA

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this study, the impact of culture on romantic relationships is interrogated through the experiences of multicultural couples. Nine heterosexual couples who have been cohabiting or married for at least six months, where spouses differ on ethnic, and religious backgrounds, and who have different native languages were selected to participate in this study. The 18 participants' ages were ranged between 22 and 43. Eight female participants were Turkish, and one female participant was from Greece. The nine male participants were from Turkey, Germany, Greece, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain and Chili. Semi-structured in-depth interviews which took about half an hour were held. The participants expressed the cultural differences they observe in their partners, the impact of those differences on the quality of the romantic relationship, and the mechanisms they used for dealing with the conflicts emerging from those differences. The findings of this study demonstrated that although the couples had cultural differences in terms of religious practices, family dynamics, gender-role expectations and child-rearing experiences, the partners in multicultural relationships also had various similarities which kept them together, and the effective use of constructive communication helped them overcome the cultural differences. The data analysis of interviews revealed five main themes: Culture Does Not Have a Large Effect, Cultural Differences, Challenges, What Enhances the Relationship and Turkish Way of Living a Relationship. The results also provided useful information for practitioners who work with multicultural couples. The findings are discussed in the context of the existing literature, and limitations and suggestions for further studies are presented.

**Keywords:** Multicultural Couples, Intercultural Couples, Intercultural Marriages, Interethnic Relationships, Interreligious Relationships, Culture, Marriage

## ÖZET

Bu çalışmada kültürün romantic ilişkiler üzerindeki etkisi çokkültürlü çiftlerin deneyimleri üzerinden incelenmiştir. Çalışma dahilinde, farklı etnik ve dini kökenlerden gelen, farklı ana dilleri olan, en az altı aydır birlikte yaşayan ya da evil olan dokuz çift ile görüşülmüştür. Çalışmaya katılan kişilerin yaşları 22 ve 43 arasında değişmektedir. Katılımcıların dokuz tanesi kadın, ve kadın katılımcıların sekiz tanesi Türk, bir tanesi Yunandır. Erkek katılımcıların sayısı dokuzdur ve bunların bir tanesi Türk, diğer erkek katılımcılar Alman, Fransız, İngiliz, Yunan, İspanyol, İtalyan ve Şililidir. Yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeler yaklaşık yarım saat sürmüş ve her katılımcıyla birebir görüşülmüştür. Katılımcılar partnerlerinde gördükleri kültürel farklılıkları, bu farklılıkların ilişkiye etkilerini ve bu farklılıklarla baş etmek için kullandıkları yöntemleri aktarmışlardır. Çalışmanın verileri çiftlerin dini, ailevi farklılıkları olduğunu, farklı cinsiyet roller beklentilerine sahip olduğunu, çocuk yetiştirmek konusunda farklı deneyimleri olduğunu göstermenin yanısıra çokkültürlü çiftlerin bir arada kalmalarını sağlayan birçok benzerliği olduğunu ve etkili iletişim yöntemlerinin sorunları aşmada önemli olduğunu yansıtmıştır. Veri analizinin sonuçları beş ana tema çıkarmıştır. Bunlar Kültürün Çok Etkisi Yok, Kültürel Farklılık, Zorluklar, İlişkiyi Güçlendirenler ve Türk Tipi İlişki Biçimi şeklinde adlandırılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonuçları çokkültürlü çiftlerle çalışan terapistlere faydalı bilgiler sağlamaktadır. Sonuçla literature uygun tartışılmış, kısıtlamalar ve gelecek çalışmalar için öneriler sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çokkültürlü Çiftler, Kültürlerarası Çiftler, Kültürlerarası Evlilikler, İnteretik İlişkiler, Dinlerarası İlişkiler, Kültür, Evlilik

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this thesis the relational experiences of multicultural couples will be examined. The subject of analysis will be 18 participants, 9 couples, who differ from each other in terms of religion, native language and ethnicity. How cultural differences influence the relationship is examined through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The impact of culture on their daily lives, their relations with the social environment, the challenges they face and the coping mechanisms they use will be examined. The interviews present data regarding how the relationship is formed and continued, what were initial experiences and what are current experiences regarding being in a multicultural relationship, what kind of conflicts occur due to cultural differences or what kind of conflicts are expected to occur in the future, and how the couples resolve the problems. This study aims to provide meaningful data to be used by clinicians who work with multicultural couples and to researchers who study the impact of culture on interpersonal interactions.

### **1.1 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CULTURE**

Being a part of who one is, culture is an important notion which will be examined in this study. Culture is the set of values, beliefs, customs, attitudes and norms which are derived from membership in various contexts such as ecological setting, nationality, ethnicity, religious background, minority status, migration history, political attitudes and social class (Gushue, 1993) and, which shape personal behavior and expectations (Falicov, 2014; Hollan, 2012). The shared meaning units and adaptive behaviors which constitute culture are reproduced through participation and membership in different dimensions of culture such as gender, race, ethnicity, language, age, religion, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation (Falicov, 1995). The notion of culture encompasses various characteristics such as gender relations, religion, linguistics, culinary habits, daily routines and art, which are covertly or

overtly influenced by the collective logic and which are not separable from the daily-life practices of individuals (Collet, 2015).

Culture is highly determining on selfhood. Krause (2002) explains that individuals develop their selfhood and their ideas about relationship with others through constant reflexive relationships. While learning the language, children internalize the meanings, symbols, history and social interactions which have continuity and which come with certain norms and values (Krause, 2002). Thus culture is not only the visible characteristics such as language, dress code, behaviors or art but it also covers the invisible notions such as emotion, motivation, memories or orientation (Krause, 2002). Being embedded in social relationships, culture provides a “repertoire of behaviors and meanings” (Krause, 2002, p.21). Individuals in same social groups agree more or less on cultural conventions, meanings and signs, and thus when communicating with people from the same social group, individuals lose sight of the culture (Krause, 2002). Another important notion is that the social unity of a group is enhanced through highlighting the differences with other social groups (Jenkins, 1997).

However Hollan (2012) notes that culture shouldn't be considered as a static notion, yet an interactive and dynamic concept, which is reproduced through personal interactions and subjective experiences. Furthermore, culture not only impacts the present but it also shapes the future by creating expectations (Hollan, 2012).

The impact of culture can be observed on family units just as on individuals (Thomas, 1998). Cultural precepts often determine the structure and functioning of families such as the size of the family, the way a family is established, the rules and roles the individuals have, the behaviors of intimacy and the boundaries between members (Thomas, 1998). On the other hand, each family has a unique narration about where they come from, how they came, the region they live in, familial stories and advices, religious and political attitudes and practices, and socioeconomic status (Thomas, 1998). Culture is also highly predictive on individuals' behaviors, attitudes and expectations regarding romantic relationship (Krause, 2002, p.5; Lou, Lalonde, &

Wong, 2015). Those unique family experiences, combined with the social environment, create a familial culture that is transmitted among generations (Thomas, 1998).

### **1.1.1. Ethnicity**

Among the concepts building up one's culture, ethnicity has an important role. McGoldrick, Giordano and Garcia-Preto (2005) express that ethnicity is a group's "peoplehood", meaning a group's commonality of history and roots upon which members of the very group evolves shared meanings and traditions (p.2). Thomas (1998) and, Hardy and Laszloffy (1995) express ethnicity as a social identity which is incorporated into an individual's self-concept and which is reproduced through one's social connections. Families have a pivotal role in transmitting the ethnic membership to their children (McGoldrick et al., 2005). The ethnic membership is often expressed in terms of unique values, attitudes, beliefs, which change through the emergence of new connections and social meanings (Phinney, 1996). On the other hand, cultural identity by defining one's social location within the society and one's way of accessing to resources, effects an individual's psychological and social well-being (McGoldrick et al., 2005).

Although some components of ethnicity such as language, behaviors, routines and rituals may be observable, some components such as values, beliefs and attitudes may be functioning subtly in the individual level (McGoldrick et al., 2005). Individuals are exposed to various levels of culture and the willingly or unwillingly selected characteristics of the cultural groups they are raised in. Those characteristics influence their views and daily practices (Kilian, 2001). Thus for understanding an individual's cultural attitude, all levels he/she has been exposed to must be explored (Falicov, 2014).

The toxic nature of ethnicity, turning it into a mechanism of oppression in some cases, also impacts how one interacts with individuals from different ethnic groups (Kilian, 2001). The same toxic nature prevents people from talking about it

due to the fear of sounding prejudiced. However, for those who are exposed to prejudice and discrimination because of their ethnic identities, internalized negative feelings are not uncommon (McGoldrick et al., 2005). Such groups may be more inclined to hold on to their ethnic identity for remaining unified against threats. Especially in multicultural contexts such as United States, awareness of ethnic identity is a reminder of the loss and pain of the ancestors in most of the cases.

### **1.1.2 Race**

Besides ethnicity, race is a very important notion to explore. Because of the historical meaning it conveys especially on EuroAmerican world, race is treated as a means of political oppression and social segregation (Thomas, 1998). Unlike ethnicity, which shapes one from inside out with the value system it constitutes, race affects individuals from outside in, because of its socially constructed nature, which implies a judgment about some people according to their skin colors or physical features (McGoldrick et al., 2005). The social force it creates makes some groups more privileged than others, leaving some on the margins of the society. This mechanism pushes people to internalize such assumptions as components of their selfhood (McGoldrick et al., 2005, p. 20).

### **1.1.3 Religion**

Being an important part of culture, religion shapes individuals' beliefs, values and behaviors. Being usually transmitted through familial and social connections, religion conveys a frame regarding rituals, beliefs and attitudes of groups sharing the same faith (McGoldrick et al., 2005). Bailey, Walsh and Pryce (2002) claim that spirituality, being part of both self and family heritage, is felt in all aspects of life especially determining how people deal with adversity, and how pain and suffering is confronted.

### **1.1.4 Class**

The notion of class is considered as a vital part of one's culture. It can be easily seen that when one looks at wealthiest people, a person from a minority group can rarely be found on the top of the social ladder (McGoldrick et al., 2005). Education is usually a means of gaining upward mobility for the members of minority groups; however, the importance given to education, high salaries or higher-class positions are also related to the social group one is placed in and the opportunities available for this social group (McGoldrick et al., 2005).

## **1.2 MULTICULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Multicultural relationships, being the focus of this study, become more prevalent in societies due to the increasing connectedness between social groups. Homogamy is still dominant, and the discourse of homogamy states that people fall in love due to their shared characteristics such as race, religion, education, age, income and ethnicity (Kilian, 2003). However increasing globalization and socio-spatial encounters increase interpersonal contact of people who differ from each other on ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds (Bustamante, Nelson, Henriksen Jr, & Monakes, 2011; Cerchiaro, Aupers, & Houtman, 2015). The increase of personal encounters in schools, working and social environments makes multicultural marriages more prevalent (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008; McAloney, 2013; Falicov, 2014; Negy & Snyder, 2000) especially among young and well-educated individuals who habit in metropolitan cities (Lou et al., 2015; O'Leary & Finnas, 2002). This increase in the number of multicultural romantic relationships open new research areas in the field of cultural and clinical psychology, aiming to figure out the correlates of multicultural mating and factors impacting those relationships.

First of all, by terminology, it should be clarified that what makes a couple multicultural is the existence of different social, ethnic, racial, religious groups in a romantic relationship (Bustamante et al., 2011; Cerchiaro et al., 2015; Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). Although the term intermarriage which represents the copresence of two different cultures in a union is widely used, all multicultural couples may not be

married, thus preferring to use the term intermarriage may keep the unmarried/cohabiting couples separated from the context (Collet, 2015). The notion of conjugal mixedness, which is also preferred by some clinicians, emphasizes the existence of different societal positions within a marital relationship (Collet, 2015). However preferring the notion of mixedness conveys the idea that there also might be non-mixed couples, which positions all same-culture relationships in a unitary line, thus ruling out the intragroup differences individuals might have (Barbara, 1989). On the other hand, the notion of exogamy is also found inadequate to cover the issue by some scholars. While endogamy means the marriage of people from same cultural groups, exogamy means the marriage of individuals from different cultural groups (Cerchiaro et al., 2015). However Davis (1941) argues that those who intermarry, challenge the dominant trend of endogamy but exogamy is itself a rule, thus it remains limited to cover all kinds of non-endogamous relationships (as cited in Cerchiaro et al., 2015). For covering all dimensions of culture, for including all types of intimate relationships, and for highlighting the multidimensional nature of culture the term “multicultural relationships” will be preferred in this study.

Multicultural relationships represent the globalization of our everyday lives, creating a bridge between different racial, ethnic and religious groups in a society, linking not only individuals to each other but also increasing the interconnectedness of different cultural layers (Cerchiaro et al., 2015; Collet, 2015; Smits, 2010). According to Collet (2015) intermarriage creates an intersection between private and public spheres. On the one hand there are personal matters of mate selection and adjustment, concerns of familial transmissions; on the other hand, racial, religious or ethnic diversification of today’s society is being reproduced within the household every day.

### **1.2.1 How They Are Established**

How multicultural relationships are formed and what individual or social characteristics make the establishment of such relationships possible are among the



research areas. Earliest studies held in the US, examining the multicultural relationships formed among White-American and African-American partners argued that individuals choosing to intermarry are either neurotic and have certain psychopathologies, or they were perceived as being attracted to the sexually attractive and exotic stereotypic image of African-Americans (Kalmijn, 1993).

One other approach regarding the establishment of multicultural relationships, Exchange Theory, suggests that educated individuals from minority groups marry less educated individuals from the dominant groups for gaining a higher-class position (Foeman & Nance, 1999; Kalmijn, 1993). This theory emerged following the abolishment of anti-miscegenation laws in the US after the 60s, the period when the number of interracial marriages sharply increased. However, although having statistical evidence (Kalmijn, 1993) due to its ideological stand towards multicultural marriages, this theory doesn't find support in the field anymore (Foeman & Nance, 1999). The macrostructural theory is also preferred by some researchers to explain the foundation dynamics of multicultural relationships. According to this theory, people intermarry when there is a problem of mate availability in their kin group (Blau, Blum & Schwartz, 1982).

Immigration, by increasing the socio-spatial contact between different ethnic groups, facilitates the formation of multicultural relationships. In a study conducted in France, Collet (2015) shows that the marriage between individuals descending from post-African colonies and French individuals is highly prevalent in France, especially among the later generations of immigrants who obtained legal citizenship and adopted the dominant culture of the society.

However, latest studies show that like all forms of romantic relationships, multicultural relationships are established upon the common themes of love, compatibility and companionship, and are gradually developed through a dating period (Kilian, 2001; Negy & Snyder, 2000). Watts and Henriksen (1999), examining the experiences of White-American women in interracial marriages, show that the desire to form a family together, having similar goals and desires in life, love and

compatibility are factors leading to the decision of marriage among interracial couples. Daneshpour (2003) analyzed the experiences of multicultural couples living in US, male partner being Muslim/Aryan descent and female partner being White-American or Asian-American, and Christian by religion. This analysis shows that having mutual interests and being physically attracted to each other are the factors contributing to the formation of those relationships, just as in same-culture relationships. Sharing common values such as respect, faithfulness, appreciation of and interest in diversity, and honesty, connect the partners from different cultures to each other (Daneshpour, 2003).

On the other hand, it is also argued that once partners get attracted to each other, they tend to find commonalities and to de-prioritize the differences, which help them to become more intimate with each other (Kilian, 2001, 2003). While forming up a romantic relationship, partners refer to commonly shared social positions such as education, age and economic wealth, instead of race or ethnicity (Kilian, 2001). It is also expressed that individuals choosing to marry or date with the members of an out-group are more open to be in a multicultural relationship because of being exposed to multicultural acquaintances either in work, school, family or in neighborhood. Observation of intercultural encounters encourages individuals to be in similar romantic relationships (Kilian, 2001). LeCompte and White (1978) also show that those who are in multicultural relationships are more open towards other cultures when compared to individuals in same-culture relationships.

Eastwick, Richeson, Son and Finkel (2009) argue that although multicultural marriages have been increasing by number in the last decades, personal factors facilitating the formation and continuation of such relationships are rarely examined. Analyzing the impact of political orientation on marrying someone from another cultural group, they demonstrate that although showing some amount of in-group favoritism, individuals who define themselves as liberals are more open to multicultural romantic relationships compared to individuals who define themselves as conservative (Eastwick et al., 2009).

Furthermore the contribution of higher education is also noteworthy. O'Leary and Finnas (2002) claim that because education increases individuals' autonomy from parents and exposure to differences, the educated individuals feel less the obligation of following the cultural norms of their kin group and give the marital decision in a more autonomous way.

### **1.2.2 The Quality of the Relationship**

Researchers have been examining the components of marital quality since the 1940s. Earliest studies focused on the personality traits impacting the continuation and quality of a marital relationship but starting with the 1950s, the focus has shifted to interactional styles of partners (McCabe, 2006). The 1980s and 1990s have been periods when both interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics of partners, and the interaction of those dynamics grabbed great attention (Gaines, et al., 1999; McCabe, 2006).

For analyzing marital quality, researchers focus on the definition of marital satisfaction and the factors associated with it. Bradbury, Fincham and Beach (2000) simply explain marital satisfaction as one's attitude towards the partner or the relationship. Satisfaction, positive interaction, conflict, perceived problems and commitment are important dimensions which should be considered (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008). Humor, affection, attraction (Madathil & Benschhoff, 2008), positive affect, intimacy and spousal support (Hiew, Halford, Van De Vijver & Liu, 2015) are suggested as important dimensions of the relationship quality.

The similarity between partners is another examined field. Social identity theory implies that individuals tend to have more positive feelings towards the members of their social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, as cited in Eastwick et al., 2009). Similarly, assortative mating theory implies individuals prefer mates who are similar to them in educational, national, religious and socioeconomic terms (Blackwell & Lichter, 2000; Gruber-Baldini, Schaie & Willis, 1995). The similarity regarding religion, attitudes towards marriage and family values (Arranz Becker,

2013), in addition to attitudinal similarity in important values (Karney & Bradburry, 1995) positively impact marital quality. According to Balance Theory, having similar characteristics with the partner helps an individual to feel confirmed and legit in her views and values (Heider, 1958). On the other hand the dissimilarity of partners in attitudes, values and backgrounds leads to relational problems by creating cognitive dissonance in individual level, pushing the partners to question either their values and attitudes or their partners (Clarkwest, 2007; George, Luo, Webb, Pugh, Martinez & Foulston, 2015; Negy & Snyder, 2000). The possible explanation of this relationship may be that differences in religion, social characteristics, ethnicity or race is also related to differences of values, attitudes, tastes and communication styles, since such differences may limit the number of activities partners share together, may hinder their capacity to understand each other and to harmoniously make decisions (Clarkwest, 2007; Kalmijn, Graaf & Janssen, 2005).

The Eurocentric perception of marriage is based upon the mutual love of partners and it is suggested that love flourishes as partners share similarities on fields such as culture, class and race (Falicov, 2014; Kilian, 2003). Whether similar couples are happier is a trend topic among researchers. While some studies show the positive association between couple similarity and marital satisfaction (Blum & Mehrabian, 1999; Clarkwest, 2007), other studies fail to reach these findings (Glicksohn & Golan, 2001). The study conducted by Gruber-Baldini, Schaie and Willis (1995) reveals that, individuals who marry are alike initially and they keep influencing each other becoming more similar on various cognitive dimensions. Their study has one other important finding, the importance of shared environment, which is defined as the familial environment people grow in, which is assumed to be influencing both their personal and cognitive skills (Gruber-Baldini et al., 1995).

Most studies focus on the differences or similarities of partners on personality traits; however, other differences such as values, beliefs and attitudes may have vital impacts on the quality of dyadic relationship. Gaunt (2006), in a study conducted among 248 Israeli couples examined the association between marital satisfaction and

couple similarity by using Schwartz Value Inventory (1992), Bem Sex-Role Inventory and a special scale designed for the family role attitudes. The findings revealed that higher couple similarity was linked to higher marital satisfaction (Gaunt, 2006). Especially the similarity on views about gender-roles and values is found to be strongly related to marital satisfaction, whereas similarity of religious beliefs and family role attitudes showed weaker relations with relational domains (Gaunt, 2006). On the other hand, in Arranz Becker's (2013) study it is found that the discrepancy between partners' gender-role expectations, familial relations and marital affinity is associated with the risk of marital dissolution.

Each individual has socially or experientially constructed ideas about relationships and marriage, and each individual exists in a romantic relationship with certain expectations and behavioral codes which impact their interactions. Having similar expectations may facilitate the satisfaction of needs and fulfillment of expectations while incongruence between what is expected and what is received may lead to conflicts in the relationship (Clarkwest, 2007). It is also argued that differences of religion, social attitudes and ethnicity are reflected as differences in communication styles, values and tastes, which then result in conflictual situations for couples (Kalmijn, 1998). For two married people from differing cultures, the only difference isn't thus nationality or race but the cultural codes of interaction coming with the traditions and teachings (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). The dissimilarity of characteristics and attitudes, especially on important life decisions is related with marital dissolution (Clarkwest, 2007; Kalmijn, Graaf & Janssen, 2005).

For dealing with differences, communication is an important aspect of a relationship. Partners communicate to get accustomed to each other, to express their feelings and to resolve conflictual situations. As two individuals decide to unite their lives, they begin negotiating about issues such as careers, household division of labor, marital expectations and child-rearing (Parsons, Nalbone, Killmer & Wetchler, 2007). This process of negotiation requires the re-evaluation of personal values, practices and beliefs for finding a common ground for both partners. The negotiation and re-

shaping of certain values may lead to crises in the relationship. Strong communication and the self-disclosure behaviors of partners are positively related to relational satisfaction whereas partners' inability and avoidance to discuss conflictual issues is negatively related with relational satisfaction (McCabe, 2006).

Another important field of research for understanding what contributes to the relationship quality is the attachment style of partners. Attachment style categorizes an individual's emotion regulation and interactions with others (Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2005) on three main groups, secure; anxious and avoidant (Bowlby, 1969). Following Bowlby's analysis, it is suggested that adults replicate the early attachment behaviors in their romantic relationships (Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2005; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Besides providing the early relational scheme shaping the child's attachment style, family has a mediator role between culture and the self, actively selecting the values to be transmitted to children, adapting those values to changing life circumstances and contributing to self formation of the child (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). Social learning theory argues that people basically learn certain attitudes and behaviors through observation (Bandura, 2001). Being a unit connecting its members both genetically and emotionally, family environment becomes the primary learning environment for children, about the social and personal interactions, conflict resolution and values (Gaines et al., 1999). Each society has certain norms which are expected to be adopted by the members and other norms which are expected to be left out, and families are active agents to teach those values to their children (Bornstein & Güngör, 2009). One's experiences in the family environment get incorporated into one's personal history, determining the attitude towards stressors, beliefs, values and self-concept (Bradbury et al., 2000). The study conducted by Dennison, Koerner and Segrin (2014) examine the relation between family-of-origin characteristics and marital quality among newlywed couples. Their analyses show that individuals mostly choose mates who are similar to themselves and whose family of origin is similar to theirs (Dennison et al., 2014).

Marriage, both as a private unit and a sociocultural structure exists in a complex environment. In addition to personal and interactional dynamics of partners, evaluating the general context within which the couple is placed is important for understanding the marriage experiences of couples. Existence of outside stressors has been another factor evaluated in marital quality studies (Bradbury et al., 2000). In their analysis between Jewish and non-Jewish migrated couples in Israel, Lavee and Krivosh (2012) show that both migration and interreligious differences act as stressors in the relationship, lowering marital quality. Spouses' different willingness towards migration, their differences of social adaptation or cultural closeness to the place they moved in play roles on how they deal with the experience of migration as a couple (Lavee & Krivosh, 2012). The different attitudes and adaptation levels of partners may lead to conflicts in the relationship. On the other hand, reciprocal social support during times of great stress such as fighting with an illness, work-related stressors or traumatic experiences, increase a couple's marital quality (Bradbury et al., 2000).

Being one of the outside stressors, macrolevel differences, such as differences of ethnicity, religion, native language and race negatively impact the marital quality. Although more people from various cultural backgrounds contact each other in different forms of personal relationships, the romantic relationship is a field where concerns arise when partners are from different cultural groups (McAloney, 2013). Bhugra and De Silva (2000) argue that multicultural couples deal with two additional sources of conflict which the homogamous couples don't deal with, (a) the macrocultural characteristics of society and (b) microcultural differences inherent in individual habits, beliefs, customs and values. Just as creative, energetic and enriching relationships may emerge from multicultural encounters, the differences of worldviews among partners may lead to problems (Falicov, 2014).

For instance, analyzing certain dimensions like ethnicity, race, religion and social class, most studies demonstrated data in favor of the hypothesis that the risk of divorce is higher in multicultural relationships (Clarkwest, 2007; Fu, 2006; Jones,

1996; Kalmijn et al., 2005; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Negy & Snyder, 2000; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). Discrepancy of religious beliefs and practices (Wright, Rosato, & O'Reilly, 2017), decreased social support from friends and families, and discriminative attitude of the society are suggested as reasons why multicultural relationships are more likely to dissolve (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006; Kalmijn et al., 2005).

However, later studies demonstrate that there is not enough evidence to show that multicultural couples have more stressed relationships when compared to endogamous couples (Fu & Wolfinger, 2011; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008). Also various studies show that multicultural couples express as much satisfaction in their relationships as monocultural couples (Hohmann-Marriott, 1999; Negy & Snyder, 2000; Troy, Lewis-Smith & Laurenceau, 2006).

### **1.2.3 Challenges**

Marriage is an important transitional period when an individual passes from singlehood to being married, when a high level of adaptation becomes necessary for both partners. In the initial stages of the marriage, each partner may feel confused trying to adapt to others' norms, values, practices and meanings (Falicov, 2014; Singla & Holm, 2012). However adaptation is a challenging process which sometimes requires vital changes in personality and life-style which can create an anxiety towards losing the elements which form up one's selfhood (Babaoğlu, 2008). Everyone intermarries indeed, since individuals may be differing in various levels of culture such as family traditions, occupations, gender, class or ideology even if they are from same race, religion or ethnic groups (Falicov, 1995, 2014). Thus all romantic unions include some degree of mutual reconciliation.

When this union is formed between the members of different cultural groups, a cultural adaptation also becomes necessary. As it is stated above, multicultural couples are expected to face with more challenges when compared to monocultural couples, and the risk of marital dissolution is suggested to be higher in multicultural



marriages. Just as individual level factors such as attachment, personality traits, religious attitude, family characteristics and gender-role socialization may be influential, the societal level factors such as the image of a certain community, the society's attitude towards intermarriage and the legal constraints may also impact the continuity of a multicultural marriage. Being obliged to live in another country also hardens the adaptation process for partners in multicultural relationships (Babaoğlu, 2008).

Partners coming from different cultural backgrounds have differences in values and worldviews, communication styles, familial interactions, religious and ethnic beliefs and attitudes, language, in addition to the personal differences each couple is challenged by (Bustamante et al., 2011; Cools, 2006). Different expectations regarding division of labor, relations with extended family and childcare practices arise conflicts in multicultural marriages (Singla & Holm, 2012; Wright et al., 2017). Especially after the honeymoon phase is completed, the partners are faced with the challenging differences they have regarding the social interactions and the organization of life, which necessitates constant negotiation (Singla & Holm, 2012). The analysis of Babaoğlu (2008) also shows that even though individuals in multicultural relationships seem to adapt to each other in the initial stages of the relationship, the embodied cultural practices emerge and cause challenges in the further years of the relationship, which necessitates a constant negotiation and adaptation process for multicultural spouses.

Although the place they live in, the environments they grew up in, their levels of acculturation and assimilation impact how much the couple relationship is influenced from cultural differences, the cultural values and worldviews may be dramatically different for multicultural couples (Daneshpour, 2003).

Clarkwest (2007) in the study conducted among African-American and White-American mixed couples suggested that different attitudes towards childcare, maternal employment, sexuality and independence resulted in conflicts in marriage. Differences on relationship expectations and conflict styles are also expressed as

problematic (Ting-Toomey, 2009). The differences of every-day life practices such as food, time-orientation, child-rearing practices, household labor and gender-role expectations are challenging multicultural relationships (Bustamante et al., 2011; Daneshpour, 2003).

Besides the cultural differences observed in every-day life, the families' and society's attitude to multicultural unions is of vital importance for spouses. Partners differing on various dimensions of culture may also be dealing with social concerns of how society perceives their togetherness or how their extended families approach this marriage (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006; Collet, 2015; Wright et al., 2017; Ting-Toomey, 2009).

To analyze the marital characteristics of interethnic couples, Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) examined the 1987-1988 data of National Survey of Families and Households in US. Their analysis revealed that interethnic couples are less resourceful and they scored higher on the chance of dissolution of marriage. This study showed that interethnic couples have more complex relationship histories, fewer socioeconomic resources and fewer social support. They also claim to have less shared values, and both women and men report having more conflict, less satisfaction and a greater expectation that the relationship will end eventually (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008).

According to Kalmijn and colleagues (2005) the relation between nationality differences and divorce is stronger. They found that although the divorce rates of interreligious couples was moderately above the average of the divorce rates of both different religious groups, this effect is twice as much the average of both groups in nationality. They explain that the reason behind this increased risk stems from the differences of values emerging from the cultural adaptation coming with nationality (Kalmijn et al., 2005).

This section will present the main challenges the multicultural couples experience and the strategies they prefer for overcoming those challenges.

### **1.2.3.1 Social Rejection**

By being with someone outside of the group, an individual cross over the invisible borders within which a community's history, traditions, values and concerns are embedded, thus marrying an out-group member may create unease in the family and the community (Kilian, 2001; McAloney, 2013; Collet, 2015). Fu and Wolfinger (2011), analyzing the previously held studies show that although visible violence towards multicultural couples decreased in US society in last decades, invisible opposition is still experienced by such couples either in extended family environments or in civic places such as restaurants and schools.

The study conducted by Kilian (2001) reveals that friends and families of individuals who are in a relationship with a partner from another culture, usually negatively react to this relationship. Cottrel (1990) also argues that although the partners may be tolerating and co-adjusting their cultural differences, their families and friends may not be as understanding towards the couple. The friends and families may oppose to this togetherness with the perceived threat of losing one's identity and being assimilated into the dominant culture (Fu & Wolfinger, 2011). The amount of social disapproval may differ based on various dynamics such as skin color, the religion or the country of origin; however, according to Collet (2015) simply being a foreigner is mostly enough for receiving disapproval.

Availability of social support is an important factor for multicultural couples. Many multicultural couples express that after being together, their relations with their previous friends were harmed and they formed new friendships with other multicultural couples themselves (Daneshpour, 2003). The study conducted by Van Mol and de Valk (2015) shows a positive correlation between social support and relationship satisfaction. Kalmijn and colleagues (2005) assert that although lack of support from third parties may not be an intolerable situation for couples, in times they go to crisis, the lack of support from their friends and families may be hindering their coping mechanisms.

The opposing behavior of families and friends depends on factors such as group boundaries and the community image of the foreign groom or bride. A study conducted by Bratter and Eschbach (2006), analyzing the data from National Health Survey in US between 1997 and 2001 portrays that the psychological distress a multicultural couple experience depends on partners' racial/ethnic group and gender factors. Some communities, especially the Asian-Indian community in the US, as stated in the article of Inman, Altman, Kaduvettoor-Davidson, Carr and Walker (2011), don't support their members to marry someone outside of their ethnic group, fearing that such unions will lead to the dissolution of ethnic culture. In the study of Inman and colleagues, it is seen that the good community image of Asian-Indians as being hard-working, smart and physically similar to whites, generated a positive attitude in the family of the white partners (Inman et al., 2011).

Although individuals no longer seek the approval of parents as was before or although arranged marriages no longer exist in most European societies, being approved by parents is an important psychological comfort for the newlyweds (Falicov, 2014). The disapproval of family and friends may push individuals to limit their relationships with the opposing family members and friends, sometimes making them obliged to run the civil service without the attendance of closest family members (Bystydzienski, 2011; Falicov, 2014; Kilian, 2001).

The family of origin's understanding and open-minded attitude towards cultural differences empowers the couple to manage the cultural differences (Daneshpour, 2003; Single & Holm, 2012). Similarly Kilian's (2001) study shows that in families where there have previously been multicultural marriages, such romantic unions are supported. Spouses can overcome the negative impacts of social and familial rejection through an open communication regarding their emotions, through connecting with understanding and empathic individuals, and through living in high-diversity environments (Bystydzienski, 2011).

### **1.2.3.2 Family Characteristics**

Family is the smallest unit in the society. Being cultural organizations, families have unique ideologies and principles in distinct parts of the world (Falicov & Brudner-White, 1983). They have different habits and attitudes, which impact the individuals' attitudes in and the expectations from social relations. Besides providing the needs of safety, shelter, trust and finances, family environment is a zone where children learn about the society's norms, morals and cultural practices (Kirman, 2004). The initial rules of interaction are presented to children by the parents, child's interaction with his/her parents becomes determinative on his/her future relations (Kirman, 2004). Also, the cultural codes and meanings are transferred from older generations to younger ones, for assuring the continuity of cultural practices (Kirman, 2004; Ozorak, 1989). The interdependency among generations facilitates the continuation of culture by increasing the transfer of social values (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005).

Kilian (2003) argues that familial experiences are also determining on attitudes towards and expectations from romantic relationship. Intercultural couples usually come from families differing on cultural codes which organize fields such as child-rearing, religious attitudes, hierarchy (Dennison et al., 2014; Falicov & Brudner-White, 1983), communication styles and relationship with the extended families (Falicov, 2014) which may result in marital discord (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008).

How much individuals are impacted by their relatives may also be cultural in certain cases and may be reflecting the differences in family characteristics. In a study conducted by Kovacs (2015) among Hungarian-Chinese couples in Hungary shows that for Chinese receiving the approval and support of the family is important whereas having conflicts with the family negatively affected their emotional well-being. However for Hungarians parental approval is not given great importance, because of the structure of their relationship. Thus negative comment didn't lead to the emergence of familial conflicts for them (Kovacs, 2015). Lou and colleagues' (2015) examined the dynamics encouraging individuals towards intercultural dating.

Their findings show that the level an individual is impacted by the family culture and by heritage is conversely related with the tendency of intercultural dating.

Another important dimension about families is the intimacy and boundaries within the family and in regard to the extended family. Minuchin (1974) defines families as systems that operate based on certain rules and patterns which limit the members' interactions. In his Structural Theory of Family Systems it is explained that for understanding families, behavioral expectations unique to each family and the universal rules regarding family functioning should be examined (Minuchin, 1974). The universal expectation regarding families is the existence of complementarity between husband and wife, and hierarchical relations with the children. However families are highly impacted by the social culture they live in, thus they are exposed to rules and norms of the society. In industrialized Western societies, the dominant family structure is a nuclear family with definite boundaries, governed by the husband-wife dyad (Falicov & Brudner-White, 1983). Yet in other cultures the governing dyad can be father-son (Fişek, 1991) or mother-son.

Wood (1985) defines boundaries as the clarity of rules determining the expected behaviors from and closeness of family members. She suggests two types of boundaries, one being interpersonal, which defines the closeness of family members, and one being subsystem boundary, which defines the distribution of power and hierarchy in family. Besides the power positions in the nuclear family the hierarchy in the family system defines the inclusiveness of extended family members in important familial decisions. In intergenerational cultures, the boundaries are more permeable for the extended family and an asymmetrical distribution of power is observed, usually excluding the women from the government of family (Falicov & Brudner-White, 1983). On the other hand, individualistic family formation is mostly a two-people business, where families and the familial cultures are not given greater importance (Lou et al., 2015).

Differentiation, also a concept to be analyzed under this category, expresses how individuals balance the individuality and togetherness, autonomy and intimacy

in relation to significant others (Parsons, Nalbone, Killmer & Wetchler, 2007). Well-differentiation of an individual helps her to protect her selfhood in close relationships without refraining from intimacy (Bowen, 1978). Achieving a unique identity and sense of self, being aware of the personal values and morals positively impacts the relationship satisfaction among interfaith couples (Parsons et al., 2007).

Sometimes partners have conflicts arising from their familial experiences because of the differences of intimacy, boundaries and their levels of differentiation from extended family. The style and the content of the communication with extended family members may become problematic if partners have different expectations and practices regarding the relationship with extended families (Bacas, 2002). For communities which emphasize having close connections, the boundaries separating the marital dyad from extended family may be unclear. The Greek participants in Petronoti and Papagaroufali's (2006) study argue that the close relations their Turkish partners have with their family of origin diminished the privacy between spouses.

In a study conducted by Bacas (2002) among German-Greek couples it was seen that while Greek partners had closer economic and emotional relations with their family of origins, German partners had more distant relationships. The close connection of Greek partners is often perceived as the eradication of the boundaries of marital dyad by the German partner (Bacas, 2002). The case study portrayed by Softas-Nall and Baldo (2000), demonstrates the experiences of a Greek couple, woman being raised in Greece and man being a Greek-American. The study shows that although sharing the same ethnic background, the families may differ in their behaviors of intimacy and in boundaries according to the social environment they have been in. Since Greeks in US are a minority group, preservation of culture and kin relations are more important to them when compared to Greeks in the homeland. The closer kin relations Greek-Americans have, turned into conflicts for the couple in Softas-Nall and Baldo's (2000) study. This little case study demonstrates the dynamic structure of culture and its differentiation based on family, individual and social context (Softas-Nall & Baldo, 2000).

### **1.2.3.3 Cultural Orientation**

Cultural value orientations are implicit codes determining our motivations, perceptions, expectations, communication patterns and meaning making. To exemplify how our ethnic background subtly operate on our thinking, cross-cultural psychology offers various alternatives. Studies which reveal the differences between individualistic and collectivistic societies demonstrate how different we all may approach to same concepts (McGoldrick et al., 2005, p. 3). Simply, individualism refers to the value system, which sees individual identity and individual well-being as prior to group identity and group well-being. In individualistic cultures, self-efficiency, accountability, individual responsibility, privacy and autonomy are of great importance. On the other hand, collectivism requires the prioritization of group identity and well-being (Ting-Toomey, 2008). Collectivistic cultures promote interdependence rather than independence, relational self, conformity and group harmony (Ting-Toomey, 2009). As an example, McGoldrick, and colleagues show that while “personal growth” is defined as a growth of human capacity towards empathy and connection for collectivistic culture, the same concept is defined as an increased autonomy in individualistic culture (2005, p. 3).

The universal needs of autonomy and connection differ among cultures, autonomy meaning the need for personal space and privacy within a relationship while connection covers the relatedness and merging of partners (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). Different communities have different meanings given to those. Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) describes autonomy as an individual’s self-determination without a sense of coercion. Individuals separate their selves from others in different levels, while some people have stricter boundaries, some people are more fused with the significant others (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). The same distinction is also evident in terms of morality. While some individuals have a more autonomous morality, some individuals have an heteronomous morality, meaning that “being subject to another’s rule” (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005, p. 404). Although claiming that the needs of autonomy and connectedness are



not antithetical, Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) argues that cultural groups may be prioritizing one over another, giving distinct meanings to two notions.

Being related with the autonomy and dependence practices, relationship with the extended family and parents is shaped by the cultural orientation. While ties with extended family are loose in individualistic cultures, those ties are strong and important in collectivistic cultures (Ting-Toomey, 2009; Falicov, 2014). While for individualistic cultures, the marital dyad is more autonomous from the extended family and more connected as a spousal dyad, in collectivistic societies the marital dyad is interconnected and dependent to the extended family. The connectedness of generations facilitates the intergenerational transmission of values in collectivistic cultures, thus marrying with an out-group member is not suggested (Lou et al., 2015). As Lou and colleagues (2015) express, in collectivistic societies the sons are expected to transmit the culture and family name to the generations, which gives males the freedom to marry someone from another culture. However when it comes to daughters, the social codes against multicultural relationships are stricter; the women who intermarry are challenged by isolation from their kin group, and guilt of contradicting with cultural values (Lou et al., 2015).

The differences of cultural orientation may be reflecting on the spousal relationship. For instance while individualistic cultures stand in a more egalitarian position in terms of gendered division of labor, collectivistic cultures have definite roles for males and females (Lou et al., 2015). The meaning given to romantic love also differs between two cultural orientations. While in individualistic communities passionate romantic falling-in-love is fundamental for the union formation of partners, for collectivistic cultures falling-in-love implies a long-term commitment and harmony of two families (Lou et al., 2015; Ting-Toomey, 2009). Furthermore, marriage is a private matter in individualistic societies; however, in collectivistic societies it is seen as a social and familial connectedness (Semafumu, 1998, as cited in Seto & Cavallero, 2007). Similar to this, the meaning of commitment is perceived differently. While voluntary commitment is highlighted in individualistic cultures,

collectivistic cultures prioritize structural commitment, which is one's commitment to a relationship based on the reactions and teachings of external sources such as culture and family (Ting-Toomey, 2009).

The communication patterns are also of great importance. Ting-Toomey (2009) explains that self-expression and problem-solving attitudes may be highly culture-dependent. While individualistic people prefer a low-context communication which is a more direct and verbal form of self-expression, collectivistic people prefer a high-context communication where indirect forms of communication are preferred (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006; Ting-Toomey, 2009). The usage of explicit phrases of love and commitment is very dominant in individualistic cultures but such explicit expression of love isn't very apparent in collectivistic cultures (Ting-Toomey, 2009).

The differences in communication styles also reflect on conflict management styles. In the assertive nature of individualistic cultures, confrontation, competing, dominating and defending are preferred, while accommodating, avoiding, defusing, compromising and passive-aggressive styles are dominant in collectivistic cultures (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Partners may also be differing on the cohesion dimension according to their cultural codes (Falicov, 2014).

In cases where one partner is from an individualistic culture whereas the other one is from a collectivistic cultural culture, relational conflicts may emerge (Lou et al., 2015; Ting-Toomey, 2009). For the couples, in Inman and colleagues' study, cultural orientation has been an anticipated and experienced problematic. In this study, the participants explained that the collectivistic attitudes of Asian Indians resulted in closer connections with family, but for White American partners this connection was perceived as the transparency of the boundaries of nuclear family (Inman et al., 2011). The participants expressed facing the negative consequences of this difference beginning with the marriage ceremony and in their everyday lives as remaining under the pressure of the Asian Indian parents-in-law (Inman et al., 2011). The differences arising from cultural orientation were also felt during family gatherings and cultural ceremonies for the couples in the study (Inman et al., 2011).

The definition of family is also a differing notion. As seen in Kovac's (2015) analysis while family includes the parents, siblings and even cousins for Chinese, a highly collectivistic culture, for Hungarians, an individualistic one, the notion of family only encompasses the atomic one. This differentiation results with relational conflicts related to the management of economic resources for the participants in Kovac's (2015) study.

Although cultural teachings regarding identity formation, connection, autonomy, communication and romantic relationship differ among individualistic and collectivistic cultures, an individual's connection and attachment to his very kin group is of great importance to understand the amount of cultural impact one experiences. Not all people fully embrace their culture and not all people remain at the margins of a kin group. Thus according to Ting-Toomey (2009), awareness regarding one's location within the cultural spectrum and being able to communicate it with the partner is of vital importance for the satisfaction of multicultural couples.

#### **1.2.3.4 Religious Differences**

Various studies have been held for understanding the implications of the heterogeneity of religious beliefs in romantic relationships (McAloney, 2013; Parsons et al., 2007). Religiosity is defined as an individual's religious beliefs and practices (Floor & Knapp, 2001). Being analyzed on a continuum, religiosity of an individual is influenced from factors such as social environment, community, familial experiences, age and personal experiences (Bao, Whibeck, Hoyt & Conger, 1999; Cornwall, 1987).

There are studies arguing for the positive relation between religiosity and life-quality; however, when it comes to interfaith relationships, religiosity becomes a conflictual ground because religious heterogeneity doesn't only mean religious differences but implies a differentiation of morality and life-style (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). Gneezy, Leonard and List (2009) argue that religion not only manifests itself in beliefs and in religious ceremonies but defines one's attitudes

towards marriage, family life, daily-life activities and child-rearing practices. Gneezy and colleagues (2009) claim that people prefer partners from their own religious groups. While religious similarity increases a couple's happiness, having dissimilar religious beliefs reveals higher levels of depression among multicultural couples (Baltas & Steptoe, 2000; Chinitz & Brown, 2001).

In their study conducted in Northern Ireland where religious practice is common and where there is a strict differentiation between Protestants and Catholics, Wright and colleagues (2017) found that there is a greater risk of marital dissolution among Protestant-Catholic couples compared to religiously homogenous couples. In their study conducted in Veneto region of Italy, among 15 Muslim-Christians couples, Cerchiaro and colleagues (2015) argue that the impact of religion on interfaith relationships should be analyzed on three dimensions: how partners feel towards their religion, how they keep up with their religious practices, and how they manage the religious adaptation of their children. These are also the dimensions partners should negotiate to regulate their everyday life practices.

The study conducted by McAloney (2013) among 17,800 individuals in Britain from different religious groups reveals the correlation between psychological well-being and being in a religiously homogenous relationship. The same study controlling for the perceived impact of religion showed that the more influenced a person is from the religion, the more stress she/he gets in a multicultural relationship (McAloney, 2013). This distress doesn't only result from individual dynamics but emerges due to the pressure coming from family and society as a whole (McAloney, 2013). People in interfaith relationships may get exposed to criticism and rejection of the society, their external families and friends (Bystydzienski, 2011).

Conversion is also noteworthy to consider. Daneshpour's (2003) study conducted among the Muslim-Christian couples reveals that Muslim men wanted their wives to convert to Islam and they gave great importance to religious practices, while Christian women negatively experienced this request although some of them accepted to convert. Regardless of conversion to partner's religion, differences

between religious values and practices caused great amount of stress for Muslim-Christian couples in Daneshpour's (2003) study. The religious socialization of the child, whether he/she will be baptized or circumcised are also concerns that religiously heterogeneous couples have. Although the partners themselves were comfortable about the child's religious affiliation in some cases, they still felt anxious regarding how their family of origin would react to the decisions they make for the religion of the child (Daneshpour, 2003).

The social structure is also defining on how interreligious couples experience religious differences. The study of Kalmijn and colleagues (2005) reveals important data on religion's effects on marital dissolution for interreligious couples in Netherlands. They showed that the negative effects of religious differences are higher for Catholics and Jews who have interfaith relationships, while the risk is moderately above average for couples formed up of Protestants and other religious groups (Kalmijn et al., 2005). According to them, the reason behind this is that as the boundaries of a group get stricter, the people in these groups get more attached on to their traditions and experience more difficulty when exposed to different traditions (Kalmijn et al., 2005).

For certain communities, the impact of religious differences operates differently on women and men. Although not being strictly forbidden in Islam, interfaith marriage is a gendered notion in Islamic hadiths. For Islamic communities, marrying someone who is *ahl al-kitaab*, meaning people of the book which covers Islam, Christianity and Judaism, is acceptable for men while it is not convenient for women (Capucci, 2016). Capucci (2016) conducted a study among 50 Iraqi-Shia Muslim females and males, half of each group being in the US for a longer time and half recently arriving to the US, by asking the participants whether they would marry a woman from another sect. Although the results changed according to individuals' duration of living in US, the females reported greater anxiety regarding an interfaith marriage. For male participants, those who stayed in US for a longer period, approached interfaith marriage more positively when compared to ones who recently

came in US. The author explains that being unfamiliar to the practices of other religious groups negatively impacts individuals' attitude towards interfaith relationships. Differently from male participants, female participants also expressed their concerns regarding family's potential disapproval to an interfaith marriage (Capucci, 2016).

To examine the position of gender, Glenn (1982) ran a study with 9,810 Christian, Non-Religious and Jewish subjects asking them whether they are happy or not with their marriage. His findings revealed that men in homogenous marriages expressed greater happiness compared to men in heterogeneous marriages. With this information, the author expresses that being in a heterogeneous relationship is more challenging for men since it's the mother who religiously socializes children (Glenn, 1982).

By analyzing the relationship of Sunni and Alevi Turkish people, Çatak (2015) shows that in cases where partners have different religious practices and beliefs, the conservatism of partners leads to relations problems, where in this very study, for Sunni partners, accepting the practices of Alevi partner became more difficult since Sunnis are more conservative when compared to Alevis in Turkey.

Nevertheless, Eriksen (1997) shows that individuals in multicultural relationships are mostly either atheist or non-practicing believers. The study conducted by Bystydzienski (2011) among religiously heterogeneous couples indicates that religion appears to be a cultural issue instead of a theological one for partners in those relationships (Bystydzienski, 2011), the religious differences do not emerge as conflict areas. Similar findings are also shown by Petronoti and Papagaroufali (2006) in their analysis of Greek-Turkish partners. As the participants in this study did not describe themselves as religious, religious differences never turned out to be a problem.

However, even if the partners themselves do not practice their religion, for continuing the relationship with extended family members, they attend to family ceremonies and they do not refrain from doing certain compromises (Bystydzienski,

2011). The partners experience confusion and problems regarding their expected behaviors in such religious familial gatherings. Issues such as what to wear, eating non-Halal food or not and drinking alcohol are mostly voiced as conflicts among religiously heterogenous couples (Daneshpour, 2003).

In their analyses with 15 couples, Cerchiaro and colleagues (2015) highlight four main strategies spouses develop to deal with religious problems which are resigning, closeting, conversion and spiritualization. Resigning refers to one partner's resignation from the decision-making process about the religious practices. The second strategy, closeting, expresses the spouses' avoidance of religion and religious practices in daily life. Partners who either don't practice religion or who believe that all religions indeed convey similar humanitarian values are categorized in this group. Religion is apprehended as a social and cultural notion, not as a spiritual entity. Third strategy, conversion, implies the conversion of one of the partners. In such relationships, only one religion is practiced. For individuals, who put religion in a non-negotiable position in their lives, their partner's conversion becomes inevitable. The last strategy adopted, spiritualization, is explained as the protection and practice of both religions at home. For partners who both give importance to religion this strategy is found to be useful. Their relations with the religion becomes a constant zone of negotiation since they both don't want to resign, convert or avoid the religion. In such cases the potential relational conflicts are overcome through focusing on affinities and strengths of the relationship (Cerchiaro et al., 2015).

#### **1.2.3.5 Language Differences**

Communication and understanding are important components of healthy relationships. Intimate relationships are zones where partners' different viewpoints about values, norms, traditions, intimacy and gender roles are revealed and negotiated. Language is an important part of the communication between two individuals. Yet in most of the multicultural relationships, at least one of the partners doesn't communicate in his/her native language in daily life. Also the partners have

different native languages, which make them to communicate in neutral languages or in the native language of one of them. Since the potential of misunderstanding and misinterpretation is higher among partners who don't speak the same language, communication related problems might be more prevalent among multicultural couples (Bustamante et al., 2011). However, beyond language as such, deciphering each other's cultural codes, particularly in the matters of expressing and discussing emotions, managing anger, and solving conflicts, challenges multicultural couples (Eastwick et al., 2009). Uncertainty about what is expressed may create anxiety and discomfort among partners (Soliz, Thorson & Rittenour, 2009). Besides the communication related problems, the language spoken at home may lead to an inequality between partners if they speak the native language of one of the partners (Cools, 2006).

Obviously, language is not the only determinant for the quality of communication. The notions that can be talked or that should be avoided, the limits of closure and disclosure, direct or indirect expression styles are among the points individuals from different backgrounds might differ (Cools, 2006). On the other hand, developing language skills eliminates communication-related anxieties and speaking a third language, which is foreign to both of the partners eliminates the language-related inequalities among spouses (Cools, 2006). Dewaele and Salomidou (2016) show that those who have to speak in a foreign language in the relationship had difficulties at the beginning, but those difficulties are overcome as the individual gains competence in the language and as the partners get accustomed to the personal meanings of each other.

#### **1.2.3.6 Gender-Role Expectations**

Gender is a highly culture-dependent notion, determining one's behaviors in intimate relationships, shaping one's self-concept and directing one's duties and goals in life. Gender-roles include the appropriate behaviors and attitudes expected from men and women. Different gender role expectations negatively impact the spousal



relationship of multicultural couples (Cools, 2006; Seto & Cavallero, 2007). It is expressed that activities such as cooking, cleaning, child-rearing and employment have traditional gendered divisions, as the partners' expectations towards such roles don't match, conflicts arise (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 98). According to Seto and Cavallero (2007) even sharing the same religion or same language may not be decreasing the negative impacts of gender-role expectation differences.

In the case study conducted by Singh (2017) among Muslim-Christian couples, it was demonstrated that what Muslim men find appropriate for a woman is different from what Christian women want to perform. While the notion of "honour" is stressed by the Muslim men regarding the culturally inappropriate behaviors of their wives, the notion of freedom is claimed by the Christian women who don't internalize the cultural values of their husbands.

Although partners learn to negotiate those expectations and re-shape their attitudes in compromise, they unconsciously carry the social and personal meanings of gender roles, reflecting those upon their expectations regarding division of labor. For example African-American men are found to have a more egalitarian view towards gender-roles and therefore they don't report anxiety regarding doing household work while White-American men report high anxiety in the same situation (Bystydzienski, 2011).

However not just race or ethnicity but the culture one is raised in impacts one's perception and attitudes towards gender-roles. For example an African born man married to a white American woman expresses that cooking is seen as a woman's job in his country of origin and not only it's rare for men to cook back there, it is seen as a shame. This couple claims that although they found a way to equally share the housework in years, they still have the stigma of such behaviors in their minds (Bystydzienski, 2011). Another man from Iran, married to an American woman also argues that he used to be more traditional in terms of gender until he met his wife. Although overcoming those traditional views and supporting the equality of both partners, occasionally he finds himself reproducing the patriarchal system

ingrained in his raising environment (Bystydzienski, 2011). Differently, a Slovakian female participant in Cools' (2006) study claims that, she feels the difficulty of not being able to perform the traditional women roles she learnt, in her relationship with her husband who is Finnish and who is raised in a more egalitarian society in terms of gender-roles (Cools, 2006).

Bratter and Eschbach (2006) state that women may experience more stress in intercultural marriages since the gender role expectations cause various problems for women in terms of household division of labor, employment, sexuality and child-care practices. Especially for males coming from more male-dominated cultures such as South-America, Middle-East or Greece, the gender role expectations are strict, giving most of the household labor and child-rearing to females, and representing the male as the provider and protector of the house (Bustamante et al., 2011; Daneshpour, 2003).

However Cools' study (2006) also shows that differences of gender-role orientations don't become conflictual for every couple. For partners who don't share their society's gender-role expectations, their partner's different gender-role expectations may be more useful. A Belgian male participant in Cools' study (2006) highlights his happiness regarding having a wife who is more egalitarian in terms of gender-roles, when compared to Belgian women he interacted in his country.

Since the differences of gender-role expectations negatively impacts multicultural relationships, being flexible in gender role expectations (Bustamante et al., 2011; Petronoti & Papagaroufali, 2006), maintaining individuality and independence (Single & Holm, 2012), and preferring an egalitarian view (Forry, Leslie & Letiecq, 2007) are suggested as important coping mechanisms. On the other hand, instead of focusing on the cultural side of certain discussions around gender-role expectations, adopting the semantics of needs and emotions may be helpful for couples to meet at a common ground for discussion, since in certain cases being stuck in the cultural side of the issue takes the conflict to an irresolvable point (Singh, 2017).

### **1.2.3.7 Community Image**

How a multicultural couple is perceived is related to historical and current socio-political context of the society and not all different communities are treated in the same way. Especially the historical relations between ethnicities and the racial status of partners determine how they are perceived by the community they live in (Kilian, 2003; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). Studies held in the US show that, although increasing in number, interracial couples still face overt and covert forms of racism both in their families and in social environments (Kilian, 2001; 2003).

For understanding interethnic marriage, sociologists analyze the group boundaries, suggesting that for groups whose boundaries are permeable, the possibility of interethnic marriage is greater (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008). Kalmijn (1998) expresses that if unhappiness and instability exists after the union is formed and if cultural codes lie behind this unease, the rigidity/flexibility of group boundaries should be examined again.

For some individuals in multicultural relationships, there might be things that remain hidden especially in cases where historical aggression is experienced between the ethnic groups of partners, there might be silenced teachings, which still operate on individual level. How their family of origins approach to historical conflicts, how much those are debated or taught at home may be subtly impacting the relationship (Kilian, 2001).

Examining the relationships of Greek-Turkish couples, Petronoti and Papagaroufali (2006) highlight the importance of historical relations between two societies. Having both peaceful connections and violent conflicts in the past, Greek-Turkish relations have had an ambiguous nature. Following the formation of Greek nation state, two countries have been in conflict and the aggression between two communities lasted for long periods. On the other hand, the neighborhood relations such as tourism or commerce never ended for two groups. For the participants in this study, although knowing that two communities have an ambiguous attitude towards

each other, the similarities they explore as being exposed to each other's culture overcome the memory of the historical aggression between two ethnic groups.

Another study compares how interracial relationships are perceived in the US and in Canada (Hou, Wu, Schimmele & Myles, 2015). Black/White marriages are often seen in Canada and people's attitudes are positive towards such unions, but when it comes to the US such unions are much rare and much more negatively perceived by the society. According to Hou and colleagues (2015), the reason behind this difference is the fact that blacks in Canada never experienced the slavery and anti-miscegenation that the blacks in the US experienced.

Similarly, the stereotypic image of a certain community also creates unease for friends and families of individuals who marry a foreigner. Especially the image of the Muslim community is emphasized in Petronoti and Papagaroufali's (2006) study. The Greek relatives hesitated when their children wanted to marry a Muslim, fearing that Turkish people wear burqa or salvari or don't drink alcohol. However this hesitation disappears as families interact with each other and notice how similar they are.

#### **1.2.3.8 Class Differences**

Class, a fundamental notion defining socioeconomic boundaries and socioeconomic attitudes among people, requires consideration for the analysis of multicultural couples. People have different power and privilege relative to their location in the social system. Those locations such as gender, race, class, ability, religion or education, impact one's positions in the personal interactions (Kilian, 2001).

The socioeconomic status of a social group is also important to consider. Bystydzienski (2011) argues that class is the most important source of conflict for multicultural couples and that although partners seem to be in equal positions by education and earnings, they may be coming from very different class positions (p.82). Bratter and Eschbach (2006) state that in African American-White American

marriages, the white partner is in a constructed superior position due to historical conditions. Thus in this type of a relationship white partner is treated as lowering her/his social positioning, which may be adding to their psychological distress. Similarly, for the African-American partner, the assumption of being in a lower-class position may be leading to internalized inequalities within the romantic relationship (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006). It is rarely possible that the cultural backgrounds existing at home are on the same societal level; one may be from a minority group and one from the majority, one may be local and the other may be an immigrant. All such categories lead to the formation of inequalities at home (Collet, 2015). Bystydzienski (2011) expresses that class of origin determines one's attitude towards material needs, family structure, financial behaviors and leisure preferences, which in the long term may cause problems for couples if there are fundamental differences.

#### **1.2.3.9 Where To Live**

The globalizing nature of the world enables the establishment of multicultural relationships and facilitates moving to countries other than the country of origin for individuals. However for multicultural relationships, the place of residency can become conflictual. One or both of the partners may be residing in a country other than the country of origin, they may be away from their social support mechanisms or may be having problems on adapting to the place they live in (Seto & Cavallero, 2007). The choice of residency may also result in an unequal power distribution between partners in cases where they reside in one of their country of origin (Seto & Cavallero, 2007).

Living abroad may result in negative feelings in addition to being isolated from the kin group. Every individual has a socio-cultural identity revealed either in indirect or direct ways. Even though one is not aware of how much one feels excluded or belonging to her social group, being exposed to a different social space fuels the feelings of belonging or exclusion (Cools, 2006). Living in a country which is not your own and being obliged to speak a foreign language may be increasing the

feelings of exclusion, isolation and inadequacy especially if the individual is not fluent enough with the language of the host country (Seto & Cavallero, 2007).

When one of the partners is not a legal citizen of the country they live in, another form of inequality emerges, a legal one, coming up with various administrative problems in addition to the minority partners' anxiety of discrimination and isolation (Collet, 2015). Petronoti and Papagaroufali's (2006) study shows that multicultural couples decide on the place of residency considering the living and economic standards of a country. In this study, Turkish partners preferred living in Greece, where their partners are from, because of the better living standards Greece provided.

The adaptation process to the immigrated country is also a concern for multicultural couples. The study conducted by Lavee and Krivosh (2012) shows that different adaptation and acculturation levels of partners into the country they moved in causes distress in the relationship. Just as one side of belonging to the new country is related with the individual's acculturation and adaptation capacities, the other side of the issue is related with the host society's willingness to accept and include to foreign individuals (Cools, 2006). The individual differences that the partners have may change the adaptation, acceptance and acculturation process for them. As is shown by Lavee and Krivosh (2012), if one of the partners shares more common characteristics such as religion or race with the country they moved in, the adaptation can be easier for him/her. However having less similar characteristics with the culture of the country they moved in, the other partner's feelings of exclusion and isolation may be advanced.

#### **1.2.3.10 Child-Rearing**

Child-rearing appears to be one of the biggest problems of multicultural couples, because child-rearing practices are consciously or unconsciously acquired from familial and social experiences (Negy & Snyder, 2000). The differences among child-rearing practices, the culture the child will adopt, the family of origin's

reactions to the couple about the cultural behavior of children are notions that arise concern for multicultural couples (Inman et al., 2011).

According to Kağıtçıbaşı (1996) caregiving is a culturally constructed notion. The caregivers receive certain recipes either through observation, experience or through advice on how to raise their children. Considering the case of multicultural couples, they have distinct knowledges and practices regarding child-rearing which become conflictual (Negy & Snyder, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 2009). Those conflicts such as, the gendered division of labor regarding child-rearing or the age-appropriate behaviors expected from a child challenge multicultural couples.

Multicultural couples who did not have any cultural problems previously, face with various contradictions when it comes to raising their children (Cerchiaro et al., 2015) such as who will take care of the child and the house (Van Mol & de Valk, 2015). In addition Bornstein and Güngör (2009) demonstrate that while for certain societies the biological parents are responsible from child-rearing, in certain cultures the extended family such as grandparents and siblings (Eastwick et al., 2009) have equal responsibilities and inclusion on child-rearing. The meaning of play even changes among cultures. For instance while Mexican mothers see playing with the child as a tool to form emotional bond, mothers in the US approach plays as tools to enhance child's cognitive abilities (Farver, 1993). Furthermore, the freedom given to the child to explore, nurturing of the child, the amount of self-control and agency expected from the child are notions differing among cultures (Bornstein & Güngör, 2009).

The religious socialization of the child also becomes a conflictual area for multicultural couples who have different religions (Cerchiaro et al., 2015; Negy & Snyder, 2000) because it also implies a hidden power-relations (Petronoti & Papagaroufali, 2006). Although multicultural couples want their children to adopt the culture of both religions/societies (Daneshpour, 2003) they are also hesitant about it, fearing how their children will be perceived in school and among friends because of being bicultural. They fear that it will be difficult for the child to internalize both

cultures confidently and to be proud of who she is (Inman et al., 2011). It is very probable for such children to find themselves in the position of representing both cultures but not being an accepted member of either (Foeman & Nance, 1999). Although research shows that biracial children in the US are exposed to racism in social environments, the participants in Kilian's study didn't report any kind of anxiety on the possible negative experiences of their children (Kilian, 2001).

Cultural adaptation of the child is another problematic for multicultural couples. The culture the child will feel closer to, will be exposed to more, the transmission of both cultures to child and child's future experiences in the country of residence are among such concerns. Also the language the child will speak, the name that will be given to the child, how the child will look are expressed as problematic (Bacas, 2002). The spouses often prefer giving transnational names to their children for avoiding preferring one culture over another, or they prefer to name their child congruent with the culture of the country they live in, considering the future experiences of the child (Bacas, 2002).

The couples deal with these problems through mutual negotiations. They try to teach both languages and religions to their children, they share with them the cultural stories and songs of both communities, they choose to give two names representing both communities, although preferring their children to be mostly adapted to the dominant culture of the resident country, to prevent any kind of discrimination they may get exposed to (Bacas, 2002; Petronoti & Papagaroufali, 2006).

Recognizing the child's mixed heritage and communicating about this with the child could be a beneficial strategy for the child to get accustomed to the idea of being multicultural. Soliz and colleagues (2009) express that interrogating whether the child feels excluded from the dominant culture or not, what he/she experiences in terms of cultural differences she/has, may reduce the stress the child has.



### **1.3 HOW THE COUPLES COPE WITH THEIR PROBLEMS**

Experiencing various problems in areas such as child-rearing, social rejection, gender-role expectations and communication, multicultural couples develop skills to overcome those problems and to protect the relationship. Although most of the research focuses on multicultural relationships in a conflict-oriented manner, there are studies showing that such relationships can also be culturally enriching and can provide a neutral environment for partners to blend their differences, and to move beyond cultural constraints. How the conflicts arising from differences are managed is related to individual and interactional coping mechanisms of partners (Bustamante et al., 2011) such as effective communication, understanding and humour (Heller & Wood, 2007)

Although literature shows that there are more stressors for multicultural couples, the multicultural couples, some studies express that those differences do not impact their spousal relationship (Soliz et al., 2009). Falicov (2014) argues that couples in balanced relationships are not stuck between cultural norms, embrace their differences, and develop their own relationship culture through mutual acculturation and flexibility. However, using limited numbers of frameworks to examine their problems, similarities or differences, may lead the partners to either maximize or minimize their differences, taking the relationship to an unbalanced situation (Falicov, 2014). “Agreeing to disagree” is suggested as an important coping mechanism (Kilian, 2001, p. 31). The spouses in multicultural relationships may not be agreeing on everything but accepting and respecting each other become helpful. In the study of Daneshpour (2003) it is demonstrated that interest and curiosity in the spouse’s cultural background is helpful for eliminating conflicts arising between partners on issues such as, finances, and responsibilities towards children and house. Also such conflicts are voiced by same-culture couples too. Besides cultural interest, the respect and acceptance of both cultures serve the formation of the couple culture, highly needed for a harmonious relationship (Soliz et al., 2009).

This section will focus on various mechanisms partners use in multicultural relationships, for protecting their relationship from the negative impacts of cultural differences.

### **1.3.1 Focusing on Similarities**

Research on intimate relationships provides meaningful data on how similarity among partners on self-revealing fields such as values, conflict-resolution strategies, attitudes and emotional experiences facilitates the intimate relationships (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Lemay & Clark, 2008). Partners sharing similar characteristics are expected to have less conflict, more accurate communication and to receive greater support from the social environment, and thus, individuals mostly prefer mates who have similar backgrounds (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). Sharing similar attitudes towards race and religion, being educated on similar levels (Kilian, 2001) and having similar gender-role expectations (Petronoti & Papagaroufali, 2006) are also presented as making the relationship stronger. Djurdjevic and Girona (2016), by analyzing the experiences of multicultural couples in Spain show that the willingness to learn more about the world is an important characteristic commonly shared by partners.

For multicultural couples, the cultural differences are evident and constitute barriers for the exploration of similarities. In such situations, focusing on similarities instead of the evident differences (West, Magee, Gordon, & Gullett, 2014) and enjoying similar activities (Inman et al., 2011) are mutually preferred by partners. The similarity between worldviews, values and life-style becomes the reason of relationship-formation, and deflects the partners' attention from the differences they have (Petronoti & Papagaroufali, 2006; West et al., 2014). Finding similar characteristics and common grounds lead to creation of an in-group perception among partners improving the romantic interaction (West, Pearson, Dovidio, Shelton, & Trail, 2009).

Studies show that perceived similarity is related with relationship satisfaction (Lutz-Zois, Bradley, Mihalik & Moorman-Eavers, 2006). While not being able to find similarities can threaten the intimate relationships, perceived similarity enhances communication, coping and mutual understanding among partners (Holmes & Rempel, 1989) as well as strengthening partners' commitment and belief in the relationship (Lemay & Clark, 2008).

Sometimes there might be similarities between the partners' cultures. As shown in the study of Petronoti and Papagaroufali (2006) being previously exposed to and familiar with the partner's culture also positively affects the spousal relationship. The Greek and Turkish participants in this study argued that although being Turkish or Greek in ethnicity, the cultures of two countries are very similar that their ancestors lived in same places and even knew each others' language. This cultural closeness facilitated both spousal interaction and the relations with extended families.

Furthermore, how much an individual is adapted to his/her culture is of vital importance. One interesting finding demonstrated by Foeman and Nance (2002) is that partners in multicultural romantic relationships, claim to always feel as an outsider in their ethnic/racial groups for reasons such as not adopting the gender-role expectations dominant in the society, not practicing religion or not internalizing the dominant socio-political values. Yet similarity they see in their partners in those fields becomes foundation of relationship. In this manner they might have "more differences intraculturally than intercultural" (Watts & Henriksen, 1999, p. 70). Such partners express that they eventually learn to belong to each other instead of feeling belongingness to any ethnic/racial group (Foeman & Nance, 2002). Thus the shared characteristics help partners to see the physical, personal or social differences as superficial and insignificant attributions (Kilian, 2001).

### **1.3.2 Constructive Coping Strategies**

As stated earlier, each marriage includes conflictual fields and partners eventually develop skills to solve those. Constructive coping strategies partners adopt

are positively related to relationship satisfaction (Dennison et al., 2014). Especially in the case of multicultural relationships, the expectations and needs of partners may highly differ. Heller and Wood (2007) argue that conflicts serve to increase the intimacy and communication in the relationship, as long as partners effectively communicate about their problems. Instead of remaining stuck on the cultural side of the issues, approaching the conflicts based on personal needs and mindfully listening to each other's views are helpful (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Gottman (1994) argues that the key to a happy marriage is knowing how to argue, satisfied couples report less anger towards each other and are better in returning to normal after an argument.

Bystydzienski (2011) argues that partners in multicultural relationships find the necessary strength to continue the relationship from the strength of the relationship, this strength explained as trusting the relationship, trusting each others' love and finding comfort with each other. Foeman and Nance (2002) also emphasize the importance of turning to each other for partners in multicultural relationships. Their analysis reveals that couples who are good at relying on each other, who are good at negotiating their feelings and expectations and those who are good at using humor as a means of negotiation are happier couples (Foeman & Nance, 2002).

### **1.3.3 Effective Communication**

Intimate interactions necessitate the expression and accurate perception of emotional messages. Although humans feel the same emotions universally, they deeply differ in how they process and utilize affective information in intrapersonal and interpersonal connections (Mikolajczak & Luminet, 2008). Researchers has found that there is high correlation between effective communication and dyadic adjustment (Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). Effective communication includes skills such as listening, expressing, empathy, respect and flexibility which are of vital importance for multicultural couples considering that they might have more fields to argue and to negotiate due to their cultural differences.

Self-disclosure is important for the expression of emotions. Both partners' effective self-disclosure positively impacts the spousal relationship (Soliz et al., 2009) by helping partners to reach to a compromise on their differing expectations. Besides, being sensitive about each other's needs and prioritizing the partner's happiness before all facilitated the solutions for Asian-Indian and White-American couples in Inman and colleagues' study (2011).

Empathy and flexibility are fundamental capacities for effective communication. Thus remaining empathic and flexible during arguments is of vital importance. Cognitively, empathy means one's ability to shift perspective and to infer others' feelings, and flexibility is the capacity to evaluate behavioral alternatives, to produce diverse ideas and to adapt to changing contexts (Grattan & Eslinger, 1989). Research shows that those who are more flexible have more confidence in themselves in interpersonal interactions and they are better at expressing and recognizing emotions, which predict relational happiness (Rubin & Martin, 1994). Those who fail to be empathic during arguments fall to verbal aggressiveness, which is negatively related with relational satisfaction (Martin, Anderson & Thweatt, 1998). On the other hand, defensiveness, stubbornness and withdrawal can harm the interaction between partners in times of crisis (Gill, Christensen, & Fincham, 1999). Partners' mutual intent to have a healthy argument without hurting each other positively impacts the quality of arguments (Mackey, Diemer, & O'Brien, 2000).

Humans communicate through both verbal and non-verbal cues, which differ in distinct cultural environments. For understanding each other and for balancing their needs and desires, partners of differing cultures must be working on their arguments, decoding their expressions and they must be adapting to the language codes of each other (Ting-Toomey, 2009). They should also explore and share with each other the verbal and non-verbal communication patterns to get accustomed to each other's language and to eliminate misunderstandings (Määttä et al., 2014). However because the partners have different communication patterns, misunderstandings can be inevitable. In such cases the cultural background of the

partner should be constantly kept in mind for the arguments to move healthily (Ting-Toomey, 2009).

Being in a multicultural relationship comes with certain psychological burdens such as feeling isolated or excluded. The partners' experiences of belonging to the cultural group they're placed in, their individual and collective ways of managing new situations and attitudes towards gender-roles, their patterns of interaction with strangers, with family and friends, and their perceptions regarding the others should be shared at the beginning stage of the relationship (Foeman & Nance, 2002). Questioning the cultural operations and exploring a subjective attitude towards culture saves culture from the rigid boundaries of familial traditions (Inman et al., 2011). Besides serving to create a common story (Foeman & Nance, 1999) discussing the differences openly and respecting each other's values help couples to embrace those differences as tools of personal growth, through which both partners increase their cultural literacy and question their own culture's teachings, values and beliefs.

Humor is an important communication capacity. In Bustamante and colleagues' (2011) study, humor is presented as one of the mechanisms couples prefer for overcoming the negativities. Using cultural stereotypes as humors, making fun of their own prejudices and about their differences help the couples to decrease the potential tension that can emerge from those differences or prejudices (Bustamante et al., 2011; Määttä, Anglé, & Uusiautti, 2014). The authors imply that without seeing the funny sides of daily events, relationships may not be able to last happy.

#### **1.3.4 Respecting and Integrating Both Cultures**

Just as effective communication, understanding and respectful attitude of partners is important for relational satisfaction. Besides the personal differentiations, partners in multicultural relationships need to negotiate about cultural practices too. This negotiation requires the integration of both cultures and the "mixedness" of the relationship is assured by refraining to prioritizing one culture over another (Petronoti & Papagaroufali, 2006).

The cultural differences partners have might as well enrich the relationship. In Bystydzienski's (2011) study, it is seen that although coming from various cultural backgrounds, partners indeed had the freedom to take parts of both cultures they prefer continuing, and to defy the parts that aren't appreciated by both of them, thus building up a more egalitarian relationship through continuous negotiations. Seeing these differences as spicing the relationship (Kilian, 2001) and focusing on the availability of choices of food, relatives, rituals and practices (Single & Holm, 2012) helps the partners to accept and integrate both cultures. Apprehending religious practices as cultural notions, tolerating and respecting the expectations, integrating the meanings of both cultures in their daily lives help the couples to prevent the potential conflicts that can arise from cultural differences (Bystydzienski, 2011; Daneshpour, 2003; Single & Holm, 2012).

Self-awareness is an important factor helping partners to be able to talk about their cultural loads that may be reflecting upon the relationship. Foeman and Nance (1999) emphasize the importance of couples' racial awareness and sensitivity on solving the culture related conflicts. Being sensitive to each other's racial/ ethnic status means concerning each other's cultural experiences (Bystydzienski, 2011; Foeman & Nance, 2002). In addition to relational dynamics stated above, the general cultural appreciation and interest towards different cultures positively impact a multicultural relationship (Bustamante et al., 2011).

Besides self-awareness, communicating about the social representations they are surrounded by both as a couple and as individuals help partners to form up a shared attitude and shared history (Collet, 2015; Foeman & Nance, 2002; Kilian, 2001). Forming this shared belief requires one to learn about four different approaches: their own, their partner's, their own collective group's and their partner's collective group's regarding the important matters for the couple. After the awareness stage is completed, the couple then can begin to formulate solutions to the probable negativities they will encounter, such solutions may be deciding on refraining from

being with family members or friends which oppose the relationship or developing a strategy to defend their relationship (Bystydzienski, 2011; Foeman & Nance, 1999).

Mutual respect and acceptance towards differences are important for partners to feel included and integrated into the relationship. As an individual feels understood, valued and respected in terms of his/her cultural identity, relational satisfaction increases; especially for couples where one of the partners is from a minority group, identity support gains greater importance. (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Respect, patience and compromise help the couples to reframe their cultural loads, to blend their previously held cultural values in the relationship and to adapt to each other's practices (Bacas, 2002; Kilian, 2001; Wood, 2000). Extended identity support is an important factor for the relational satisfaction among intercultural couples.

Finding solutions for problems they encounter requires mutual compromise, which is a vital part of multicultural relationships. Empathy, understanding and flexibility of both partners gain importance at this point. Määttä and colleagues (2014) by analyzing the coping strategies of multicultural couples in Finland show that partners' willingness to make compromises helps their partners to feel respected and understood. In that sense, mutual understanding is suggested as fundamental for a balanced relationship to develop (Heller & Wood, 2007). Bocas (2002) claims that partners in multicultural relationships do not experience conflicts because of cultural differences but because of insisting on their differences. Being flexible about the cultural codes helps partners to not prefer one culture over another but to build a relationship culture by integrating elements of both cultures into their everyday life. Similarly Bustamante and colleagues (2011) present the importance of cultural reframing and flexibility in important dimensions such as religious practice and gender-roles as important coping mechanisms individuals use in multicultural relationships

Flexibility, parallel with openness provide the conditions for the integration of both cultures. Open-mindedness and flexibility help partners to think beyond cultural categories and to enjoy an enriching relationship (Daneshpour, 2003; Single & Holm,



2012). Aron and Aron (1986) also emphasize the association between relational satisfaction and individuals' openness to self-expansion. Partners in multicultural relationships do not have to leave away their cultural practices. The capacity to appreciate relationship as an environment, which can be used for personal growth where all differences can be integrated, becomes possible through the open and flexible attitude of partners (Gaines & Brennan, 2001).

#### **1.4 SITUATION IN TURKEY**

Turkey is a country situated as a cultural bridge between the East and the West, and shows the co-existence for most people, qualities of both individualism and collectivism (Medora, Larson, Hortaçsu, Hortaçsu & Dave, 2002). Fişek (1991) describes Turkish families as being enmeshed in terms of emotional relatedness and highly-differentiated in terms of role expectations. The traditional family structure is still predominantly patriarchal in Turkey, determining the rules, roles and expected behaviors within and outside of familial environment (Bolak-Boratav, Okman-Fişek & Eslen-Ziya, 2017).

Men are more powerful when compared to women and children, and this results in a strict hierarchy defining the boundaries within families. The fathers are traditionally positioned as emotionally distant and oppressive, adopting the role of protector of the family and the maintainer of authority. Although going through changes, Turkish men still keep certain characteristics such as being emotionally distant, performing limited self-disclosure, and having strict boundaries based upon respect with their children (Bolak-Boratav et. Al, 2017).

In terms of relation between self and family, Fişek (2010) defines the traditional Turkish experience as a "familial self" an intrapsychic organization that is interconnected with intimate others. These intimate connections are highly defined by "structural hierarchy" (Roland, 1988, p.7, as cited in Fişek, 2010) based upon obedience and respect of children, and authority and control of parents (Fişek, 2010). While the expression of both positive and negative emotions is possible with mothers,

children are not free to express especially their anger to fathers (Sunar & Fişek, 2005). In terms of the differential treatment of sons and daughters, while boys are permitted to be more independent and aggressive, daughters are educated in a manner to always remain obedient and dependent (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996).

The dominant family structure is nuclear family, but extended family members provide each other mutual support and they are also spatially close to each other (Sunar & Fişek, 2005). With increased urbanization and education, this familial self may gradually expand in the direction of an “autonomous-relational” self instead of an independent or interdependent self (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996, p.89). With socio-cultural changes, a more egalitarian family structure emerges in Turkey, especially among upper-class, educated families living in metropolitan cities (Bolak-Boratav et al., 2017). In this newly emerging family model, child-rearing practices became less authoritarian. Also the emotional closeness among parents and children gains more importance (Sunar & Fişek, 2005). This kind of a family structure would be perceived as enmeshed in Minuchin’s (1974) family-systems theory, yet a high proximity between members, a strong hierarchy rendering possible the differentiation and interconnectedness of members is the norm among Turkish families (Sunar & Fişek, 2005).

Similarly the meaning of marriage changes from the union of two based on mutual respect, towards a more egalitarian and emotionally close relationship of two (Bolak-Boratav et al, 2017). The tradition of arranged marriage is still strong especially outside of major metropol, but there is also a growing educated and young population who see marriage as a union of two in love and who give importance to free choice when it comes to marriage (Medora et al., 2002). However families are still influential in marriage decisions and most marriages are homogenous in terms of social class (Sunar & Fişek, 2005).

When it comes to the accurate number and experiences of multicultural couples in Turkey, data is limited. The earliest study known about binational couples in Turkey dates from 1970’s (LeCompte & White, 1978). Analyzing the marriage

experiences and partner expectations of Turkish men who are married to non-Turkish women and who are married to Turkish women, this study demonstrated that perceived similarity among spouses positively impacts relational satisfaction. Yet a significant difference is not observed between those who are married to non-Turkish women and those who are married to Turkish women on self-confidence or marital expectations.

There are studies focusing on the experiences of foreign brides who are married to Turkish men, demonstrating that especially in Antalya, a highly touristic city, the number of Russian-Turkish marriages increased in the last decade. However this study only covers the experiences of Russian women in terms of working conditions, migration stories and legal situations they are faced with, failing to include the relational dynamics and the experiences of husbands (Deniz & Murat, 2013; Gökmen, 2011). Other studies have examined the union of Sunni & Alevi or Turkish and Kurdish couples (Balkanlıoğlu, 2012; Gündüz-Hoşgör & Smits, 2002). One study showed that both Turkish and Kurdish women preferred mates from their own ethnic groups (Koç, Hancıoğlu & Cavlin, 2008). These researchers defined ethnicity in terms of native language because the data regarding ethnicity is only determined based on the native language in Turkish population statistics. In another study by Gündüz Hoşgör and Smits (2002) the data on Kurdish-Turkish marriages obtained between 1993 and 1998 show that although the two groups mostly prefer in-group marriage, the number of Kurdish-Turkish marriages increased over the years. Furthermore their findings provided support for Social Exchange Theory, by showing that the interethnic marriages between Kurd and Turks is usually among the educated Kurdish men and less-educated Turkish women. A second study by Gündüz Hoşgör and Smits (2013) analyzing the data obtained between 1993 and 2008 showed an increase in the number of Kurdish-Turkish marriages, explaining that the increase in the number of Kurdish women getting married Turkish men is related with the increasing opportunities of education for Kurdish women.

A study of relational experiences of Sunni & Alevi couples in Turkey showed that couples face with criticism coming from their social environment and experiencing anxiety regarding the potential challenges their children will face (Balkanlıoğlu, 2002). Similar findings were also reached in a study of Sunni and Alevi couples (Çatak, 2015) where partners face with rejection, discrimination and negative comments from their families; it was reported that especially more conservative Sunni parents had difficulty accepting their children marrying an Alevi.

### **1.5 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Existing research on multicultural couples focuses on racial, religious or ethnic differences among spouses from a problem approach, suggesting that partners differing on various layers of culture have less stable relationships and a higher risk of divorce (Clarkwest, 2007; Fu, 2006; Jones, 1996; Kalmijn et al., 2005; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Negy & Snyder, 2000; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). This study aims to broaden the concept of multicultural relationships, considering various dimensions of culture such as religion, language, familial dynamics and ethnicity. Also this study approaches the issue not from a problem approach but in a constructive manner, aiming to figure out the relational dynamics, which protect the relationships from the potentially negative aspects of cultural differences.

The studies conducted with multicultural couples in Turkey are limited. These studies either examine the relationship between Turkish-Kurdish and Alevi-Sünni couples or the Russian brides who live in Turkey. Thus a wider analysis which cover the experiences of both partners is missing in the literature. By including partners from different nationalities, ethnicities, languages and religious groups, and by including both spouses, this study aims to provide important knowledge for practitioners and researchers who work with multicultural couples.

## METHOD

### 2.1 PARTICIPANTS

Eighteen participants, nine males and nine females who are in intimate relationship, volunteered to join the study, eight of the female participants were Turkish and one was Greek, eight of the male participants were from, Germany, Spain, United Kingdom, France, Chili and Italy and one male participant is from Turkey. Convenience sampling method was used through word of mouth. The researcher reached the participants through acquaintances. The participation criteria were currently being in a multicultural relationship and either cohabiting or being married for at least six months. The partners who are born and raised in different countries, who have different native languages, religious and ethnic backgrounds are accepted as multicultural, in the scope of this study.

The researcher reached the participants through declaring the study to acquaintances and asked for people who might be eligible. The researcher made a phone call with people who are reached for examining their eligibility for the study and for informing them about the study. The couples who share the same religion, ethnicity and same native language are excluded from the study even if they differ on one dimension of culture. Also those who don't cohabit or who cohabit for less than six months are excluded. Those who are married for less than six months are not excluded. Because the researcher is only fluent in Turkish and in English, only the individuals who can speak either of the languages are elected for the study. The researcher arranged meetings with participants who are found eligible to participate.

After the approval of the Ethics committee of İstanbul Bilgi University, the interviews are set with the participants. The researcher made a pilot study with one couple before beginning the interviews. After the pilot study the researcher and the advisor decided not to change any questions since they provided the aimed information. As the pilot study is completed the interviews began. All participants

were informed that the interviews will be recorded and transcribed before the interviews are held. They were also briefed that the recordings will be deleted after the data is transcribed and the transcriptions will be kept in a password-protected file for five years for potential publication and they can retrieve their information from the study any time they want. The interviews are done face to face, separately with each partner in their houses for protecting the confidentiality. The demographic characteristics of the couples are also presented. Data collection ended up when the researcher reached data saturation.

## 2.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

In this section, brief information about 18 participants are presented. Identification numbers are used for the protection of confidentiality. Detailed description of participants is presented in Table 1 and in the following sections.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

Id	Age	Gender	Nationality	Rel. Status	Rel.	Religion	Profession	Nr.of Children
					Duration (years)			
C01FTR	25	F	Turkish	Cohabitation	3.5	Atheist	Lawyer	0
C01MGR	27	M	German	Cohabitation	3.5	Atheist	Lawyer	0
C02FTR	22	F	Turkish	Cohabitation	3.5	NPB*	Lawyer	0
C02MUK	24	M	English	Cohabitation	3.5	Atheist	Marketing	0
C03FTR	40	F	Turkish	Married	5	NPB*	Banking	2
C03MIT	43	M	Italian	Married	5	Catholic	Engineer	2
C04FTR	25	F	Turkish	Married	10	Atheist	Marketing	0
C04MFR	28	M	French	Married	10	Atheist	Pilot	0
C05FTR	24	F	Turkish	Married	2	Atheist	Advertising	0
C05MGRC	28	M	Greek	Married	2	Orthodox	Teacher	0
C06FTR	26	F	Turkish	Married	4	Atheist	Teacher	0

C06MCH	27	M	Chilian	Married	4	Atheist	Teacher	0
C07FTR	37	F	Turkish	Married	3	NPB*	Banking	1
C07MFR	40	M	French	Married	3	NPB*	Engineer	1
C08FGRC	24	F	Greek	Cohabitation	2.5	Orthodox	Tourism	0
C08MTR	29	M	Turkish	Cohabitation	2.5	Atheist	Tourism	0
C09FTR	36	F	Turkish	Married	2	NPB*	Counselling	0
C09MSP	29	M	Spanish	Married	2	Atheist	Teacher	0

\*NPB stands for non-practicing believer

### 2.2.1 Couple-1

The female partner of this couple (C01FTR) is Turkish and atheist. She is 25 years old. She currently habits in Berlin, working in a NGO. She studied law in Turkey. She is from İzmir, a city in the west of Turkey, primarily known as secular and European. She is from an upper-class family. She has an older sister who lives in Copenhagen.

The male partner of this couple (C01MGR) is German, from Dortmund, and atheist. He is 27 years old. He is currently doing his legal internship in a law firm in Berlin. He has a younger brother who lives in Dortmund.

They have been together for 3.5 years and they cohabit for 2.5 years. They used to live in Istanbul, this year they moved to Berlin.

### 2.2.2 Couple-2

This couples is formed by one Turkish female partner (C02FTR) and one half Turkish half English male partner (C02MUK). C02FTR is 22 years old. She is from İstanbul, coming from an upper-middle class family. Her parents are also from İstanbul. She studied law in a private university in İstanbul. She has one younger sister. She has been living in Ataşehir for two and a half years with her boyfriend,

they've been dating for three and a half years. She is Turkish and Muslim. In terms of religion she describes herself believing in God but not practicing Islam.

C02MUK is 24 years old. He is from İstanbul. His father is Turkish and his mother is English. He studied in international schools in Istanbul until college and he completed his college education in London. He works in a telecommunication company in the marketing branch. He is also from an upper-middle class family, both of his parents are university graduates and business-people. In terms of religion he describes himself as a strict atheist.

### **2.2.3 Couple-3**

This couple is formed by one Turkish female partner and one Italian male partner. They are married for 4 years and are together for 5 years. They have two daughters ages of 1.5 and 3. They live in Istanbul.

C03FTR is Turkish and she is 40 years old. She is from Izmir, coming from an upper-middle class family. She has a younger sister who is also married. She is a university graduate. She works in a bank as a client supervisor. In terms of religion she describes herself as believing but not practicing.

C03MIT is Italian and he is 43 years old. He is from Napoli, coming from a middle-class family. He has an older sister. He is a university graduate. He works in a factory as CEO. He describes himself as a practicing Catholic.

### **2.2.4 Couple-4**

This couple is formed by one Turkish female partner and one French male partner. They have been together and cohabiting for ten years. They are married for one year. They used to live in London, but moved in Istanbul two years ago.

C04FTR is Turkish and she is 25 years old. She is from Izmir, coming from an upper-middle class family. She is a university graduate. She works in a company in the marketing department. In terms of religion she describes herself as an atheist.



C04MFR is French and 28 years old. He is from Nice, coming from a middle-class family migrated from Italy three generations before. He has a younger brother. He is a university graduate. He is pilot. In terms of religiosity he describes himself as an atheist.

### **2.2.5 Couple-5**

This couple is formed by one Turkish female and one Greek male. They are together for two years and married six months ago. They live in Istanbul.

C05FTR is Turkish and she is 24 years old. She is from Istanbul, coming from an upper-class family. She has an older brother. She describes her family as very conservative Muslims. She studied history and she works in an advertising agency. She describes herself as atheist.

C05MGRC is Greek and he is 28 years old. He is from Athens, coming from a middle-class Albanian origin family. He has a younger brother. He is a university graduate. He works in a language school as a teacher. In terms of religion he describes himself as an Orthodox Christian.

### **2.2.6 Couple-6**

This couple is formed by one Turkish female partner and one Chilean male partner. They have been together and cohabiting for four years and they married six months ago. They live in Istanbul.

C06FTR is Turkish and she is 26 years old. She is from Istanbul but her family of origin migrated from Rize. She is from a middle-class family. She has one older sister and one younger sister. She is a university graduate. She works as a trainer in a private sports club. In terms of religion she describes her family as practicing Muslims, and herself as an atheist.

C06MCH is a Chilean and he is 27 years old. He is from Chili but because his father is a diplomat he never lived in Chili. He is from an upper-class family. He

doesn't have any siblings. He is a university graduate. He works as a language teacher in a kindergarten. In terms of religion he describes himself as atheist.

### **2.2.7 Couple-7**

This couple is formed by one Turkish female partner and one French male partner. They have been together for three years and have been married for two years. They have an eighth months old son. They live in Istanbul.

C07FTR is Turkish and she is 37 years old. She is from Bursa, from a middle-class family. She has an older sister. She is a university graduate. She works in a bank. In terms of religion she describes herself as believing but not practicing.

C07MFR is French and he is 40 years old. His father is from Tunisia and his mother is French. He is from Paris, from a middle-class family. He is a single child. He is a university graduate. He works in a factory as a director. In terms of religiosity he describes himself as a not practicing believer.

### **2.2.8 Couple-8**

This couple is formed by one Greek female partner and one Turkish male partner. They have been together and cohabiting for 2.5 years. They live in Istanbul.

C08FGRC is Greek, from Thessaloniki. She is 24 years old. She is from a lower-middle class family. She has two older brothers. She is a university graduate. She works in a hotel, in guest relations. She describes herself as a practicing Orthodox Christian.

C08MTR is Turkish, from Istanbul. He is 29 years old. He is from a middle-class family. He is a single child. He is a university graduate. He works in a hotel, in guest relations. His parents are Alevi and he describes himself as an atheist.

### **2.2.9 Couple- 9**

This couple is formed by one Turkish female partner and one Spanish male partner. They have been together for two years and married for eight months. They live in Istanbul.

C09FTR is Turkish, 36 years old. She is from a lower-class family, from Adapazarı. She has one older sister and one older brother. She is a university graduate and works in a private school as counselor. In terms of religion she describes herself as believing but not practicing.

C09MSP is Spanish and he is 29 years old. He is from a middle-class family, from Cordoba. He has a younger brother. He is a university graduate and works as a Spanish teacher in a private school. In terms of religion he describes himself as an atheist.

### **2.3 MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE**

This research study aims to understand how culture influences the dynamics of multicultural romantic relationships. Two question sheets were prepared for the interviews, one in English to be used with participants who are not native Turkish speakers, and one in Turkish, for participants who are native Turkish speakers. The questions began with the meeting story of individuals, continued with their experiences regarding being in a multicultural relationship, and ended with their expectations regarding the future of the relationship. The questions investigated what kind of differences are observed, what kind of conflicts emerge due to those differences, how they were resolved, and how the partners perceived their relationship when compared to endogamous relationships. The question forms are presented in Appendix A and B.

Eighteen in-depth, semi-structured, one-to-one and face-to-face interviews were conducted, each taking around thirty minutes. The researcher met with participants in their houses for the participants to feel comfortable. Interviews were recorded after the approval of the participants to be used in the analysis. The recorded data is transcribed by the researcher and after the transcription the records are deleted

from the recording machine. The transcribed data is kept in a password-protected folder in researcher's computer. The transcriptions will be kept for five years.

### **2.3.1 Data Analysis**

The interviews with 18 participants were analyzed with 'Thematic Analysis Method' (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This method is preferred since it enables the researcher to capture details that can be missed otherwise and to combine the obtained information under meaningful themes. The researcher took field notes while the participants spoke, so as to be able to capture their mood and attitude while speaking. The interviews were transcribed and coded using the computer assisted software program MAXQDA for figuring out the common themes and the sub-themes emerging from the answers of the participants.

Six steps of Thematic Analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed during the analysis. In the phase one, which requires familiarization with the data, the researcher transcribed and repeatedly read the interviews. The repeated reading of the interviews gave the researcher a general information about the data set. Next, as the second phase, initial ideas are listed and codes are generated from the data. With the coding of each consecutive interview, the code list became revised. The codes are generated based on participants' expressions and are organized into groups. During this phase the researcher generated as many codes as possible for reaching out to potential themes. In the next phase, the generated codes are analyzed for combining them under relevant themes. At this phase visual materials such as tables and maps are created by the researcher for properly grouping the codes that will turn into themes and sub-themes. Usage of visual materials helped the researcher to figure out the relationship between initial themes. Later in the fourth phase the initial themes are reviewed. Certain themes are excluded and some other themes are collapsed into each other. Following this, the coded extracts are re-read and analyzed for their appropriateness with the themes and sub-themes. As this step is completed the candidate themes are generated. The interviews are read again to check if there is

uncoded important material. In the fifth phase the themes are defined and named to appropriately cover the content. The final themes are decided based on their frequencies and on their relevance with the data set. The themes that are expressed less frequently and that are irrelevant with the research question are excluded. The memos and notes are created to be used while writing the report. In the last phase the report is written. At this phase all interviews, memos and themes are checked again for their relevance and analyzed to be used while writing the report.

The first theme obtained from the analysis is ‘Culture Does Not Have a Large Effect.

The second theme is ‘Cultural Differences’. This theme has four sub-themes which are: Family Structures; Attitude Towards Romantic Relationships; Daily Life Practices and Gender-Role Expectations. The sub-theme Family Structures has two sub-sub themes. These are Intimacy/Boundaries and Autonomy vs. Dependence.

The third theme is ‘Challenges’ has four sub-themes which are: Language Differences; Child-Rearing; Where to Live and Opposition from Third Parties. The second sub-theme ‘Child-Rearing’ has two sub-sub themes which are Different Child-Rearing Practices and Experiences and Cultural Adaptation of the Child.

The fourth theme is ‘What Enhances the Relationship’ has six sub-themes which are: Constructive Coping Strategies; Exposure to Different Cultures; Seeing the Relationship as A Learning Environment; Individuality, Independence and Trust; Familiarity With the Partner’s Culture and Open-Mindedness and Flexibility. The sub-theme Constructive Coping Strategies has three sub-sub themes which are Mutual Acceptance, Tolerance and Respect; Effective Communication; and Not Losing Temper.

The fifth and a much minor theme is ‘Turkish Way of Living A Relationship’ has three sub-themes which are: Not a Typical Turkish Girl, Typical Turkish Guy and Oppressive Relationships.

## **2.4 RESEARCHERS PERSPECTIVE**

As I was deciding on the thesis topic, I was also doing my clinical internship and I was being challenged by working with couples. As a student in ‘Couples and Family Therapy’ track, I was planning to run a study either with couples or families. My experience of working with couples in the therapy room was sparking questions in my mind. It was surprising to see how challenged the spouses were in terms of expression of emotions and understanding each other even though they spoke the same language and even though they were born and raised in the same society. This made me wonder about the experiences of multicultural couples, who widely differ in religion, language, family dynamics and sociopolitical environment they are raised in.

The romantic relationships has always been a curiosity for me, which also became a reason why I chose to be a couples and family therapist. Since I was a child, I have been observing the relationships I see around and the dynamics enhancing or harming relationships. At the same time, being in a romantic relationship I was deeply challenged by the differences I had with my boyfriend in terms of family dynamics and the social environment we were raised in, even though we were from the same ethnic group. I also had the chance to observe couples who are from different cultures because there were many multicultural couples in my immediate circle, among family members and friends. I was noticing a difference between them and couples from the same culture I see around. Although not being able to name this difference properly, I was curious about how they make the relationship work despite of various differences. This mere curiosity pushed me to examine the experiences of multicultural couples, hoping to shed a light which will help me to understand the dynamics which enhance or which harm all relationships, either homogamous or multicultural.

As I prepared the questions, I came up with ten questions to explore how those couples met, how they decided to live together or to get married, what kind of reactions they received from their families and friends, what challenged them the

most, what helps them to overcome those challenges and what their expectations are regarding future challenges. I especially wanted to learn how cultural differences impact the relationships and what kind of capacities or dynamics help them to overcome those differences. I refrained from using any directive questions, and in fact used few questions, trying to elicit their spontaneous answers. I started with general questions such as “What are your experiences regarding being in a multicultural relationship?”, and used different probes when necessary. All participants are asked ten questions. As a therapist who will be working with couples, I was hoping to obtain valuable information from the findings of this study which will help me as a practitioner and as a researcher.

The data collection process was exciting from the beginning. Before the initial interview I was very excited about the answers that will come up, the experiences I will have with the couple and the dynamics that will emerge in the room. I mostly remained stuck with the questions I prepared, refraining from unintentionally directing the participants’ answers. The interview continued well, they were a young and motivated couple doing their best to give me helpful answers. As I typed the initial interview I was surprised to see their answers which presented contrasting data to the literature. Following interviews were also exciting but I was feeling more secure with my attitude and questions. I had good relations with all couples I visited. They were all motivated to provide me adequate information. In a few cases I faced with hesitant participants who were not very willing to share detailed information. Although trying not to approach any participant differently I tried harder with those who spoke less, I asked questions for motivating them to speak. It was also interesting to see how similar answers came up from the partners.

The most interesting part of the data collection process was visiting the participants’ houses. I took notes regarding their mood in the house, my feelings about meeting with them, how they treated each other before and after the interviews. The challenging part of meeting with them in the house was sustaining the confidentiality and asking one of the partners to leave the room. Most of the

participants did not prefer running the interview separately claiming that there are no secrets between each other, that they can tell everything next to their partners. Although not being a data to be used in the results section, this observation is consistent with the couple dynamics that are enhancing their relationships, which are presented in the results section.

Overall, data collection was a wonderful experience for me in terms of seeing different couples in their natural habitats, observing their interactions, examining the house they live in and analyzing their interactions with an “other”, which is me as the researcher. The friendly and motivated mood they embraced also helped me to feel comfortable for asking my questions and taking my notes. Although not expressed in the thesis, the field notes I took helped me to separate my experiences and feelings from the information presented by the couple.

## **RESULTS**

This study examines the experiences of multicultural couples regarding how culture impacts their spousal relationship. Nine couples participated in the study, and each spouse was interviewed separately.

This section provides the results of the data obtained from 18 participants. A detailed information regarding the demographics of the participants is presented in the section 2.2 for providing further information for the analysis of the obtained data. The themes will be illustrated with the quotations received from the participants.

### **3.1 THEMES**

Based on the information received from the participants, the analysis revealed an important main theme which is ‘Culture Does Not Have a Large Effect’. This theme presents participants’ approach towards the impact of culture upon the romantic relationship, and the factors which limit the culture’s impact upon the relationship. The second main theme, ‘Cultural Differences’ portray how partners,



their families and societies differ in terms of familial dynamics, attitude towards romantic relationships, gender role expectations and daily life practices. Following this, the challenges they are faced are demonstrated in the third main theme, 'Challenges'. Although not stating huge challenges negatively impacting the relationships, partners experience difficulties in terms of language, child rearing, opposition from families and deciding on where to live in future. Since it was also questioned how they deal with challenges, the following theme is named as 'What Enhances the Relationship'. In this section the relational mechanisms they use such as mutual respect, tolerance and understanding, and the individual and social characteristics enabling a happier relationship are presented. The last main theme, 'Turkish Way of Living a Relationship' portrayed participants' experiences and observations regarding the gender-roles and relational dynamics dominant in Turkish society.

### **3.1.1 Culture Does Not Have a Large Effect**

This theme emerged as an important finding from the analysis. 15 of 18 participants expressed that cultural differences they have do not impact their romantic relationship. They also questioned what culture really means, how much it affects individuals, whether individual differences are more important than cultural ones or not.

Although participants are from various countries such as France, Chili, Greece, Germany, Italy, Spain and Turkey, most of them expressed that they are not observing huge cultural differences between each other. Even if they notice certain cultural differences, they do not impact the interaction they have.

*No but I feel like I couldn't help you enough. Because there are not huge cultural differences between us, I'm not sure if we fit into your research. (C05FTR married to Greek)*

*But there is not a difference indeed. If I was living a relationship with a Turkish person, the same things would be. He's a foreigner but still it is the*

*same. Nothing actually changes. Only if you overcome the language barrier no difference remains. (C06FTR married to Chilian)*

*But with Z, never. There was never a difference a problem in our relationship because of the culture. (C03MIT married to Turkish)*

Their narratives also show that individual differences are more determining on the relationship.

*More than culture I think we have differences of characters. We are different characters, I don't know. I cannot really point it down to ohh it's because you're from this culture. No maybe they can start from there but I think different characters would react differently, we just have different characters. And that's a bit difference of course. (C06MCH married to Turkish)*

*I mean of course it's very very stereotypical in my part. I know but it's like images, we talk about culture, we talk about certain patterns, certain images that we have in mind so... Many of those images have nothing to do with reality, certain cultures, societies have many layers, so many variables that direct. It's more about, as I said before it's about lived experience, the paths you've taken and the circles in which you knew people. (C09MSP married to Turkish)*

Besides, they also argue that what connects them to each other are the affinities they have in terms of values, personality and practices, which impact the relationship more when compared to cultural differences. The narratives of the participants show that they are more similar to each other compared to the communities they come from.

*You get surprised when you find common things, you get happy. Finding common things make you closer to each other, connect you to each other. When there are many things in common, the differences seem to lose importance. You don't feel like cultural difference is a fundamental part of the relationship. Because the main dynamic for the establishment of the*

*relationship is not the differences but the similarities you two share. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

*So I said this girl is interesting, let's meet her one time more, two times more, then I realized that our differences were not so big. However there are different point of views but we have some common things like respecting humanity, respecting how to say like trying all the time to see the other's side. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

The similar hobbies and leisure time activities they share are important for the continuation of the relationship, enjoying each other's company relate partners more to the relationship.

*We have some common points, we like the music we like the cinema, we like books, we like to talk about all sorts of things, not only gossip or so. So we are able to spend time together. So for this reason at the end I fell in love with her. After we got married. (C03MIT married to Turkish)*

*What makes it easier... I don't know. I really like him. We have lots of common things. He is exactly like me. He's the kind of person that will go out... I like having fun, I like dancing as I told you and I like drinking. And he is exactly like me. Also things like hobbies, we enjoy same things. (C08FGRC cohabiting with Turkish)*

*Because I also like travelling. I've always been interested in music, literature and cinema. Those things have always been things we can talk about. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

*We discovered many similar characteristics. We like same music, the familial dynamics are also similar etc... (C04FTR married to French)*

The participants in the study argue that the characteristics of the family such as the education level, the socio-economic status, and what is taught in the family to a child is more important than the traditional culture one is exposed to because of being a member of a certain community.

*That's not really the French id I'm stuck to. It's more like the family culture like we do things in my part of the family. Obviously for all things in life you look up to your parents to see how they're gonna do in the situation. I think that's a big mix of who you are and how you take things in life. 99% of the culture comes from the parents. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

*I don't think culture is, I think culture is not the most important. There are other things that differ or that unite the couples. Like age. Like social or financial background. Like I don't know maybe because more or less we are raised the same way like financially or I don't know educationally speaking and stuff. Like we have, we are creating a different culture, that is a subtle culture, that is connecting students from Greece, from Netherlands, from Turkey, I don't know. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

It is noteworthy that participants in this study do not usually express themselves as individuals who are deeply connected to the culture they were born and raised in. This also may be diminishing the potential effects of the cultural differences upon the relationship.

Most of them described themselves as “I'm not a typical ...” to explain that they do not fit into the stereotypic image of their society.

*It's difficult to speak in absolute terms like this is better than this because this person is from your own country. Because for example I don't feel really attached to my own country, no really. It's not like I don't have any conception about my country, I'm not very into that only. (C09MSP married to Turkish)*  
*I'm not really attached to, we say patriotic in French, I'm not really patriotic... I don't think I'm a typical French person. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

Not sharing the cultural, religious or political values and concerns most of the members in their society have makes the participants in this study feel detached from their own cultures.

*He is also reading a lot of stuff about Kurdish people, Dersim and Armenians etc... There are garbages that come up with history but we can talk about these things. If I were a more stereotypical Turkish person, even if F was attracted to my eyes and eyebrows at first, this relationship would last a week or two, or a month or vice versa. If he was a Spanish sympathizer I would get enough of him. Because I am also against nationalism. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

*I of course like my culture but it's not a culture that I internalized. There are many things that I don't find appropriate, that I'm not comfortable with or that I'm against to and that make angry. (C06FTR married to Chilian)*

Religion appears to be an important part of the culture for most of the societies. However, for participants in this study, religious differences are not voiced as problematic since 15 of 18 participants in this study described themselves as either atheist or non-practicing but believing in God. Just as they do not feel strongly attached to their cultures, they don't either adopt the dominant religious attitude in their societies.

*In terms of our relationship, we're not really affected. Because we both are not religious. We don't believe in God. That's why I also didn't care about it that much... But if we were more like attached to religion or culture this would be a problem. (C06FTR married to Chilian).*

*So yeah obviously the religious thing plays a big role to it. That's why I'm saying L is not a typical Turkish girl too. She is not religious at all. So that aspect was never part of us. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

*I'm more like. I have faith but is there a place that it's focused on, no. I believe in, I try to find a place, I try to go somewhere. I'm more like trying to do something by myself. I don't know where this faith will go but there is a faith. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

### **3.1.2 Cultural Differences**

Each community has various traditional practices, habits, rituals besides the norms, values and ideas that are transmitted among generations. Religious practices, daily life routines and rituals, family gatherings are among such practical differences observed in couple relationship. Other than those practical differences, the social meaning of relationship and marriage also differ between different communities. Furthermore the family dynamics appeared to be culturally varying in the narratives of the participants. The factors forming up the structure of a family such as boundaries, intimacy, rules and roles, separation/individuation practices, autonomy and dependence behaviors seem to vary in different cultures. Although not specifically expressed as challenging factors, such macrolevel cultural differences are observed among partners from differing societies.

### **3.1.2.1 Family Structures**

Being the smallest unit of society, family is an environment where the structure of the society is reproduced and reflected. The relationship between parents and children, the limits and rules of that relationship, the boundaries between family members or the infringement of those boundaries, the location of the members in the scale of autonomy and dependence are different among families from different societies. Thus this sub-theme is explored in detail to understand how families from different societies differ in various factors determining the structure of a family.

#### **3.1.2.1.1 Intimacy / Boundaries**

The differences of family dynamics on intimacy and boundaries are voiced by the seven participants in this study. Especially the physical connectedness of family members appears as an important notion varying between societies. Turkish families are spatially more connected to each other. One Turkish female participant whose partner is French expressed this situation as such.

*For example when we first moved here, it was really weird for him. For example our house and my father's house was side by side, my father comes to*

*us, he eats with us. It is too weird for him. He was asking how much longer he will keep coming? When he was living in France for example, they used to live in the same apartment with his grandparents but they used to visit each other like once in a month. Our relations are too close. (C04FTR married to French)*

Another French male participant also emphasized the physical connectedness of Turkish families, differently from the families in France.

*The biggest difference is in France we are not so close in my family. We don't live together that much. We see each other but we don't go somewhere every weekend together. (C07MFR married to Turkish)*

The narrative of another Turkish female participant whose partner is Italian also shows the physical connectedness she has with her family. However, while this connectedness becomes a problem for a French, the same thing is a familiar and acceptable situation for an Italian. Thus it is not possible to simply say that European families are more distant because within Europe too, the family structure differs in different societies.

*He is also very into his family. I don't know. They give importance to being together in celebrations. That's why I'm not really challenged in terms of family. He understands so well why I am so connected with my family. Because they also live in the same way, he doesn't find it weird. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

The impact of families upon the relationship is also a notion to be examined under the concept of boundaries. The narratives of Turkish participants reveal that Turkish parents are very involved with the romantic relationship, decision-making and daily life of their children. The physical connectedness making the boundaries between children and parents transparent, turns into a problem for the spousal relationship in some cases.

*The families are so much involved with the relationships. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

*Especially this coming to Turkey and living next door to my father became a huge problem in our relationship. For example my father calls me twenty times a day. This was making him uncomfortable. He got used to it. This is a balance. Of course he shouldn't be calling me twenty times a day but it's an issue of balancing. His mother and his father call him once a week. Also this is weird to me. (C04FTR married to French)*

For families who are spatially less connected, the boundaries of the relationship are more apparent. The romantic relationship of the child becomes a boundary that can not be crossed. The quotation received from a French male participant shows this.

*On my side we are not so much into the relationships, thus there are not many problems. (C07MFR married to Turkish)*

There are also boundaries shaped by traditional norms determining the content of communication in Turkish families. Although being intimate with each other, when it comes to oppositions, the communication is limited for children. These boundaries seem to be evident only for parents, rendering the parents irreproachable and unopposable. However the Turkish female participants claim that they see a different situation with their non-Turkish partners' families. They argue that their partners are in a more egalitarian position with their parents, and do not feel limited in the process or the content of their communication.

*Or like protesting, opposing to anything they say is not something that can be done. But here, they are much more comfortable. They make fun of each other or like slamming the door and leaving, or saying it's my decision, such things occurred very late for me. I experienced those things much earlier and in a much healthier way as far as I see. They are more like two mature individuals instead of a mother and a little child. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

*Around my friends there are people like me, like more open-minded. You can sit and talk about something. Nobody gets something wrong. But we have touchiness. You have to consider what you say in every terms when talking.*



*But their culture is not like this. More like... You can talk something openly, you can discuss. The missings etc... I think this is too different. Seeing this is a weird feeling. Because it is like this people are more comfortable with each other. (C06FTR married to Chilean)*

The intimacy in Turkish families, especially between children and their fathers, is curtailed by the hierarchy in the family. The relationship with parents and elderly is limited by the traditional norms of respect and distance.

*Or like hugging. For example my father doesn't hug me much or I can't sit in front of my father opening up my legs, I have to sit properly. Or I cannot say certain words. For example, I can't ever make fun of my mother or my father. I can't joke with them saying are you stupid, these are concepts too distant for me. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

*Cultural reasons... Not actually. Wow, it's more to do, not related with each other but it's about how we relate to family... Mainly with Ö's family because we live here closer to them. It's... Sort of how Turkish culture is in terms of hierarchy, respect and how you relate to older people and how you relate to your parents, all those sorts of cultural rules that there is in Turkey. (C06MCH married to Turkish)*

Just like the opposition behavior, the intimacy between family members is also limited by certain boundaries within Turkish families when it comes to the communication about romantic relationships. One Turkish female participant shows it as such.

*At the end of the second year we started to talk this thing. I was staying with him every weekend and I was nervous because I was telling my parents that I go to Istanbul to see my friends. I was at the age of 33-34 and I was lying. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

A Chilean male participant whose partner is Turkish also highlights the difference he observes between his family and his partner's family in terms of the communication about romantic relationships.

*With my family, we share right away. And that's something I learnt later in Turkish culture with Ö's family at least that you wait a long time until you share with your family oh I have a new boyfriend, I have a new girlfriend. With my family at least it's right away. As soon as you meet someone, you like someone you share it like oh I met someone the other day and so on. And I told them and they were so cool... Just with Ö's family we couldn't be honest all the way. We couldn't tell them that we were living together, like so many thing. (C06MCH married to Turkish)*

*My family of course it wasn't easy. It was like one year after, 14-15 months after. Of course I told it like there is someone I'm seeing and we're going to get married. (C05FTR married to Turkish)*

The romantic relationship is usually shared first with the mothers, who are responsible from talking to father about child's relationship. The female participants in this study refrained from talking about their romantic relationship with their fathers.

*I first said this to my mother, my mother got really happy. Then I couldn't tell it to my father, my mother and my brother told this to him. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

*He first met my sister, my sister loved him. A very short time after we started dating he met my mother and she liked him too. Even though they couldn't communicate she loved him. Then he met my father. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

*I first told my mother to decide together for how to do. She immediately called my father. (C05FTR married to Greek)*

### **3.1.2.1.2 Autonomy vs. Dependence**

The importance given to family, the impact of the family on individual's life, how much independence is given to children and how much they try to control the child's life are among the factors to be examined under the sub-sub theme of

autonomy versus dependence. This sub-theme is voiced by seven participants in this study.

Turkish family structure keeps the members of the family as interconnected units of a whole, thus limiting the autonomy of family members, rendering individuals more dependent on each other, both physically and emotionally. The narratives of participants show that the notion of family is very important for Turkish individuals such that even the very personal decisions are taken while considering the family.

*But the relations are closer in Turkey, families act like a team. Now I think what surprised me. Family is very important in Turkey. Unfortunately it's not the same in France. (C07MFR married to Turkish)*

*In terms of differences yeah Europe is more individualistic. Hmmm... L is always thinks more about when she's going to make a decision, about her family, I more think about myself directly. When I say myself is like L and me. My life with L before thinking about the bigger family. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

In this manner, Turkish female partners of German and French participants describe their non-Turkish partners as more detached from family, more independent and more individualistic. However there is something to be considered at this point. Not all non-Turkish partners are specifically described as more autonomous. A special emphasis did not come from the partners of Greek, Chilean and Italian participants.

*F: All things we experience come from this. I mean... They are more independent, more detached from the family and we are so much interconnected. It's like two poles, not in the middle. All problems emerge from this. But you find a way somehow.*

*I: Them being more individualistic?*

*F: The thing of the family, the role. For example his parents are 15% into his life, my parents are 85%. There is such a difference. I don't know if it's something cultural, I can't generalize but if I have to separate like French and*

*Turkish there is something like this. Most of the French are like this as far as he told me. But in Turkey the families, a nuclear you get? There is family in everything. (C04FTR married to French)*

*Well I don't know, they are more comfortable both in terms of what they wear and their attitudes. They are more individualistic. For example while everyone is around the table chatting, he can go and read a book. Or in our families everybody sleeps and eats at the same time. They don't have this attitude of doing everything together at the same time. This was being weird to my family at first. Because for example we wait the family even if we are really hungry, right? They don't feel obliged to wait. Or they don't think this waiting is something related to respect. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

How individuals relate to money is also important. It is seen that for Turkish participants money is a tool rendering individuals dependent on their parents. They see earning money as gaining independence and becoming an adult. Being economically dependent on the family is experienced as being under the hegemony of their parents.

*Because for example, when I was a student, I was thinking about those things and I was feeling like I don't have economic freedom. So I can't talk to them honestly, this is a very selfish thought. What if now I say something like that and they don't accept, what if they reject me as a child, I'm still studying. (C05FTR married to Greek)*

*Again at first it is about the money again. For example, D used to visit me more when I was in Turkey. Because for example I had to ask my parents for visiting my boyfriend. Like can I buy this plane ticket. There was something like this. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

The act of earning money occurred later for Turkish individuals when compared to their European partners, which facilitated the autonomy of their partners.

*For example, his family, they have this culture of working and earning money to buy things he wants to buy. Being adult more. I guess he knows much better*

*the adult life compared to people around me. Culturally it seemed so weird to me at first. (C04FTR married to French)*

*The relationship with money! Two completely different things. For us like when my mother or my father gives me money, it's like this is how it is. This is not something to be questioned. They support you in all ages. They give you as much as they can. For J's family it's more like... Of course they would give if he's in a difficult situation but he has to survive on his own once he began to survive so that he learns surviving by himself. He gets his salary, he has to learn living with that salary because he has to learn to stand on his feet. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

### **3.1.2.2 Attitude Towards Romantic Relationships**

Being an unexpected theme, the differences of attitudes social attitudes towards romantic relationships are expressed by 12 participants in this study. It is seen that, while in Turkish culture, dating is perceived as always leading to marriage, non-Turkish individuals don't see dating something that always develops into a marriage.

*This is also different to me. This is different. I see this in Turkish culture a lot. When a relationship starts and it goes well very quickly people start to talk about marriage. They're going to get married oo... So that was a bit... That was new to me that very kind of what I can say soon in the relationship the mom was already imagining a wedding, us getting married even though we may be talked about it as if to be in the future. (C06MCH married to Turkish)*  
*For example my family is the same, they are relaxed. They don't judge or see as if we are going to get married. They see her as a friend of mine and like her that way. But in our country it's generally the opposite. If I were to meet with the parents of a girlfriend from here I would be more nervous because then it's seen as if you are going to get married when you meet with parents. (C08MTR cohabiting with Greek)*

In Turkish culture, for two lovers to live together, marriage is required by parents and by the society. However, non-Turkish individuals' attitude towards romantic relationship is more flexible. They don't see legal marriage as an obligation and they do not feel the pressure of from their families to get married to their partners.

*We were living together for three years, we were like married but we got legally married. Because my family is traditional Turkish family, they didn't know we were cohabiting. We wanted to be comfortable. (C06FTR married to Chilean)*

*The fact that our families are very different. I mean in Turkey most of the families when a girl is 25 years old like she should get married. Not everybody of course but it's in the culture. All of my friends in here they are like 25 years old. They either married or planning to get married really soon. This is the only thing we got into this super-serious thing sooner than I expected. (C08FGRC cohabiting with Turkish)*

*Only whatever is important to my parents, marriage was important for them for us to live together. We did it. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

Turkish female participants express that they would be challenged by their families and by the society if their romantic relationship or cohabitation is seen or noticed. They fear of having stigmatized for living with their boyfriend before marriage.

*Also cohabiting for us and for them comes to my mind. For us it is impossible if you will have kids and stuff. No one cohabits before marriage; only if you are a model and you'll be able to bear it. For example I think, if we weren't married and I get pregnant, think of the gossip. Europeans are more comfortable with this. For example A's aunt, newly separated from her boyfriend, they have a kid 23 years old but they never got married. They don't have this conception. What is important is cohabiting, loving each other. (C03FTR married to Italian )*

*Also there was this thing when we first met. We were living in her hometown, where her parents live. And she was very nervous about being seen with me... She was staying with me on weekends and she was being so so anxious if someone saw her or not. That was the first cultural shock to me I guess. A huge cultural shock. I remember saying to myself ho my god, what an oppressive community! What a difficult situation for her! That was kind of different for me. (C09MSP married to Turkish)*

### **3.1.2.3 Daily Life Practices**

The special occasions like religious celebrations, family gatherings are important cultural notions. The differences observed in daily life and special gatherings are stressed by 10 participants.

How the guests are hosted is represented as a cultural difference by a couple formed up of a Turkish female and a Spanish male participant.

*Guests are important to us, like I have to get everything ready. He is more relaxed. He goes and grabs something for himself when there are guests. I try to teach him that if you get something for yourself you should also bring to guests. Of course he is not like me, he can leave the room and play guitar when there are guests. I get angry when he does such things... (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

*But yeah there are certain things like when people come here like she... She wants everything to be like ready, that concept of hosting somebody is very important for them. I maybe more relaxed about that; in Spain we are, of course that depends on the situation but when somebody comes home it's like okay whatever grab a beer. You know what I mean... but here it's like more formal in that sense. It's like you have to get the tea ready and the cookies and everything. (C09MSP married to Turkish)*

Other than the behaviors of hospitality, wedding ceremony is something that differs among communities. The differences observed in wedding ceremony are voiced by one couple formed up of a Turkish female and a French male.

*The weddings are also different. Like... For example we give a list. In Turkey there might be a list but it was so surprising for a European to stand in the middle of the hole and to put gold on a scarf. Weddings yes. (C07MFR married to Turkish)*

*What kind of differences. I mean... For example you know our processes in weddings etc. Like there is a lot of ceremony, the jewelry and stuff. These are expected but they don't have such things, there is no such conditions for them. (C07FTR married to French)*

The practices and rituals related to religion also differ between Muslim and Christian communities. The special days like Sunday praying, the mere act of going to church, the religious holidays are practices unique to each society and they have different social meanings in different societies.

*I mean in my family, we celebrate Noel. A first celebrated Noel with me, I don't know. Did she ever celebrate it before... (C02MUK cohabiting with Turkish)*

*Could be Sundays. We go to church then we eat a meal whole family together. We eat and drink. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

*So what I did in my life for thirty eight years, something like Ramadan or iftar? Or kurban bayram? To kill the sheep to give to the neighbor? But you should accept because... Or when did Z come to church to have a baptism or to pray to Holy Lady? (C03MIT married to Turkish)*

The social meaning given to a religious practice also differs as shown in the below quotation of a German male participant.

*Going to church was a social thing to me than it was ever religious. Of course I went to church couple of times but it doesn't make me believe in God... When I met A. At a very early point of our relationship, she was completely shocked*



*by it. She was like “you are religious!”. And I was like no it’s really not because it doesn’t automatically mean you are super-religious to be part of a church community. Or you being baptized. I can go to church. It’s like a cultural difference to me. From the Turkish point of view it’s... You pray or go to the mosque or you’re involved in this; to her it means kind of a being religious and oh I think that’s a pretty big difference I can think about. (C01MGR married to Turkish)*

Habits around eating also socially differ. In Turkish culture, dinner is seen as a time when all family members sit around one table and eat together.

*Almost everyday we eat together with my parents, we make breakfasts in weekends. We sit together and stuff. A German would be challenged by being so much together, I guess. (C03FTR married to Italian).*

*Or for us for example, we all sleep and eat at the same time together. They don’t have this notion of doing everything together. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

### **3.1.2.4 Gender-Role Expectations**

This sub-theme was one of the most expected outcomes of this study. How one is socialized with her/his gender and how the expected behaviors are taught and transmitted within families depends on the culture of the society. Such expectations then, are reflected upon the romantic relationship of two individuals. For individuals who have different expectations about gender roles, potential conflicts are expected in the intimate relationship.

The narratives of six participants demonstrated the gendered nature of Turkish society where women and men are given certain separate roles and duties. Being protective and authoritarian are characteristics expected from Turkish men.

*I’m sure it would be completely different if O he wasn’t Turkish, if he would be German let’s say, there wouldn’t be so many differences. But now he’s coming from a Turkish society and you know the Turkish society... Sometimes he’s*

*aa... Too overprotecting. Well this is how he used to be. He made me feel safe is what attracted me to him at first. Like he was the man. But sometimes it's too much. (C08FGRC cohabiting with Turkish )*

*Or I don't know, the behaviors of women and men. What do we say, a man who loves you wonders about you, protects you, gets jealous of you, he doesn't sleep before you come home, he has to come and pick you up etc... Neither my boyfriend nor my sister's husband have such things. My parents used to find it really weird at first, like didn't he pick you up or didn't he take you to where you go. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

On the other hand, this sub-theme unites all non-Turkish male participants, as they all claim to have been exposed to a more egalitarian household division of labor in their communities and they argue that Turkish society is a very traditionally gendered. The egalitarian attitude of non-Turkish male participants is emphasized by Turkish female participants in comparison with traditional Turkish roles.

*For example the other weekend when we were going to talk we went to Moda for Ö's sister, she's getting married, this isteme. And I was very fool. Like I'm... All the males were just sitting and not helping and o like I don't sit, I'm going to kitchen, I'm helping. (C06MCH married to Turkish)*

*I wouldn't be this comfortable with a man from my own country, because I doesn't have this like, women do that, women should behave like that, this is a woman's job, this is a man's job. He is not someone like that. (C06FTR married to Chilian)*

*We also have this thing, mother's role father's role. Mother should look after the child, change the diaper, should cook. But in Europeans, in Italians there is no such thing like mother's role father's role. A feed his children, changes the diapers... Because this is normal for them. My father-in-law is also like this. He comes here, he cooks, he asks me what I want to eat. I'm comfortable. My father looks after my children, cooks my dishes... If he comes home earlier, he cooks, if I come earlier I cook. He never feels bad about looking*

*after the children, makes the children drink their night milk and sleep. He doesn't expect gratitude. He doesn't expect a thank you because of doing these because it is normal for him. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

### **3.1.3 Challenges**

The individuals in multicultural relationships are faced with various challenges resulting from the differences between cultures. Such differences may be related with the native language, the place of where the spouses decide to live, the attitudes of parents towards a “foreign” bride/groom or the stereotypic image of a community.

#### **3.1.3.1 Language Differences**

Being born and raised in different countries, participants in this study all have native languages that are different from their partners. Although some of the participants are fluent with the native language of their partners, in some cases, both partners are fluent with a common neutral language. Communication problems related to language emerged as a sub-theme in this study.

Except for one couple who communicate in Turkish, remaining eight couples in this study communicated in English, which is a neutral common language. According to the narratives of 13 participants speaking in a language other than the native one hinders the communication capacities of participants.

*Because it is sometimes difficult at first about the language. I know Turkish well but I can't say very delicate things. Or I can't clearly say what I want to say. Sometimes misunderstandings may occur. (C07MFR married to Turkish)*  
*She doesn't know any English, I was going back to Berlin. We were going to do this like Facetime. Like when you're with one another it's easier to talk, you can use body language, but over the phone it becomes more difficult, but we did it. (C06MCH married to Turkish)*

*Sometimes definitely language! Sometimes I want to speak posh but I can't. Of course my language is not amazing, I didn't study college in English, but I've always been related to English. But at the end his English is better than mine. Of course sometimes I'm challenged but there isn't anything we couldn't solve. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

The inability to express oneself efficiently may be leading to misunderstandings in certain cases.

*Because the language is really important for example E sometimes says something directly but he says it like this because his vocabulary repertoire is only that much. There are softer ways to say that thing but he doesn't know. He doesn't have the command of the language that much. (C07FTR married to French)*

*Sometimes for example it happened like this. I didn't know any English before, I learned with him. Also he didn't know any Turkish, he learns it not with me but from his environment. There were times that I felt so stuck. But these were related with language. When you can't fully explain what you want to explain while discussing something, or while explaining something else, there are some things that don't have exact definition in Turkish, or things that don't exist in English. I felt depressed when I couldn't say those things. This became the biggest problem for us. The language difference. (C06FTR married to Chilean)*

Not just the communication between partners, but the communication with extended family and friends is also a challenge for those couples. Although overcome as both partners develop their language skills, the communication problem with the extended family is expressed as a concern since most of the parents are not able to speak a neutral language.

*My parents always thought like I will find someone foreigner, and both my mother and my father don't speak English, so they were afraid that I will be*

*with a foreigner. Thinking that he will not be able to enter into the family. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

*Three months after we started dating, A's parents came. I prepared post-its like welcome, in Greek under it. I put them on my table to constantly see and learn. Short sentences like did you like the food, like enjoy your meal. I was able to talk only that much back then. But other than this, I was afraid to stay alone with them for like five minutes. Because they will say something and I won't understand, like those awkward silences. This aspect was difficult.*

*(C05FTR married to Greek)*

*Four months after we started dating I went to France, E introduced me to his family. But it was hard because I wasn't speaking French back then. And the communication wasn't easy of course. The French are really challenged while speaking in English and they are old and stuff. So at first... You love them but the language is very important. Speaking a common language is thus very important. That weekend was difficult for me because E had to simultaneously translate everything. (C07FTR married to French)*

*Yeah but when we're talking about the language that was a big challenge too. So obviously my parents don't speak English and so L speaks good French and she got better at it. She wasn't as good as it is now at the beginning. So it was a bit difficult for her to interact with my parents. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

### **3.1.3.2 Child-Rearing**

For multicultural couples, child-rearing includes various difficulties. Transmitting to the child the values you internalized within the family of origin, or raising the child in the way you've been raised is a very common attitude for most of the individuals. Two individuals who lived in distinct cultural environments might have various differences regarding child-rearing practices and on the things they want

to transmit to their children from their own cultures. These topics emerged as two sub-sub themes under the theme of Child-Rearing.

### **3.1.3.2.1 Different Child-Rearing Practices and Experiences**

The cultural differences in family structures demonstrated in the section 3.1.2.4 such as autonomy versus dependence or boundaries and intimacy shape the child-rearing behaviors of individuals. Each individual, either consciously or unconsciously, raises his/her kids in similar ways to how they were raised by their parents. Although in this study, only two of the couples had children, six couples expressed concerns regarding how they might differ on their child-rearing practices in future.

*To be frank, kids come to mind. I was raised differently, I was raised differently that's certain... My mother was a little strict. This is how it is supposed to be, this is good, this is bad, very strictly. And, how do I put this, she loved us but in a different way. Um, my mother's side is a bit cold. They don't like...show it that much. It's like a habit. There is some respect. This is something cultural and she tried to project this to us. There might be something like that in me, I don't know what will come out. (C07MFR married to Turkish)*

*For example in child rearing. This might be a bit problematic in the future. The child's education, his/her upbringing, attitude towards him/her. I mean I was raised in a different place, in a different culture, he was raised in another place in another culture. Now we will raise our child in a synthesis of both. This is why it is inevitable. I mean we coddle the children, we want to make sure they eat, they don't cry. They are not like this. They have a more relaxed way of raising children. (C06FTR married to Chilian)*

*It might be child rearing. There will most probably be a lot of differences, a lot of different perspectives there. I will do what I learned from my family, he will do what he has learned from his... He might want to raise the child in a more*

*individualistic, responsible way. Compared to him I might be more giving, since that is what I learned from my family. (C04FTR married to French)*

### **3.1.3.2.2 Cultural Adaptation of the Child**

What will be transmitted to the child in terms of culture is also a concern for the participants. The religion the child will adopt, the language the child will speak, the national identity the child will feel closer to or the cultural practices the child will be exposed to are among the issues the participants consider as challenges. The concern regarding child's future experiences is highlighted by six participants.

*I mean maybe we might have some cultural problems when we have children. But I is not a person that belongs to a single culture. He lives the culture of all places he's been to. I have more culture. I was born and raised here, I belong to this culture. Maybe when we have kids this might cause some differences. I might want to include some things from my culture he might not. (C06FTR married to Chilian)*

Religious adaptation of the child is one of such concerns stressed by one participant.

*Religion! J is an atheist. I'm more like, I have faith but do I focus this faith, no. J is a firm atheist. I have no idea what will happen if we have kids (laughs). (C02MUK cohabiting with British)*

Another French male expressed his wish to transmit his cultural values to his children, however he is also afraid that because his children will grow up in another country, this will be difficult for him.

*That's going to be more difficult because I want my kids to adopt my culture too because that's what makes me but I want them to have her culture as well. Hmm... So that's gonna be depending a lot on where we're gonna be when we'll have kids obviously. From now it looks like we might be in Turkey for a while and so yeah. If we do have a kid while we're in Turkey it's for sure going*

*to be difficult to transmit my culture. There's going to be less how can I say, they are going to be less in it. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

Especially, two male participants, one Italian and one Greek, stressed their anxiety of being a “foreigner” in the eyes of their children. They argue that although they will be speaking English at home, their children will be socialized more into the dominant culture as long as they live in Turkey. Those participants claimed their anxiety on not being able to speak Turkish as good as their children, thus possibly turning into a foreigner for them.

*I mean for sure my babies will feel different compared to other babies in Turkey because other babies have fathers and mothers that are Turkish. My baby has a father and mother speaking a different language. So I think to solve something if we will continue to stay in Turkey I should learn Turkish. Otherwise maybe my girls can feel me as a stranger, like a foreigner, always foreigner. (C03MIT married to Turkish)*

*Well sometimes I ask N what language our children will speak. We don't know about this. What culture will be more close to them. I was saying please don't teach them Turkish because I will then be the dad they always make fun off. Because my Turkish will always be a foreigner. If they are born in turkey I will be a foreigner. We don't talk about it much now because we are young but this also will be a problem in future. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

### **3.1.3.3 Where to Live**

Considering the current socio-economic condition of Turkey, nine participants plan to move to another country. Conflicts are expected to occur in future among spouses if they don't mutually want to leave the resident country or if they can't have a mutual decision on where they will live.

*Also where to live. For example I want to stay in Turkey, M sometimes wants to stay but sometimes doesn't want at all. He says let's move to Canada,*



*bullshit, I don't want it. We are going to have problems on where to live in the future. (C04FTR married to French)*

*I guess in future it will be about where to live, where to have kids and stuff. To be adapted to where we live because we want to live in a different country. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

*For example I don't really miss Turkey a lot. But the main reason for this is the fact that I don't want to be in Turkey right now. If it was more attractive or easier to live in Turkey I would maybe miss it. Berlin is a new place for both of us, in fact this was why we wanted to live here. That's why, I don't know, it might be problematic in the future. He might not want to leave Germany. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

For participants who don't have a European passport, moving to another country also includes both bureaucratic and professional obstacles.

*She doesn't want to stay here. It is too much for me, I mean I don't know if I can live abroad. I don't know because there are a lot of problems like getting a visa, finding a place to stay. Moving abroad is very problematic. This is a big issue for us because she really doesn't want to stay. (C08MTR cohabiting with Greek)*

*Yeah, I mean I don't know if this answers your question but... We are thinking about moving away from Turkey at some point. But if at some point it turns out to be bureaucratically impossible for us to move to the Netherlands for example, we might have to live in Athens for a while. Aside from this, we are thinking about moving to another country. Especially when we decide to have kids. (C05FTR married to Greek)*

### **3.1.3.4 Opposition From Families**

Participants in this study usually expressed receiving support of their parents but in some cases either the religious attitude of parents or the image of the society their partners are from, caused certain obstacles. Seven participants expressed

receiving mild opposition from their families. The religious attitude of the families is very important here. Those who are more radical and rigid in their beliefs, don't support their daughters' relationship with a "foreign groom".

*In the beginning my mother was a little apprehensive since religion is very important for her. She wanted me to marry a Muslim. (C07FTR married to French)*

*Well I guess Ö mentioned that at some point when Ö's mom realized that our relationship is serious she started to ask her about my religion oo... If I'm Muslim? I'm not Muslim, I'm not religious. First it was he is not religious. Her mom was like o no way... (C06MCH married to Chilian)*

*In my opinion even the non-religious people in Turkey have a traditionalist side. For them, it is difficult to accept a foreign groom... In our case it is more extreme religiousness than traditionalism. For a long time I thought that my father didn't support it because of not being able to explain it to others. When it came up, my father said "I don't care about the others. How will I answer for this in the next world, if I allow this." (C05FTR married to Greek)*

In cases where the parents of Turkish partners are more conservative, religious differences became a problem. The partners chose sometimes not so honest ways, in order to overcome this problem. Lying about the religion of the Christian partner, or telling the parents that he converted into Islam even though he didn't are two ways the couples used.

*Actually, my mother's point of view was not about culture at all, it was about religion. Completely about religion. Because she was focused on religious differences... we lied to her, we said that he converted to Islam. They think he is Muslim. (C06FTR married to Chilian)*

*This is what I meant as a loophole, A is half Albanian. His father is Albanian, he was born and raised in Greece. When I told [my parents] about this, I told it as if his mother also doesn't not have a Greek origin, as if he was*

*completely raised as an Albanian Muslim but he was just born and raised in Greece. (C05FTR married to Greek)*

The stereotypic image of the community and the relations of two societies are also important on how parents approach to the relationship. In this study, Turkish and Greek participants were challenged by the historical relations between Turkey and Greece.

*We are taking the wrong examples of Turkish culture, men hitting, slapping their women and stuff. So N was like oh the foreigner. And the Muslim foreigner. And the Turkish foreigner. Turkish was the first, then was the Muslim, She is Turkish and she is Muslim how is this supposed to happen? (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

*I'm sure you know the relationship between Turkish and Greek people. Although Turkish people like Greek people most of them, most of the Greek people don't like Turkish people. Constantinople and Atatürk and Izmir and bla bla bla. Many people asked me oh god what are you doing in Turkey how can you have a Turkish boyfriend? They killed us, they killed like our ancestors in Izmir, in Karadeniz, how can you be like that? (C08FGRC cohabiting with Turkish)*

Headscarf has also been a concern for non-Muslim parents when they learn their children date with a Muslim woman.

*My mother's question was if his mother is covered. (C08FGRC cohabiting with Turkish)*

*The first question she asked when I told her that I'm dating this awesome girl, she's from Istanbul. Her first question was she doesn't wear a headscarf, does she? (laughing). I was like no but that's a pretty offensive question. (C01MGR cohabiting with Turkish)*

*My mother was saying, how to say, I don't know and it is a bit weird, are you sure and stuff. Is she drinking alcohol, does she wear a headscarf and stuff. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

Although not directly affecting the couple relationship, the negative and unsupportive attitude of the parents is negatively experienced by the spouses. On the other hand, for those participants whose parents are open-minded, accepting and religiously tolerant, the relationship with families got more positive, rendering them happier and more comfortable.

*I think the humane side of my parents. Because they didn't mind that he is European, uncircumcised or Christian. At least I didn't think they did. They regarded him as a person whom I love and who loves me back. That's what I meant by humane. I mean they were so open-minded. When F's gay brother wanted to come to the wedding with his boyfriend, his family was reluctant, they thought it might be a problem since Turkey is a conservative country. But my family was very accepting. No one said or meant anything. This is because they have love for all humans within them. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

*In my case it was like, my English was not very good, I improved my English with her. They were surprised about this. They used to joke about how I managed to get a girlfriend with this level of English (laughing). Other than that, my family took it normally, nothing really happened. (C08MTR cohabiting with Greek)*

*No they accepted immediately. They never made a question why I did not choose an Italian lady, why I did choose a lady that is Muslim. Never... And I guess it's evident that family of Z is not a strict Muslim family. I mean they accept all my situations as they all fully respect my situation. (C03MIT married to Turkish)*

*Also my father is kind of Bektashi. This religious tolerance. He was always telling me to try to understand N's father. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

*Because he is coming from a family who are Alevi. So like they are quite... I mean they are very open minded like I was staying with his family, we are drinking alcohol with his family. (C08FGRC cohabiting with Greek)*

### **3.1.4 What Enhances the Relationship**

Despite the differences they have and the opposition they received from their parents in certain cases, the participants in this study expressed having a satisfying relationship. When examined in detail, certain characteristics and strategies are suggested as helpful for the continuation of the relationship and for the resolution of culture-related challenges.

#### **3.1.4.1 Constructive Coping Strategies**

Having various differences in terms of cultural practices and adaptations that directly or indirectly impact both the couple relationship and the daily life of spouses, multicultural couples are faced with certain challenges. The language barrier, the religious attitude of the family of origins, the stereotypes dominant in the macrostructure have the potential to lead to conflicts in the spousal interactions. This following section demonstrates how the multicultural couples in this study deal with and resolve conflicts.

##### **3.1.4.1.1 Mutual Acceptance, Tolerance and Respect**

Emerging as one of the most prominent notions in this study, mutual acceptance, tolerance and respect help partners to deal with differences and conflicts arising from different expectations as stated by 12 participants. Respecting the partner's character and life-style, accepting who she/he is and tolerating the differences are important conflict resolution strategies the participants prefer.

*She is very respectful towards me, my job, my life, my family etc. (C08MTR cohabiting with Greek)*

*Respect. She showed respect to my character, my way of thinking. I felt this need to respect this. This made me respect too. She gave me the feeling that she has an opinion and I need to respect that. I'm not 100% right and she is not 100% right. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

Respecting the partner's life, culture, and not imposing your own cultural preferences on your partner is very vital for these couples. For example, respecting the tradition and religious practices gain greater importance if at least one of the partners is a practicing believer.

*It is respect. I respect her faith, she respects my lack of faith. I don't really have faith. We respect each other. She wants to go to church, we go together. It makes me happy because she feels better there. Her happiness makes me happy. As long as there is respect I don't think there will be a problem about faith. (C08MTR cohabiting with Greek)*

*His faith is of course different. But it's about mutual respect. For example their Christmas is very important, you do this, you do that. Whatever they do I try to go with it. And he, during our holidays, for example if there is hand kissing, he does it. It's about respect. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

*I mean they accept all my situations as they all fully respect my situations. So it's not so much hard to stay together. Also because this is some example. I accept the situation about the Kurban bayram and other things, I enjoy the Muslim holidays, or I respect the religion holiday of Muslims as the family of Z respect my tradition. She immediately accepted all. Both my daughters have the baptizes. And all the family of Z that are Muslim, they come inside the church to listen the ceremony. They never pushed me to do something like a Muslim guy but I accept something about Muslim, so in the table during the special dinner I don't drink alcohol for respect. Or during the Ramadan I wait till the iftar before to eat. Is a respect. (C03MIT married to Turkish)*

Tolerance and patience are also suggested by participants, since they are necessary for resolving conflictual issues.

*In general it is critical to be patient. I guess it is like this in every relationship but when you don't speak the same language, you need to be able to tolerate not understanding and not being understood. Accepting is also important.*

*Accepting that some things can be different. Being able to respect these. I think that's it. (C06FTR married to Chilean)*

*There needs to be some patience. Patience is very important. Tolerance. (C07MFR married to Turkish)*

*You say this is his culture, his custom. The most important thing is to be understanding. You learn being understanding and tolerant. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

Finding a common ground is shown as important to eliminate potential conflicts. They express that some amount of effort and mutual compromise are needed for understanding each other and for finding the middle way.

*But I think we, in both sides, both my parents and her parents, everyone is quite adaptive. Like I'm trying towards her, she's trying to come towards me. So far so good. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

*Mutual compromise. You need to put more effort in order to understand each other. Similarly, at a point that is very important to me, he will take a step back, at a point that is very important to him. I mean we are both reasonable people, what each of us wants will not be irrational, I will take a step back; it will be mutual compromise. (C07FTR married to French)*

*Compromise. I mean it doesn't make sense unless both of us put in the effort. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

#### **3.1.4.1.2 Effective Communication**

Individuals have certain expectations and certain boundaries in relationships. Clearly expressing those expectations and emotions are vital for the partners to be able to understand each other and to resolve conflicts. The importance of effective communication is highlighted by 13 participants in this study.

*To be open. To be always sincerely. To tell always what you feel in positive and negative. If you like something you should tell that you like something, if you don't like something you should tell that you don't like this thing. I don't*

*like this your approach, I don't like when you say me this, I don't like to meet this people, I don't like to eat this, I don't like to think about this, I don't like to watch this or I like to do this, I like to meet these people. (C03MIT married to Turkish)*

Openly communicating about negative situations help partners to resolve those before they come to an unresolvable point.

*Talking, communication is really important to us. Because if you keep there the whole garbage, it doesn't really help. I try to reflect upon my own attitudes and so on to put everything in a context. (C09MSP married to Turkish)*

*He is very direct. He immediately tells if there is a mistake or he makes a mistake. He is not afraid to point out to me that something I do bothers him. Sweeping things under the rug is not something I can do, makes me so angry. It fills me up, I feel like exploding and also it would hurt the relationship. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

Open communication is especially emphasized for multicultural relationships since partners have different preconceptions about various issues that should be enlightened.

*You need to explain what you base things upon. I mean for example you have a five step procedure, you build it in your mind. The first three is written for you in your own culture. For example you are going to go out in the evening; you think that you shouldn't go out wearing a skirt in Turkey, so you put a couple of pants on your bed. But he might not know why you are doing that, it's nice to go back and explain the steps to him. An open communication helps. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

*In a novel relationship one of the key factors is communication. Like you need to communicate about things. And then things work out better. I think in the way that in a multicultural relationship you communicate differently. (C01MGR cohabiting with Turkish)*



Just as clearly expressing yourself, being empathic while communicating is also important. Considering the partner's point of view, approaching with empathy are also important qualifications for a healthy communication.

*She understands how I can feel about it. She doesn't try to impose all the time her thought and what she thinks is the correct way to do things too. She tries to see what works good for everyone. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

*We don't argue much but when we do it's always like, trying to understand each other. (C08FGRC cohabiting with Turkish)*

*This is why talking is very important for us. To understand the other person when they have a problem or to help them understand themselves. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

Also keeping in mind the cultural differences they have and reminding themselves that their partner is from another culture helps the partners to remain more tolerant and empathic.

*You approach each other to understand and to learn. You listen and talk to with that intention. Otherwise you either assume that the other person is like you or when they are not like you, you have a conflict. When you know that the other person is from another culture, you argue less. (C06FTR married to Chilean)*

*I mean like you have to really open for hearing and experiencing the other person's culture because otherwise someone would always feel like left alone over there. (C01MGR cohabiting with Turkish)*

#### **3.1.4.1.3 Not Losing Temper**

Nine participants in this study express the importance of remaining rational, empathic and calm when faced with crisis. They have differing strategies such as use of humor, relying on rationality or giving each other some time for preventing the conflicts from turning into crisis. Not losing temper is shown as enhancing the quality of the relationship.

*She is very rational. Even though she is as stubborn as I am, she knows that maybe she is not completely right about things. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

*I think you always need to do what makes sense, what the logical thing is to do. (C04FTR married to French)*

*I mean it's mutual compromise. Sometimes what he says goes, sometimes what I say goes. In the end you do whichever makes more sense. As long as you do what is reasonable you can overcome any problem. Neither of us is very, rigid. We talk and find a common ground that makes sense. (C07FTR married to French)*

*Nothing you say will be erased from your life. No matter how angry you are, it is important to talk knowing that. It is important not to regret the things you said after the fight is over. I never regretted the things I have said after the fight ended. I don't think J has either. We never said anything that would hurt or insult the other. I don't think we are soft, we are reasonable. We don't think that bursting out without control would solve anything so why do it. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

Giving each other some time helps the partners to reduce their temper and to calmly discuss the issue afterwards.

*Whether I'm right or wrong, I explain to her after some time has passed. Like wouldn't it be better this way, I did that because of this, why did you do that etc. I think it's better to talk about it again after some time has passed. I see the benefits of this. This is beneficial to me. (C08MTR cohabiting with Greek)*  
*I mean we've been together for two and a half years now, I think we only had a fight once, I mean a real fight. For example, we talk more when we are in disagreement. We actually give each other some time. I give him some time, like five or ten minutes. I go to another room, I mean I haven't a lot, but when this happens I do. I go and I think. I try to look at it objectively. We usually don't look at it emotionally like this. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

Although language differences are expressed as challenges by spouses in this study, participant also claimed that speaking in a neutral language helps them to reduce the temper and to eliminate potential fights.

*For example you communicate in a neutral language. Like you don't communicate in your mother language for example we communicate in English... Sometimes I don't like talking about things or saying bad things or when it comes to I don't know conflicts and stuff like that it's way easier to do this in English. Hmm.. And. that plays a key factor. That's easier for me to communicate in that relationship than it has ever been in any other relationships where I spoke German with another woman. And I feel like saying things in English is much easier for me than saying them in my mother's language. I feel being more like rational and objective while speaking in English. (C01MGR cohabiting with Turkish)*

*F: You can't really fight since it's not your mother tongue (laughs). For example we speak in English with each other. It's a foreign language for both of us. So we can't have huge fights.*

*I: And you mean, the fact that you can't have huge fights helps you?*

*F: I mean, yeah. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

Humor is also suggested as a way which lowers the temper and helps couples resolve conflicts.

*The way of solving or non-solving differs. In the end we love each other. We fight but we say I love you stupid, I love you asshole and it ends. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

*But to add to what I said about love, respect and openness, there is humor. Humor is a huge one. I think if there is no humor I think man o it will be very difficult. So humor... I'll add humor to any and every relationship. Try humor, then you can't be so bad. If you can laugh you're good enough. (C06MCH married to Chilean)*

*Sometimes there is shouting but it is so typical of us. When one of us shouts, we laugh because you knew that the other person would react like that. For example in mornings, D pranks me, I am always so grouchy in the mornings. He did it this morning too for example, I didn't speak to him until I left the house. But when I got home in the evening we mocked how annoyed I was in the morning. And how his joke was not funny. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

*Haha everyone curses in their own language. And since we don't understand each other we have no problems (laughs). (C03FTR married to Italian)*

#### **3.1.4.2 Exposure to Differences**

11 of participants stressed the positive impact of being previously exposed to different cultural environments. They have either been in different countries due to student exchange programs, student summer camps, educational or professional reasons, or they have been in culturally mixed social environments in the country they live in, such as studying or working in culturally mixed places.

*I already was studying in London, I have many friends from many different cultures. That's why I never really felt different because he was French. (C04FTR married to French)*

*Because she is also well educated, she has travelled, she's been to Europe, she knows different things, we have many affinities; that makes it easier obviously, you know encounters and those kind of things. (C09MSP married to Turkish)*

They argue that interacting with people from different cultures teaches one how individuals and cultures can be different from each other and also how despite all differences individuals can be quite similar. Recognizing the ambivalent nature of the culture helps them to be more tolerant and accepting in their romantic relationships too.

*After that, when things started to get a bit serious during the first meeting, umm my father is Tunisian, my mother is French. We were already in a*

*multicultural setting so it was not really a problem for us. (C07MFR married to Turkish)*

*Erasmus gave me ideas about what is culture and how cultures affect relationships and stuff. I had people from many many countries, not just from Europe but people from US, Canada, from China, Japan. They were showing me that difference is not the most important. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*  
*Since my high school years, I've always loved multiculturalism. For example, I did a preparatory year in high school, and the years after that, I went to international youth volunteer camps. He is like that too. He always lived alone for many years, in many different countries. He met many different people. Both of us have this kind of knowledge that comes from our experiences. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

*Nothing really challenged me about the cultural differences, since I too grew up in an international environment. I also had a lot of foreign boyfriends before J, and had a lot of foreigners around me because of Dame de Sion etc. I ended up being an open person in this sense. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

The same situation is evident in terms of families too. The families who are previously exposed to different cultures more easily adapted to the concept of “foreign bride/groom”.

*Umm, the fact that my sister is married to a foreigner makes things easy for me. I mean when I think about the first time she brought her boyfriend, my mother used to find a lot of what he did to be rude, she didn't understand. Or she thought that he was being unfair to my sister about some things. As time went on, she realized that, this is simply how the Europeans are. They don't have bad intentions or anything, it is just how they were raised, that's why they act like this. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

*L's parents are both psychologists and they really understand the human mind well. I mean L's mother lives in London, so she's with different people all the*

*time. They've been in America for a time. They're both really nice. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

On the other hand, for families who have not been in different cultural environments, accepting a foreigner into the family created a surprise and hesitation.

*So my mother, because she is a housewife, she never had any relationship with people from other countries. So N was like oh the foreigner. And the Muslim foreigner. And the Turkish foreigner. She is Turkish and she is Muslim how is this supposed to happen? My mother was saying, how to say, I don't know and it is a bit weird, are you sure and stuff. But when they came to Turkey and they saw that girl, they said o I got, she is perfect. She is the same as us. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

*I mean of course they were surprised. Because they never experienced something like this before. No foreign brides or grooms. (C06FTR married to Chilean)*

*Maybe there was some anxiety about the foreign one because we didn't have any international relationships around us. (C07FTR married to French)*

### **3.1.4.3 Seeing the Relationship as a Learning Environment**

The partners in multicultural relationships bring into the relationship what they learned from both their cultures and from their families. When combined with the individual differences they have, the relationship turns into an environment where partners continuously evolve in the relationship as long as they feel open and willing to change. The relationship becomes a melting pot of both cultures, in which the individuals enrich their worldviews and evolve in terms of characteristics and attitudes.

13 of the participants especially highlighted the benefits of being in a multicultural relationship in terms of personal development. The nature of the relationship which enables the personal development makes the couples in this study happy to be in a multicultural relationship.

*I: You say that these different experiences are more enriching.*

*F: Absolutely. You find a middle ground, see the differences and form your own opinion. It is important to see the differences in order to form an original opinion. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

*The thing about enriching the relationship is more when there are different cultures. There is a lot to know. You have to ask and learn everything, you have to be curious. When it's like that, there are more stories to tell. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

*And we always contribute and enrich each other. We have various conversations. If I were with a person from the same culture, we wouldn't be able to do that. (C06FTR married to Chilean)*

*Also it's pretty enriching, more exciting to explore. Every time you learn something you change; therefore you grow. (C06MCH married to Turkish)*

The partners develop each other in certain characteristics such as openness, open communication, tolerance and being more relaxed.

*When the other person is very open with you, you can't really close yourself up anyway. You think, if he is open with me, why can't I be open with him. (C07FTR married to French)*

*When I look back at how I was a year and a half ago, I can say that he changed me. He turned me into a calmer person. (C05FTR married to Greek)*

*Normally I am not a very patient person. When someone doesn't understand what I'm saying and I need to repeat myself, I get bored very quickly. I think I got over that a bit. Because he is more relaxed, I too can be more relaxed. (C06FTR married to Chilean)*

*He told what was on his mind. We never beat around the bush. That directness also reflected on me. I started to be able to be more direct in my life and to directly tell when I wanted something. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

They argued that in monocultural relationships, most of the things are considered similar and not even discussed. In multicultural relationships, there is a lot to explore and partners feel more motivated to investigate their partner's worldview and culture, both to learn more and to understand him/her better.

*To be able to understand and communicate you need to talk to that person. I mean this also applies to relationships between people from the same culture, but in that case, you kind of feel like you don't have to. You just assume things, both of you assume things. Or you simply don't realize that the other person might have a different opinion. When you are with a person from a different cultural background, at some point you just start to ask about things out of curiosity. Because you cannot simply assume anymore. Consequently, you share more. I feel like with a person from the same culture, you miss out of half the things to talk about simply due to assumptions. And also, I feel like there is more to learn here, I feel like there is a larger source of information to feed from. Somehow you talk more. I think this is the difference. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

*But we can introduce each other to new things, we can discover new things. So yeah, that's a fundamental thing. (C09MSP married to Turkish)*

*You ask, what does this means to you. Things that might turn into problems with a person from the same country are easily resolved in this way. (C08MTR cohabiting with Greek)*

#### **3.1.4.4 Individuality, Independence and Trust**

Trust is a fundamental aspect making relationships healthier. 10 participants in this study expressed their trust in each other by claiming that jealousy and restricting each other are never practiced in their relationships. Especially Turkish female partners claimed that the lack of jealousy and the following constrictions provided a comfort and freedom to them in their romantic relationship.



*In our relationship, what makes it easier is that fact that neither of us is jealous. For example we both go out with friends. This way there is more to tell, you are more relaxed and free. Especially after kids, you look for something spice up the life. Flirting for example. Going out with other people spices up the life. The fact that A is not jealous makes it easier for me. As time goes by, continuing to not restrict each other will be even more important.*

**(C03FTR married to Italian)**

*The fact that he is a totally different profile compared to men I knew before. I didn't know it at first of course but there is no jealousy in our relationship. This facilitates staying together.* **(C04FTR married to French)**

*I mean, in the simplest term, this jealousy issue. You know that Turkish men are such and such about this. I shouldn't generalize, of course there are different people but in general they are like this. For example I and I, we speak very different things. We never get stuck in this side of the relationship. Not like did you wear this, did you go there, don't see this friend etc... Never such arguments.* **(C06FTR married to Chilean)**

*In the beginning it felt very different but now, these behaviours are an important part of my comfort zone. I used to think that it was weird that he wasn't jealous at all, it used to bother me. But now I am very happy that he is like this. It facilitates both the life and the relationship.* **(C07FTR married to French)**

*No, never. F never looks at my mail or checks my phone or texts me to learn where I am or what I am doing. If I don't come home this evening after work, and just tell him I'm going to a certain place, he doesn't ask with whom I'm going. And I don't ask him either.* **(C09FTR married to Spanish)**

Because partners trust in each other, they don't control or restrict each other. This liberal attitude facilitates for them to protect their individuality. Being able to be yourself in the relationship, being able to preserve your individuality is demonstrated as a positive aspect of the relationship, by the participants.

*I am as comfortable with him as I am with my parents. (C04FTR married to French)*

*Because I doesn't think things like, a woman is supposed to be like this, act like this, this is woman's work that is man's work. He is not like that. I'm not like that either. Since he is at ease about such subjects, I can be myself. Otherwise it would have been difficult. (C06FTR married to Chilian)*

*It's like best of all. You find a person who lets you be who you are as you are, and also I will be able to understand what he says. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

*Yes of course, being able to be yourself. Because in my previous relationships I always heard things like don't do this, you do this a lot. These are so annoying. Of course I can change certain attitudes which harm the relationship but it's exaggerated when someone argues about everything I do. (C05FTR married to Greek)*

*The important is you don't block my freedom. And Z, the family of Z or other people around me never block my freedom. Never block my choose, never push me to something I don't want. (C03MIT married to Turkish)*

Also independence arises when partners trust in each other. This independence helps them to feel confident and comfortable in the relationship. Participants in this study highlight that they feel as independent individuals in their relationship.

*We know how to be quite independent from each other. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

*Because there are some couples like they all have their own things, you have your own thing and your wife also. Of course I don't mean we do everything together, everything is not same for us. (C09MSP married to Turkish)*

*The feeling of being one, instead of being two different people. When I look at it now, I don't find it very healthy. I like where I am now more. We are different people but we are together, I like this more. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

### 3.1.4.5 Familiarity with the Partner's Culture

Being familiar with the partner's culture positively impacts the couple relationships as suggested by 10 participants in this study. This familiarity emerges either from the cultural similarity of the countries or from the partners' previous exposure to each other's culture.

In terms of cultural similarity, because of being from Mediterranean societies, the cultures of Greece, Italy and Spain are expressed as having similar characteristics with Turkish culture, which then helps the partners to experience less cultural difference.

*First, as you know Greek culture is not too different from ours. I mean we lived in the same country for years. From our cuisine to how we have fun, it's all very similar. I went to her brother's wedding. Like us they close off the street to have the wedding party in front of their homes (laughs). We really do have a very similar culture, we use the same words for a lot of things. I didn't really have a lot of problems in this aspect. (C08MTR cohabiting with Greek) Because I am from Greece and it was so easy for me to adapt to culture. Turkish culture. We were raised in Mediterranean, from how to say middle class families. Having good education, knowing languages. These things were connecting us. I don't know how would be if I was from US or China or Argentina. You don't know. But more or less we were raised in the same like things. When we decided to get married and to make a life, more or less we had the same beliefs of what a home should consist of. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)*

*Culturally, the Spanish, especially those from Cordoba and Andalusia, are very similar to us. I mean there was an Arab country there, Cordoba as its capital. They have a huge mosque there, now it is a cathedral but you still see the Arabic architecture. It is not too different. I mean muslims lived there. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

*It's not like he is English or something. Our cultures are really similar. Maybe it's because I haven't been to Greece but you know how it is: neighbor! It's like the other side of the sea, like a Christian version of us. This image is not shaken for me maybe because I haven't lived there. (C05FTR married to Greek)*

*I can't say that it's really different. Maybe it's because Italians, Mediterranean culture and it is very similar to us. I didn't see a lot of differences. But as I said this is due to the fact that A's culture is very similar to ours. He got used to us very easily. Maybe if he were German or English, it would have been harder. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

Even though the cultures of the countries the partners lived in are not found to be similar, previously being exposed to that culture, learning the language, learning the traditions help the partners overcome cultural differences that might otherwise turn into problems.

*M: Umm no. My friends from England asked me if I was dating a Turkish girl and that's it. And even they said that it's Turkey so it's not weird or anything*

*T: What would make it weird?*

*M: For example if she were Chinese, like actually from China. Because I have no relationship or connection with China and it is really far away (laughs). That could have been surprising. (C02MUK cohabiting with Turkish)*

*I also think it is an advantage that I lived in Turkey for a long time. So I really like the culture and I'm really interested in it. Like Turkish politics, all of these things. And all the way around A is very interested in what's going on in the country that I'm living in now. (C01MGR cohabiting with Turkish)*

*Another thing I can add is knowing the culture of the other person. For example D is German; I don't specifically know a lot about German culture but I know Belgian and Dutch cultures. It gives me a general idea about Germany. Similarly, D lived in Istanbul before we met so he had a general idea about how the Turkish people are in general, how to walk in the streets*

*etc. I think it's good to have some ideas. We talked about this a lot when we first met and agreed that the fact that we have seen each other's cultures before we met was a huge plus. (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

*And also, knowing the culture and the language is important. Otherwise somethings just don't work. You need to know to culture at least a little bit, also knowing the language makes everything easier. (C07MFR married to Turkish)*

#### **3.1.4.6 Open-Mindedness and Flexibility**

Open-mindedness and a flexible way of thinking facilitates the human interactions since every human interaction involves two different mental and behavioral sets which confront each other. When it comes to intimate relationships, individuals may be challenged if they approach their partners in a rigid way. In this study, open-mindedness and flexibility are portrayed by 10 participants as vital factors enriching the relationship.

*Both of us are easygoing. In general yeah, we are not too obsessive about anything. I think that helps a lot. But basically being obsessive, being like rigid on certain point would make this relationship more difficult, it can make all relationships really more difficult. (C09MSP married to Turkish)*

*You definitely have to be flexible and tolerant. It is important to be more open, otherwise you won't be able to understand that person. If you insist, you might not be able to find a solution. (C07MFR married to Turkish)*

*I think the key not just to multicultural relationships, but to any relationship is kind of realizing that we are all unique. Even if we come from the same country, same neighborhood, same school or whatever we are all unique. And if we are not open enough and loving and respecting enough to see that, I don't think you can build a strong enough relationship. (C06MCH married to Turkish)*

*What makes it easier is not being rigid for both partners, to think alternatively. For example, sometimes I completely disagree with his opinion but I'm never like how is this possible? Neither is he. I mean, trying to understand is very important. But both of us are really easygoing. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

*Of course, we have differences but because we are both flexible people, we somehow always manage to find a common ground. (C07FTR married to French)*

Being open to new experiences is also voiced by participants as helping to integrate both cultures.

*And you should be open minded of course. You should be able to accept something you never did in your life before. So when I did in my life for thirty-eight years, something like Ramadan or iftar? (C03MIT married to Turkish)*

*What I meant by character was, for example being more open-minded. Being more open to new experiences. As I said you might have some problems if you are a strict person. (C06FTR married to Chilean)*

### **3.1.5 Turkish Way of Living a Relationship**

Although not being one of the expected outcomes and research questions of this study, a style of relationship unique to Turkish people, emerged as a side theme. Being titled “Turkish Way of Living a Relationship”, this specific type of relationship includes characteristics such as jealousy, oppression, a social meaning given to marriage and the notion of “trip” which can be explained as an unclear communication between partners. Under this theme also two specific descriptions regarding “Typical Turkish Guys” and “Typical Turkish Girls” are also emphasized.

Based on their observations and experiences, both Turkish and non-Turkish participants attributed certain characteristics to Turkish women and men. Those characteristics usually have a negative connotation and expressed as negatively impacting the spousal relationship.

### 3.1.5.1 Not a Typical Turkish Girl

This sub-theme, emerging unexpectedly, was evident in 10 participants' narratives. Either Turkish female participants used this in a way to separate themselves from the stereotypical image of "Typical Turkish Girl" or their non-Turkish partner expressed their happiness of not being with a "Typical Turkish Girl".

One participant who is a Turkish male, hesitantly revealed his ideas about typical Turkish girls, fearing that he will be judged by the researcher who is also a Turkish female.

*I don't want to comment on Turkish girls and get lynched (laughs). M was not like this in the beginning but slowly she became more capricious. Slowly she embraced the Turkish girl culture, I mean there is barely any difference left now (laughs). She used to be so relaxed, I mean she still is, she doesn't rant or anything, but I don't know, maybe it's more about wanting attention.*

**(C08MTR cohabiting with Greek)**

"Trip atmak", which is a word often used for describing the attitude of not preferring an open communication but indirectly making the other person uncomfortable from the situation, is demonstrated as one of the negative characteristics of Turkish girls. One Turkish female participant voiced this as such:

*I: What does mean being a Turkish girl?*

*F: For example this concept of 'trip'. If you asked me four years before I would say I don't make trips and I'm so understanding. But whenever he showed me like you are doing this right now, and explained to me what I'm doing like "you are doing a trip right now and this is why you are doing this", and when I thought about what I'm doing, I came to see that what I do is not logical at all. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

One Greek female, who is the only non-Turkish female participant in this study, also had an opinion on typical Turkish girls' trip due to her boyfriend's previous dating experiences.

*And he told me that all of my ex-girlfriends, while saying of course yes, you can go out, they were actually meaning no bitch don't go out without me. It was a bit different. He had a bit different experience with his ex-girlfriends because they were Turkish. (C08FGRC cohabiting with Turkish)*

Her boyfriend also voiced his experiences with Turkish girls.

*I don't like saying that actually. Turkish girl almost sounds racist, let's call them women with Turkish citizenships (laughs). It's all based on previous experiences I had with my ex-girlfriends, maybe I was just unlucky but I and other people around me were exposed to "trip" for such stupid reasons. (C08MTR cohabiting with Greek)*

Being widely observed in the romantic relationships in Turkey by the participants, jealousy is expressed as another characteristic of Turkish girls.

*How am I? I don't really carry that Turkish girl thing. This jealousy is increased by being in such a relationship. If you are in such a relationship, if there is someone who is jealous, you can't help but wonder what he is doing if he is thinking about such things. You get into that mindset. (C04FTR married to French)*

*When I started dating J, I was a typical Turkish girl. And I didn't even realize that. It's like these little jealousies. (C02FTR cohabiting with British)*

The notion of marriage is also to be considered under this sub-theme. Turkish girls are expressed as very willing to get married and as seeing the marriage as bringing a higher social status to women.

*Like as I said what I saw represents only my experience but in working environment, I've seen certain attitudes that tends towards that. I've seen the concern of social status, some women are trying to go for it. (C09MSP married to Turkish)*

*I had a director once, an Italian, once he told me "Z why all women above 30 in Turkey are so negative?". He's right. Because it's like coded in the genes. I will get married and will have kids. Marriage is a symbol of status for us, as if*



women rise to a higher social class when they get married. Especially to marry a rich man. That's why like the reason of marriage is not love but money. What are the qualifications and stuff. (C03FTR married to Italian)

I never had the wish to marry or a solitaire ring. I never had the anxieties a typical Turkish girl has. (C09FTR married to Spanish)

Although observing such characteristics in Turkish women, Turkish female participants don't describe themselves as typical Turkish girls. This is also voiced by their non-Turkish partners.

L is not a typical Turkish girl. (C04MFR married to Turkish)

She was a Turkish girl, living this different life. I said this girl was born and raised in Turkey but her ideas are completely different. Completely different from what we mean stereotypical Turkish girl. (C05MGRC married to Turkish)

T: So is family the only thing coming to your mind when I ask about experiences?

E: Yeah pretty much, because she's also not a very typical Turkish girl. That plays a role as well. (C09MSP married to Turkish)

### 3.1.5.2 Typical Turkish Guy

Besides the concept of typical Turkish girl, there is also the Typical Turkish Guy, who is explained as more or less having the same characteristics with a typical Turkish girl. 10 participants expressed their negative comments on Turkish guys.

Well, there is also the notion of Turkish guy, we have to ask about it too. (C08MTR cohabiting with Greek)

Jealousy is also one of the characteristics of typical Turkish guys.

I mean, in the simplest term, this jealousy issue. You know that Turkish men are such and such about this. (C06FTR married to Chilean)

The fact that he was a type of man that I was not familiar with. Of course I didn't know when I first met him but we don't really have any jealousy in our

*relationship. Things like this made it easier for us to be together. (C04FTR married to French)*

The protective attitude Turkish men adopt towards women was also voiced by one of the participants. This female participant, being the only non-Turkish female participant of the study, expressed the protective attitude of his boyfriend as a positive thing that attracted him to her.

*He was holding my hand from day one. Like in order to show that I can take care of you. And I think... What attracted me to him... I was always a very strong girl. Let's say. Also there was a huge difference between him and my ex-boyfriends in Greece. Because with my ex-boyfriends in Greece I was always the man in the relationship but with him from day one, he was the man in the relationship. (C08FGRC cohabiting with Turkish)*

However although attracting her to him at first, this characteristic gained a negative connotation after the relationship progressed.

*But now he's coming from a Turkish society and you know the Turkish society... Sometimes he's aa... Too overprotecting. Well this is how he used to be. He made me feel safe is what attracted me to him at first. Like he was the man. But sometimes it's too much. (C08FGRC cohabiting with Turkish)*

Interestingly, one Turkish female participant voiced Turkish males attitude towards the meaning and practice of sexuality. While stating that women's sexuality is very limited by social concerns, men are expressed as enjoying sexual freedom, again with a negative connotation.

*For men it's the opposite, I'll sleep with this one too, a relaxed attitude. For the ones above a certain age. Because it's never a taboo for Europeans in any part of their lives; love comes first for them, sexuality later. The ones in here, even if they go and study in US or even if they are raised in very modern families, it's like in the genes, this taboo. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

Another Turkish female participant expressed the immaturity she sees in Turkish guys.

*I think Turkish guys are pretty immature after being with a foreign. They are really infantile and they all have problems with competence. (C04FTR married to French)*

Interestingly, all Turkish female participants claimed that they were much happier to be with a non-Turkish partner and they would not prefer to be with a Turkish guy. Due to various reasons such as oppression, jealousy and gender-role expectations they observe among Turkish guys, these female participants expressed their relationship with non-Turkish partners as more comfortable.

*I never imagined to have a foreign husband but I always wanted. Because I had such relationships before and I liked that. Because it's hard to find a Turkish guy who has the same mentality with me. I will say relax but relax doesn't exactly cover what I want to say. While saying relax I'm also someone who knows the traditions and behaves appropriately but the way my mind works is really open. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

*I: Wouldn't you want to be married to a Turkish man?*

*F: No I wouldn't.*

*I: What made you say that?*

*F: It's all about E. I can't say this culture or that culture but I feel more comfortable with the culture E was raised in. I wouldn't be like this if I were married to a Turkish man. (C07FTR married to French)*

*I think of myself, trying to compare this to what it would be like if I were married to a Turkish. It could be harder. Definitely. You know this oppression and jealousy. They have difficulty to understand when you are different. That's what I experienced with Turkish guys. In our relationship there is no oppression or shaping and this makes me more comfortable. It's really great being in a relationship that I will not be judged because of being myself or because of the things I do. (C05FTR married to Greek)*

*With someone from the same culture those things would be put in front of me and I would have to fight a lot. You know how Turkish men are, the jealousy thing in simplest terms. (C06FTR married to Chilian)*

*For example I think it would be harder with a Turkish man. I got married quickly and had a child. The dynamics changed. I lived alone for years, I was accustomed to be with friends. For example A's attitude made me feel more comfortable, I'm never oppressed. But he also hangs out a lot. We both trust each other. That's why the most important thing for me is the lack of jealousy. But of course women also have this. They don't give permission to their husbands. As if something is going to happen. (C03FTR married to Italian)*

*That's why when I think of myself, it would be harder with a Turkish guy. A much less less peaceful relationship, and much more fights because of his immaturity. (C04FTR married to French)*

### **3.1.5.3 Oppressive Relationships**

According to the narratives of participants in this study, romantic relationships mostly have an oppressive nature in Turkish society. Varying from the limits on clothing to interaction with friends, partners oppress each other in certain ways. Jealousy appears to be a main motivation why partners in Turkey restrict each other's behaviors and activities. Nine of the participants expressed the oppressive nature of relationships in Turkey.

*Hmm... In the terms like, if I need to do something, even if it's a stupid thing like going out with friends, she's not gonna be calling me every five minutes to ask what I'm doing. That's something I saw from my friends very typical to the culture. (C04MFR married to Turkish)*

*Two people from same cultures... Considering my own long-term relationship experiences I can say that Turkish men are too dominant for me. One of them was so dominant. Like jealousy, things that are not nice. But if you ask he would say ooh I love you so much, ooh I die for you. But on the other side,*

*such things negatively impact your self-confidence, your existence and your relationships with your friends. (C09FTR married to Spanish)*

For those who have previously dated with Turkish men and women, the relationship is coded like something which includes constraints. Once they started dating with non-Turkish participants they could not easily adapt to the comfort the relationship provides.

*For example you have different expectations about how a relationship will be. Not to offend each other but different conceptions regarding what is right what is wrong. His version is much more libertarian. I didn't know it and I used to apologize for many things. He was getting surprised like why do you apologize, you didn't do anything, this is normal and it's your right etc... (C01FTR cohabiting with German)*

The Greek female participant also expressed her boyfriend's difficulty to adapt into a relationship where he will be able to freely see his friends.

*Apart from this marriage and clothes thing... Hmm... And for example like once I caught him lying to me. When he was going out after work. He told me he's at work, while going outside. And then like I found out and I was asking him like why? Of course you can go out after work. It's super normal. And he told me that all of my ex-girlfriends, while saying of course yes you can go out they were actually meaning no bitch don't go out without me. It was a bit different. He was a bit differently used with his ex-girlfriends because they were Turkish. (C08FGRC cohabiting with Turkish)*

## DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the impact of culture upon the romantic relationship of multicultural couples by revealing what kind of cultural differences observed among partners, how do they operate on the relationship and how are they resolved. The

findings of this study are obtained based on the experiences of nine couples where spouses are from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Individuals obtain unique meanings, values, practices and attitudes from their cultural environment (Falicov, 2014). The selfhood and the style of interaction with others are highly impacted from cultural teachings and practices (Krause, 2002, p.21). Increasing contact among different cultural groups facilitates the formation of multicultural relationships. Partners from different cultural groups differ on various dimensions such as religion, language, family characteristics, gender-role expectations and child-rearing practices, as well as beliefs, values and their expectations regarding romantic relationships. Such differences challenge the couple relationship in certain cases. Couples who fail to integrate both cultures or who fail to empathically understand each other are faced with divorce as studies show (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Clarkwest, 2007; Finnas, 1997).

The results of the current study portray contrasting findings. The interviewed participants in this study expressed that although they are initially challenged by language differences, their cultural backgrounds did not negatively impact the spousal relationship.

In line with Thematic Analysis Method, results are obtained from the experiences and explanations of participants. In this section, five themes presented in the results section are analyzed according to the observed differences, similarities and the associations within the narratives of participants. The responses are discussed parallel with the previous findings retrieved from the existing literature.

#### **4.1 CULTURE DOES NOT HAVE A LARGE EFFECT**

Culture includes various characteristics such as gender relations, religion, linguistics, culinary habits, daily routines and art, which are influenced by the collective logic and which are not separable from the daily-life practices and selfhood of individuals (Collet, 2015; Krause, 2002). Culture provides a “repertoire of behaviors and meanings” that are reproduced in social interactions (Krause, 2002).

While interacting with people from their own social group, individuals assume and expect similar behaviors, meanings and signs (Krause, 2002). Meanings and interaction patterns that are shared with the kin group are enhanced by the emphasis of differences with other social groups (Jenkins, 1997). Thus individuals mostly prefer interacting with individuals from their own social groups.

When it comes to romantic relationships, the cultural differences result with various challenges for spouses. Those challenges are the differences of gender-role expectations, religion, language, child-rearing practices in addition to the expression of affect and familial relations (Clarkwest, 2007; Kalmijn et al., 2005). However current study provided contrasting data on the importance of culture in romantic relationships. The participants in this study emphasized the importance of familial experiences and individual differences on romantic relationships, instead of cultural differences.

Various studies in the literature show that the dissimilarity among partners lead to marital dissolution (Clarkwest, 2007; Kalmijn et al., 2005) because dissimilar cultural practices result in dissimilar expectations among partners (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). Yet parallel with this study, there are also studies failing to find adequate evidence to claim that multicultural relationships are more distressed (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006; Fu & Wolfinger, 2011; Negy & Snyder, 2000). The participants in this study expressed that their relationship is not impacted by their differences and they have various similarities in terms of values and personality, indeed. Existence of commonalities (Djurdjevic & Girona, 2016) and having similar desires and goals in life (Watts & Henriksen, 1999), having similar attitudes regarding religiosity and gender-roles (George et al., 2015) protect the relationship from cultural differences. This is also voiced by the participants in this study. They argued that they have more commonalities with their partners when compared to differences. The participants in this study are similar to each other on age, education level, socio-economic status and religious attitude, which may be diminishing the potential negative effects of differences.

Hollan (2012) highlights the interactive and dynamic nature of culture stating that just as the social culture or the family culture impacts an individual, individuals also impact the culture (Hollan, 2012). The expressions of participants are in accordance with this statement. They show that individuals are not passive receivers of the culture but develop their selfhood through active and selective participation in it. Foeman and Nance (2002) claim that each individual is impacted by the culture in a subjective manner, and partners in multicultural relationships are usually not typical members of their societies. The participants in this study also emphasized this very notion that they do not feel attached to their own communities, they do not adopt all cultural practices and teachings inherent in their cultures which helps them to have stable relationships with their partners from other social groups.

One interesting outcome of this study is that participants feel themselves as more similar to their partners when compared to their own social group in terms of religious attitude, personality and gender-role expectations. Similar with the findings of Arranz Becker (2013), Gaunt (2006) and, Karney and Bradbury (1995) attitudinal similarity on important life dimensions eliminates the potentially negative impacts of cultural differences.

In accordance with earlier studies held for examining the impact of personality traits on marital quality (McCabe, 2006), the participants in this study highlighted personality differences as more important than cultural differences. The information they shared regarding what they mean by personality included style of conflict-management, open-mindedness and adaptation skills.

Family also covers an important position while discussing the importance of culture. Studies show that culture is transmitted to the child from families and each family has a unique way of apprehending and practicing culture (Bradbury et al., 2000; Gaines et al., 1999). Individuals learn the expected behaviors in their interactions with their families (Dennison et al., 2014). This also appears in the narratives of participants. They suggest that how one is raised is more important than



culture, and they add that what impacts an individual is not the culture of the society but the family culture.

#### **4.2 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

Communities have various norms and rules which shape the social interactions, daily practices, habits and rituals. Such norms are transferred among generations, providing a mental scheme to individuals about appropriate behaviors and expectations. Partners coming from different cultural backgrounds have different values, worldviews, communication styles, social interactions, beliefs and languages (Bustamante et al., 2011; Cools, 2006).

Although expressing themselves as detached from their own communities, and although apprehending culture as an ambiguous notion, participants in this study highlighted various cultural differences they see in their partners. This main theme has four sub-themes which are Family Structures, Attitude Towards Romantic Relationships, Daily Life Practices and Gender Role Expectations.

Families differ on factors such as intimacy, rules, roles, hierarchy, the structure of family and the boundaries within family members (Thomas, 1998). Although there are universal factors such as love and connection, family units are highly influenced by the culture (Fişek, 1991) and by the unique familial experiences and memories that are transmitted among generations (Thomas, 1998).

The findings of this study regarding familial differences are collected under two sub-sub themes, Intimacy/Boundaries and Autonomy/Dependence. The participants' narratives demonstrated that Turkish families and non-Turkish families differ in their behaviors of intimacy and boundaries. In Turkish families the existence of definite rules shaping the intergenerational communication is highlighted. Turkish participants expressed that they do not feel themselves in an egalitarian position with their parents especially in terms of the communication of negative feelings and romantic relationships. This finding is consistent with the studies of Fişek (1991; 2010) and Roland (1988) which highlight the hierarchial structure of Turkish

families. However the narratives also show an emotional and physical connectedness within families. Turkish participants, most of them living in the same neighborhood with their parents, argued that they spend a great amount of time with their parents. This physical connectedness leads to parental involvement in important life decisions, especially in the decision of marriage. This situation is different for most of the non-Turkish participants. In case of German, English and French participants, the spatial and emotional connection with families is much lower when compared to Turkish families. They claim to see or talk to their parents much rarely. Yet they also highlight that they have a more egalitarian positioning within their nuclear families. The content and the style of communication is not limited as is the case for Turkish participants, which fosters the independence and individuality of German, English and French participants in family environment. One interesting outcome is that although being Western, Italian, Spanish and Greek participants created a unique group. They stressed physical and emotional connectedness with their families and more egalitarian relationships. The boundaries within families is not as permeable as is the case for Turkish participants, but this is not expressed as an emotional distance as is the case of German, English and French participants. This finding is in line with the analysis of Schneider (1971) and Pina-Cabral (1989) who, in their anthropological analysis show that Mediterranean family culture is shaped by bilateral kinship. The Mediterranean families, similar to Turkish families, give importance to spatial and emotional closeness with their relatives, and their belonging to family is as strong as in Turkish case.

One other dimension the families differ is the autonomy/dependence. Parallel with the notion of intimacy/boundaries, Turkish participants described themselves as feeling dependent to their parents especially on important life decisions. Taking the parents' approval is expressed as important for Turkish participants. One interesting outcome is that Turkish participants stressed economic dependence as fostering their emotional dependency to their parents. They claimed that their non-Turkish partners have the experience of working and earning money as students, and this is shown as

helping to gain autonomy. The situation is expressed differently by non-Turkish participants in this study. They claimed as feeling autonomous from very early ages on, and taking a decision which is not supported by the parents is not expressed as a crisis by them. They argued that their parents share with them their opinions but the choice is personally made. These findings are parallel with Fişek's (2010) notion of familial-self in describing Turkish families. The participants from Turkey felt more psychologically related to their parents, although not being happy about it. One information to consider for examining this notion is the gender of the participants. As it is suggested by Kağıtçıbaşı (1996) daughters in Turkish families are expected to be more obedient and dependent compared to sons who are raised to become more autonomous and aggressive. Also the hierarchical structure of Turkish families position females in a subordinate position when compared to males (Bolak-Boratav et. Al, 2017). Except for one male, all Turkish participants are female. The gender-roles inherent in Turkish families may be also rendering females to be more dependent on their families and in a lower position in family-hierarchy which harms their individuality and independence.

Considering the cultural orientation is also meaningful at this point. As stated by previous studies, Western countries are more individualistic and this cultural orientation is observed in family structures (Ting-Toomey, 2008). Autonomous decision making and looser ties with families is prevalent in individualistic cultures. On the other hand in collectivistic cultures the relations with extended family is stronger and the dependency among family members is suggested for the protection of harmony (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). The German, French and English participants in this study, coming from individualistic cultures, expressed more egalitarian and autonomous family relations. Yet for Turkey, this labelling is not easy due to the changing social structure of Turkey (Medora et al., 2002). This transition is observed in the narratives of participants. The female participants expressed the dependency and the strictness of hierarchy as prevalent in their family structures but also these are

the family characteristics they are not happy with and they do not want to transmit those to their children.

The next dimension in which partners observed cultural differences is the social attitude towards romantic relationships, especially the importance given to marriage. Turkish participants expressed their resentment from being obliged to marry their partners to live together whereas the none of the non-Turkish participants experienced such an obligation. Only three Turkish participants live with their partners with the consent of their parents, one male and two females. Again considering the gender of the participants, the disapproval of families towards cohabitation may be generating from the notion of “honour” which is highly prevalent in Turkish families, limiting women’s freedom in sexual and romantic interactions (Singh, 2017). Two female participants whose parents do not reject cohabitation describe their parents as open-minded, not-religious and as being previously exposed to cohabitation relationships. The other participant who cohabits with his partner is male, thus factors operating on women may not have operated in his case.

Participants in this study also differ in daily and religious practices. Although most of the participants do not describe themselves as religious, they claim that religious practices are not just religious but also cultural. Thus while Turkish participants celebrate Muslim holidays, participants from Christian communities celebrate Christian holidays. The previous studies apprehend the differences of religious practices as leading to conflicts in spousal relationship (Baltas & Steptoe, 2000; Chinitz & Brown, 2001). However none of the participants in this study expressed a problem arising from religious practices. This may be related with participants’ religiosity. Bystydzienski (2011) and, Petronoti and Papagaroufali (2006) argue that individuals in multicultural relationships usually do not define themselves as religious. Parallel with this argument, in this study except for three Christian participants, none of the participants described themselves as practicing believers. Those three participants both believe in and practice religion but because

their partners are not conservative and they are tolerant with their partners' religious attitude, their religiosity doesn't negatively impact the spousal relationship.

The last difference observed is on gender-role expectations. In male-dominated societies the duties and behaviors expected from men and women highly differ (Bustamante et al., 2011; Daneshpour, 2003). Turkish society also being a patriarchal one, gives women the duties of household and child-rearing, while declaring men as the protector and provider of the family. The participants in this study do not adopt such gender-roles and claim to have equal positions and duties at home. However this difference is voiced by them in the societal level. Especially non-Turkish male participants expressed this differentiation with surprise and criticism highlighting that they are happy because their Turkish partners do not reproduce Turkish gender-roles in their relationships. On the other hand Turkish female participants argued that their partners' egalitarian gender-role practices positively impact the relationship because as Turkish women they are not happy from the society's enforced rules and expectations.

#### **4.3 CHALLENGES**

Multicultural relationships are expressed to be challenging for partners in various terms. The differentiation of values, practices, beliefs and attitudes, when combined with differences of language and religion, complicate the situation for multicultural couples, increasing the risk of marital dissolution (Clarkwest, 2007; Finnas, 1997; Fu, 2006; Jones, 1996; Kalmijn, Graaf & Janssen, 2005; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Negy & Snyder, 2000; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). Babaoğlu (2008) claims that even if partners adapt to each other at the beginning of the relationship, the embodied cultural practices inherent in each individual emerges in the years necessitating an ever-ending negotiation and adaptation process. According to data received from participants, under the main theme of challenges, four sub-themes emerged. These are Language differences, Child-Rearing, Where to Live, Opposition from Families.

Communication is an important aspect of couple relationship since partners constantly negotiate their differing wishes and expectations. Considering that in multicultural relationships at least one of the partners doesn't communicate in his/her native language, the probability of misunderstanding, misexpression and misinterpretation is higher when compared to homogamous relationships (Bustamante et al., 2011). In this study, except for one couple, remaining eight couples communicate in English. One couple communicates in Turkish because the French male partner has been living in Turkey for fifteen years and he is better in Turkish when compared to English. The participants in this study are all university graduates and they are fluent with English. Only one female participant didn't speak English when she met her Chilian partner and she expresses that they were really challenged at first because of language differences. The remaining participants who are fluent in English also stress that not being able to speak in their native languages hinders their capacity of self-expression, especially in times of conflicts. Not being able to communicate with their partners' families is also voiced as a challenge by the participants in this study in cases where parents do not speak English.

In terms of emotions, the participants argued that the fear of not clearly expressing themselves created and anxiety in the initial stages of the relationship and misunderstandings lead to resentment and anger among partners, as also shown in the studies of Cools (2006) and, Soliz and colleagues (2009).

Conflicts related to child-rearing emerged as an important outcome of this study. Studies show that child-rearing becomes a conflictual field for multicultural couples, since individuals from different societies have different practices and experiences regarding child-rearing, and they also have different cultural values that they wish to transmit their children (Inman et al., 2011; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996; Negy & Snyder, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 2009). This sub-theme has two sub-sub themes, different child-rearing practices and the cultural adaptation of the child. Participants in this study expressed they will have difficulties as they raise their children. However among the participants only two couples have children. One couple has a newborn

baby, the other couple has two children who are ages of 2 and 4. Only one couple with the newborn baby expressed that they have very distinct child-rearing practices. Turkish female participant explained that while she is more giving, understanding and physically close to her child, her French partner is raised in a more emotionally distant and disciplined manner. Thus they expect to have conflicts in future regarding their behaviors towards the child. The other couple formed by an Italian male and a Turkish female did not express any anxiety regarding different child-rearing practices. This may be due to the cultural similarity they claim to have among Italian and Turkish culture. Yet in this case, Italian father expressed his anxiety regarding the cultural adaptation of his children. He argued that because they reside in Turkey, his children will always be closer to Turkish culture and he is going to become a foreigner to them. Although not having children yet, other participants also voiced similar concerns. This finding is consistent with previous studies which show that different child-rearing practices and concerns regarding the cultural adaptation of the child create discomfort among multicultural couples (Bacas, 2002; Cerchiaro et al., 2015; Daneshpour, 2003; Kilian, 2001).

The place of residency is a field of conflict for multicultural couples, considering that at least one of them may be living in a foreign country. Living in a country other than one's own, hardens the adaptation process (Babaoğlu, 2008) and the feelings of loneliness, inadequacy and isolation may be evident for the partner who lives abroad (Seto & Cavallero, 2007). In this study 8 of 9 couples reside in Turkey. For three couples who live in Turkey, both partners used to live in the same place before meeting each other so the decision of residence did not create a tension. In remaining five cases, the partners who used to live abroad moved in to Turkey for living with their partners. Last, one couple reside in Berlin, which is collectively decided considering each other's job opportunities and preferences. The initial decision of moving is not expressed as a conflict by any of the participants. However all participants claim that in future they might have problems regarding where to live. Especially the current socio-economic situation in Turkey is voiced as a concern,

making the participants obliged to move to another country in coming years. At this point the country they will move in and the adaptation to that country is voiced as a problematic. Parallel with previous findings they fear that their partners may not want to leave his/her country of origin, may have professional or legal problems or they both may feel loneliness and isolation if they prefer to move to a neutral place (Cools, 2006; Lavee & Krivososh, 2012).

The last challenge stressed by the participants is the opposition from families. Because the individuals who marry with an out-group member crosses the boundaries of a social group, multicultural marriages create an anxiety among families and friends (Kilian, 2001; McAloney, 2013; Collet, 2015). This union may be apprehended as a threat to group uniformity (Cottrel, 1990) which will lead to experiences of assimilation and discrimination for at least one of the partners (Fu & Wolfinger, 2011). In our study, the opposition from families does not emerge as a dominant theme however there are certain cases which require detailed consideration. Just as suggested by Lou and colleagues (2015) the cultural orientation of a society shapes the reactions towards multicultural unions. More collectivistic cultures disapprove such union because they prioritize the transmission of culture to younger generations, while individualistic cultures are more open. Also the religiosity of the families is highly defining on the reactions. More religious families disapprove their child's union with an interfaith partner (McAloney, 2013). In this current study, four couples reported being exposed to mild levels of criticism from their parents regarding their multicultural relationship. In two cases, the Turkish female participants' families are expressed as moderately religious and an interfaith relationship is thus not easily approved. Their parents requested the foreign groom to convert to Islam before marrying. One couple eliminated this problem by saying the parents that the foreign groom converted to Islam although he's indeed an atheist. In this case the Chilean partners' indifference towards belief facilitated the relations with the family of Turkish participant. In the other case, the same request coming from families is rejected and the Turkish family is pushed to compromise, accepting a



foreign groom. However in this case because the parents are not strictly religious compromise has not been difficult. Yet in another case where the female partner is Turkish and male partner is Greek, Turkish partners' parents strictly rejected this relationship, refusing to see their daughter and to attend to marriage ceremony. This family is expressed as strictly religious and conservative. In this case, the female participant argues that she accepted a cut-off with her family. After a long period of conflict the parents accepted this union and attended the civil ceremony however the relationship with the parents is definitely harmed and participants say that they barely see the Turkish partner's family. Although creating sorrow and resentment the mutual support partners provided each other protected the relationship.

In addition to the religiosity of parents, the social relations within two communities is noteworthy to consider for two cases. Especially in situations where there is historical aggression between two communities, the multicultural union creates tension and conflict among families (Hou et al., 2015; Kilian, 2001; Petronoti & Papagaroufali, 2006). Within this study, two Turkish participants have Greek partners. Although Turkish families did not report an anxiety or rejection towards Greek nationality, the parents of Greek partners expressed their anxiety towards a Turkish groom/bride because of the historical aggression between two societies. However this anxiety is overcome after parents met with Turkish partners, seeing that they are indeed very similar to each other. The physical and ideological characteristics of Turkish partners is also important here. As mentioned above, none of the Turkish females are strict Muslims, they do not practice Islam and they do not match with the stereotypical image of Muslim community. This may be a factor facilitating the acceptance of non-Muslim families.

Other than these stated cases, participants mentioned having good relations with both sides, and being easily accepted into both families. When the familial characteristics facilitating this atmosphere is inquired, they stressed the tolerant and open-minded attitude of their parents, and their parents' previous exposure to different cultures and multicultural relationships. Thus other than stated cases, the

findings of this study provide contrary data regarding the argument that multicultural couples experience criticism and social rejection from their families and friends.

#### **4.4 WHAT ENHANCES THE RELATIONSHIP**

Existing literature apprehends multicultural relationships in a problem approach, arguing that because of their differences, such unions are less stable and the risk of dissolution is higher when compared to homogamous relationships (Bustamante et al., 2011; Ting-Toomey, 2009; Singla & Holm, 2012; Wright et al., 2017). However there are also studies showing that multicultural relationships are not more distressed than homogamous relationships (Fu, Tora & Kendall, 2001; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008). The current study, examining the coping mechanisms of multicultural couples highlights important themes such as Constructive Coping Strategies; Exposure to Different Cultures; Seeing the Relationship as a Learning Environment; Individuality, Independence and Trust; Familiarity With Partner's Culture; and Open-Mindedness and Flexibility.

In this analysis constructive coping strategies are presented in three sub-sub themes that are Mutual Acceptance, Tolerance and Respect; Effective Communication and Not Losing Temper. Parallel with the literature mutual acceptance, tolerance and respect are highlighted outcomes of this study. Although some of those factors positively impact relationships universally, negotiating about expectations and practices is more vital for multicultural relationships since they have different expectations and practices on various issues. Studies show that integrating both cultures into the daily life and respecting each others' practices flourish multicultural relationships (Petronoti & Papagaroufali, 2006; Kilian, 2001). In this study, partners come from different ethnic and religious groups but they express that they don't feel the problems regarding those differentiations. When inquired about their ways of eliminating culture's negative outcomes, they suggested the importance of respect and tolerance. Especially in cases where at least one partner is more into the culture and religious practices of his/her social group, tolerance, acceptance and respect gains

greater importance. In this study most of the participants do not express themselves as being attached to their social groups, which eliminates the potential arguments regarding cultural practices. However three participants expressed themselves as attached to their cultures. In those cases participants continued their religious and cultural practices in their relationship too. They argued that they see respect and acceptance from their partners. Those participants are Christians and their Turkish partners attend with them to religious ceremonies and celebrate religious holidays. Similarly the partners of those participants claimed that their partners are tolerant and accepting to their non-believing too, which is also emphasized as of great importance.

The participants expressed the importance of tolerance during arguments. They showed that especially during the initial stages of the relationship, they experienced great amount of conflict trying to learn about each other. In such cases, remembering that their partner is from another culture encouraged them to explore more about their partners' relational expectations to be able to understand him/her more. Just as shown by Bustamante and colleagues (2011) an appreciation and curiosity towards partner's culture facilitated the resolution of conflicts. One interesting outcome of this study is that almost all participants claimed that being tolerant and understanding is easier with a foreign partner. Things that would easily turn into problems with a partner from the same culture, do not become conflictual when with a foreign partner. When this information is deeply explored they argued that remaining calm is easier because they always keep in mind that their partner may not be thinking or behaving in a way that is appropriate to his/her culture. Thus contrasting attitudes or behaviors aren't apprehended as attacks to them but ways of self-expression, preventing them to have a more defensive position towards their foreign partners.

Open communication and self-disclosure are also highlighted by the participants. Literature shows that partners' effective communication and self-disclosure is associated with relational satisfaction (Soliz et al., 2009; Yelsma &

Athappilly, 1988). The findings of this study support the existing literature. Participants argued that openly communicating about both positive and negative experiences, not withdrawing from conflicts and not avoiding negative emotions helped them to resolve conflicts easily. However the expression of emotions is a pretty cultural notion. While overt expression of problems is easier for individualistic cultures, the collectivistic cultures prefer covert expression methods (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006; Ting-Toomey, 2009). Although Turkey stands in an ambiguous positing regarding cultural orientation, Turkish participants in this study expressed that they were challenged by the different emotional expression styles of their partners. Turkish participants described themselves as mostly preferring the covert forms of communication in the initial stages of the relationship but as they realized how easily and openly their partners express his/her problems and emotions, they also began overtly expressing themselves. In line with the study of Altan-Aytun, Yağmurlu and Yavuz (2012) the communication and expression of negative emotions is not encouraged in Turkey, and especially less educated mothers prefer minimizing the negative emotions of their children. Being raised in such a social environment Turkish participants had difficulty adapting to open communication of emotions, at the initial stages of the relationship. However exposure to their partners' open communication, they developed their skills of self-expression.

The notion of personal growth is noteworthy to consider at this point. Exploring partners' culture, becoming more open in communication, developing the language skills and becoming more tolerant are areas the participants expressed as they gained more competence in years. Using the relationship as a tool of self-expansion increases the relational satisfaction, as suggested by Aron and Aron (1986) and Gaines Jr and Brennan (2001). The current study thus provides consistent evidence with earlier studies.

One important outcome of this study was the protection of independence and individuality within the relationship. Romantic relationships are zones where needs of autonomy and dependence are regulated. In mature relationships the self and the other

are integrated in a manner to foster and support each other (Shulman & Knafo, 1997). The treatment of other as an integrated and separate whole is expected from partners, for the emergence of an atmosphere suitable for the individuation of both partners (Shulman & Knafo, 1997). Applying Family Systems Theory (Minuchin, 1974) into relationships, the boundaries within partners balance the needs of closeness and individuality (Shulman & Knafo, 1997). The study conducted by Moore and Leung (2001) shows that individuals from different cultures differ in their expectations of closeness and independence in romantic relationships. However this study presented contrasting findings. Both Turkish and non-Turkish participants expressed the importance of independence and individuality in their relationships. In terms of independence and individuality they mean being able to take their own decisions, being able to spend time with their friends without their partners, having personal leisure activities and not being oppressive or judgmental towards each other. Except for one couple, remaining 8 couples claimed to have separate lives and activities and they feel independent in their relationships, without being exposed to jealousy or clinginess. Only one Greek female participant expressed her Turkish boyfriend as jealous and protective, hindering her independence. The remaining participants expressed mutual trust and independence as two important characteristics of their relationships. Considering the patriarchal nature of Turkish society, being a separate independent individual in the relationship is of vital importance especially for women. The positive impacts of egalitarian and independent attitude the partners have in romantic relationships is also demonstrated by feminist family therapist as expressed in the article of Rudman and Phelan (2007). The Turkish female participants in this study expressed with gratitude the egalitarian attitude of their partners. Similarly, the non-Turkish participants also voiced how independent and individual they feel in their relationships. Although in terms of cultural orientation, a more enmeshed (Minuchin, 1974) relational attitude could be expected from Turkish participants, this current study failed to find support for this evidence. This may be resulting from the fact that participants in this study did not express themselves as

typical members of their communities, thus Turkish female participants consciously refrain from reproducing the familiar relational attitude they observe among the community.

One unexpected outcome of this study was the importance of familiarity with partner's culture. Almost all participants argued that there are similarities between two cultures or they have previously been familiar with their partner's culture. Only one Turkish female participant whose partner is from Chili did not explain a previous familiarity. But the rest of the foreign partners are from France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Spain and United Kingdom. In cases of Spain, Greece and Italy, the partners expressed that the cultures of two countries is very similar to Turkish culture in terms of romantic and familial relations, which facilitated the adaptation process for spouses. In cases of France, UK and Germany, both partners have been into each others' culture either through professional reasons or through educational reasons such as studying abroad or going to exchange. The participants claimed that having a more or less idea about the community of their partners facilitated the initial adaptation process. This finding is also supported by the study conducted by Petronoti and Papagaroufali (2006). They showed that previous exposure to partner's culture positively impacts the romantic relationship.

Similarly, being previously exposed to different cultural environments emerged as an outcome of this study. It is also expressed by Kilian (2001) that individuals choosing to marry or date with the people from other cultures are more open to be in a multicultural relationship because of being previously exposed to multicultural environments either in work, neighborhood, school or in family (Kilian, 2001). The study conducted by Capucci (2016) also showed the importance of previous exposure to differences on the establishment of multicultural unions. Not just among the partners but families' previous exposure to different cultures also facilitated the acceptance and support partners received from their families. Participants argued that being previously exposed to different cultural environments helped them to develop the idea that people may be both similar and very different in

different cultural environments, and relationship quality may not be negatively impacted by the differences. In their analysis, Bratter and Eschbach (2006) apprehend acculturation as being influential on the relationship quality of multicultural couples, considering that minority partner's previous exposure to the dominant culture would facilitate the spousal interaction. Although partners in this study are not from minority groups and they do not mention an acculturation towards a dominant group, the same mechanism may be operating in this case too. As individuals get accustomed to differing cultural practices, their cultural repertoires may be enlarging, thus facilitating the spousal interactions.

One important outcome emerging under the theme of "What Enhances the Relationship" is seeing the relationship as a learning environment. Because of including the perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs of two separate individuals, actually all relationships are multicultural as suggested by Falicov (1995). In cases where partners are literally from different cultures, there are many more things to explore (Bustamante et al., 2011; Cools, 2006). Although most of the literature focuses on the problematic dimension of multicultural relationships, enriching and energetic interactions may arise from the existence of different cultures (Falicov, 2014). Gaines Jr and Brennan (2001) and, Aron and Aron (1986) also highlight the enriching side of multicultural relationships, arguing that as partners are willing and open to learn about their partners' culture, they may find the opportunity of self-expansion. Parallel with these studies current study obtains quite positive outcomes regarding multicultural relationships. All partners in this study, with no exception, are happy to be with a foreign partner because the relationship provides an atmosphere which fosters self-development. They argued that especially at the initial stages of the relationship, they constantly explored each other's culture, they improved their language skills, they had the chance to see different family dynamics which encouraged them to question their familial practices and expectations, and they became better at self-reflection and self-expression.

Open-mindedness and flexibility are also two notions facilitating the interaction of individuals from distinct cultural environments. Cognitively, flexibility is expressed as one willingness to change the attitude and ability shift perspective, a key capacity for social interactions (Grattan & Eslinger, 1989; Rubin & Martin, 1994). Bocas (2002) claims that multicultural relationships do not create conflicts by themselves but because of partners' insisting on preserving their cultural codes. Being flexible about the cultural codes helps partners to integrate elements of both cultures without prioritizing one over another. In this study all participants described both themselves and their partners as flexible and open-minded. These two characteristics are expressed as helping them to get adapted to partners' cultural practices and family environment. In certain cases, the partners found themselves in occasions that they are not familiar with, such as wedding ceremonies or familial gatherings. However being flexible helped them to get integrated into such previously unfamiliar environments.

Other than the findings of this study, literature shows important factors which enhance multicultural relationships. Having a liberal political orientation and being educated (Eastwick et al., 2009) facilitates the formation and continuation of multicultural relationships. In current study, all participants describe themselves as politically liberal and they are all university graduates. Furthermore, Djurdjevic and Girona (2016) express the importance of cultural curiosity in the formation of multicultural relationships. Similar with this argument, all participants in this study claimed that they have always been into different cultural environments and they are very happy to learn about different cultures.

#### **4.5 TURKISH WAY OF LIVING A RELATIONSHIP**

This theme emerged as an unexpected outcome of this study. Considering the limited number of research on multicultural relationships in Turkey, this theme indeed is the one which makes this study special. Under this main theme, the sub-themes of



Not a Typical Turkish Girl, Typical Turkish Guy and Oppressive Relationships emerged.

The situation of Turkish men and women is apprehended by certain studies. In their analysis Boratav and colleagues (2014) depicted Turkish women as being under the dominance of men, having a more oppressed and obedient position within families, having a limited position in job market, although this situation began changing in urban zones (Bolak, 1997). Also the women are under the protection of male family members for the preservation of “honour” (Boratav et al., 2014). In the same manner, the men are apprehended as the provider and protector of family, being on the top on hierarchy, and having emotionally distant relations with their children (Boratav et al., 2014).

Those studies, analyzing the situation of women and men in Turkey on power axis do not match with the findings of the current study. Conversely from previous studies, the narratives of participants yielded both Turkish young men and women as jealous and oppressive in romantic relationships. They are described as oppressing their partners’ friendly and professional relations with the opposite sex, as controlling each other in spite of the eradication of privacy, as ascribing certain rules and roles to each other and preferring unconstructive ways of coping when conflicts emerge.

The notion of “trip” is especially attributed to Turkish girls by the participants. Trip, being a newly emerging vulgar word in Turkish, actually means making the partner feel uncomfortable through either withdrawal from communication or through indirect ways of expressing emotions. “Trip” is preferred by Turkish women if their partners go out to have a drink after work, if their partners do not tell them where they are or with whom they are and is also done when there is a conflict regarding different attitudes. Thus “trip” fosters the feelings of loneliness and dereliction for the side who gets exposed to it. When considered in terms of cultural orientation, it can be apprehended as an indirect expression of emotions (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006; Ting-Toomey, 2009). However this is expressed as a very act observed among Turkish women by both Turkish and non-Turkish participants in

this study. Of course there is the other side of the coin. Turkish men are also expressed as extremely jealous and oppressive in romantic relationships, seeking dominance and higher position in relational hierarchy.

In this study, all Turkish female participants emphasized that they are not typical Turkish girls, and this is also voiced by their non-Turkish partners. Only one Turkish female participant argued that she used to be a typical Turkish girl at the beginning of the relationship, preferring “trip” in cases she felt uncomfortable but within the relationship she overcame this and began directly expressing her emotions. The Turkish female participants’ uncontrolling and unoppressive behaviors towards their partners are also shown as proofs why they are not typical Turkish girls.

On the other hand, there was only one Turkish male participant in this study whose partner is from Greece. In this case the partners gave complementary arguments about each other. While the Greek female participant argued that her partner is pretty jealous and oppressive in terms of her clothing and her profession, the male Turkish participant argued that his partner used to be more relax and open-minded towards his life outside of the relationship but she became a typical Turkish girl as the relationship progressed. When asked about what makes her a typical Turkish girl, he stressed her behaviors of “trip” and seek of attention.

Marriage is also voiced as a problematic at this point. Turkish girls are described as giving a social meaning to marriage, which is that marriage brings a higher social status to women. None of the Turkish participants in this study voiced a willingness to get married and those who are married expressed that they got married just for making their parents more comfortable considering that outer-marriage sexual intercourse is still not accepted in Turkish society.

Overall, all Turkish female partners expressed their happiness of not being married to a typical Turkish guy because then they would be more uncomfortable, more oppressed and thus more stressed in the relationship because they don’t have the expectations a typical Turkish man would provide them in a relationship. Their partners’ egalitarian attitude in terms of life-style and division of labor facilitated life

for them. Also the non-Turkish male participants expressed their gratitude of not being with a typical Turkish girl because they would not prefer a more oppressive relationship in which they will be constantly questioned about what they do or who they are with. The satisfaction the partners receive from their relationships shall be considered in relationship with their expectations from marriage and from partner. The study conducted by Burgoon and Hale (1984) shows that the positive violation of marital expectations, meaning that being in a more satisfying relationship than expected, increases the partners' marital satisfaction. In this case, Turkish female participants' expectations regarding Turkish men and romantic relationships in Turkey had a pessimistic tendency. They were expecting to be in more oppressive relationships. However finding themselves in non-oppressive and egalitarian relationships might be increasing their relational satisfaction. Similarly non-Turkish male participants' negative expectations regarding Turkish female might be increasing their relational satisfaction since they do not see their partners as typical Turkish girls.

#### **4.6 CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The civil rights and feminist movements of 1960s and 1970s increased the attention given to ethnic and cultural background of a patient, especially in the US (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). Systemic approach, which gained support during this period, considers individuals as embodied within the web of culture, nation, society and family where meanings are constantly reconstituted (Bateson, 1973; Jenkins, 1997; Krause, 2002). In this context, crossing borders and marrying/dating with someone from another culture is itself a systemic notion.

Multicultural couples are raised in different social contexts, and have been exposed to different social meanings. Thus, working with multicultural couples necessitates the overview of those contexts, which also necessitates a systemic approach (Krause, 2002). Systems approach helps therapists analyze the nuclear and macro-environment of each couple, to learn the structure and the system of the

family, and to gather information about the familial and cultural background of each partner (Bhurga & De Silva, 2000).

As presented above, partners from different cultural groups may have differing attitudes towards monetary issues, child-rearing practices, personal space, relations with the family, and the differences in these matters may lead to stress in the romantic relationship. Most of the times, the partners may not be aware of the cultural background of their presenting problems, but they may report general discomfort and incompatibility in the relationship. In such cases the therapist must openly and objectively assess the presented problems and the cultural background of each partner to see the extent to which individuals' problems are related to individual issues or to cultural differences. Besides being value-free and culturally sensitive, the assessment should include the information about the cultural norms regarding love, marriage and gender roles (Bhugra & De Silva, 2000).

Thomas (1998) problematizes the fact that literature on family therapy focusing on ethnic minorities, apprehends the minority identity as a unified structure, and argues that all relevant dimensions of culture and ethnicity such as reasons and patterns of immigration, the region they came from and they came to, the socioeconomic status of the family, religious attitudes, politics, acculturation levels and unique family experiences should be considered and understood in the sessions.

Using a multicultural genogram helps practitioners to explore a family's or an individual's cultural exposure, worldview, dependence on or differentiation from the group, familial history, structure of relationships and familial rules (Thomas, 1998). The analysis of these dimensions may enlighten the hidden preconceptions of partners that are reflected on the relationship (Softas-Nall & Baldo, 2000).

Promoting cultural curiosity, understanding, tolerance and knowledge is a fundamental duty of therapists working with intercultural couples. Therapists should be helping the partners to see how cultural teachings are rooted within their relational problems, how much the conflictual differences are cultural or individual notions, how cultural differences can be expressed and be understood by each other and, how

and in which fields compromise may be possible (Daneshpour, 2003; Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). The reactions spouses may have received from parents and friends need also be explored in the therapeutic process for a better understanding of the initial stages of the union formation (Falicov, 2014).

It is important for the therapist to refrain from referring to any stereotypic information regarding the culture of either of the partners (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). Falicov (2014) suggests that therapists should be aware of the fact that enculturation varies with individual experiences and someone who intermarries may have far different experiences regarding her/his own culture, thus it is necessary to explore each problematic domain of marriage in a non-stereotypic manner.

Empathizing with the couple in an objective and curious manner, validating their feelings and demonstrating the strengths of the relationship are suggested for the therapists to adopt while working with multicultural couples, just as working with same-culture couples (Daneshpour, 2003). Examining the conflicts arising from religious, language or gender-role differences is of high importance for the accurate analysis of presented problems, as examining those issues may provide a sharing environment for partners to voice previously not voiced emotions and experiences (Bustamante et al., 2011).

It is important for family therapists to see cultural differences as an opportunity for growth instead of a conflictual context (Softas-Nall & Baldo, 2000). Showing that history can be heterogeneous, helping partners to discuss their historical knowledge and encouraging them to re-write a history unique to their couple culture can be helpful for the couple to overcome the previously hidden historical assumptions and knowledge which may be harming the interaction in implicit ways (Kilian, 2001). Therapists should also promote the formation of a transcultural reality by the couple, a “third reality” built up together, which will be a baseline for the partners in terms of crisis (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006).

The therapist’s social position and cultural discourse have an important role in the therapeutic process as well. The interaction between the therapist and the couple

is affected by external factors such as race, class, gender, level of education, and internal factors such as self-concept, religious beliefs, and language (Bhugra & De Silva, 2000). The therapist must be fully aware of the cultural teachings operating behind her/his attitudes towards the couple, in order to eliminate the possibility of alliance-formation in an instinctive manner and to refrain from making judgments based on his/her preconceptions about one of the different cultures (Bhugra & De Silva, 2000; Daneshpour, 2003; Krause, 2002). One particular situation is where the therapist and one of the partners are from the same cultural group while the other partner isn't. In such cases the other partner may feel alienated and he/she may perceive as if there is a coalition between her/his partner and the therapist. In such cases the therapist should be able to openly discuss the situation.

The findings of this study should be examined in terms of its contribution to the practice of couples therapy with multicultural couples. Parallel with the literature, the importance of exploring each partner's cultural background, attachment to her/his cultural practices, expectations regarding romantic relationship and family life is highly important. The findings of this study show that each individual is unique in his/her adaptation to the cultural environment she/he is raised in. Not all Turkish participants expressed similar concerns and not all non-Turkish participants are unified in their expressions. Thus it is vital to analyze their cultural background without remaining stuck on cultural assumptions regarding the partners' background. The existing literature highlights the importance of therapist's curiosity towards spouses cultural orientation however the main focus usually remains on the notions of race/power, religion or individualism-collectivism. This study, portraying important findings regarding cultural and relational experiences of Turkish individuals, presents one other important dimension, attachment to cultural practices. Thus clinicians working with Turkish patients should consider that being in a country in transition, Turkish young people have different values and expectations when compared to their parents. Thus it is of vital importance to consider that individuals may not be fully embracing whatever has been transmitted to them and they might have different

expectations regarding romantic relationships. Besides the experiences, the clinicians should also explore the expectations of each spouse.

On the other hand, the findings of this study also show that as partners become open, empathic, understanding and respectful towards each other, all cultural differences are embraced and integrated into the couple's culture, without anyone feeling isolated or excluded. However these are skills also needed for homogamous relationships. Just as Falicov (2014) suggests, all relationships are multicultural since each individual differs from each other in terms of cultural and familial experiences. Thus the clinician who work with couples, multicultural or homogamous, should consider all relationships as multicultural, treating each individual as a unique culture. This kind of an attitude can increase the empathy, curiosity, respect and understanding among homogamous couples too.

#### **4.7 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study examined the impact of culture upon the romantic relationship of multicultural couples providing important findings to researchers and clinicians in Turkey. Also, this study is unique because of providing information regarding the relationship of partners in Turkey who differ in terms of language, religion and ethnicity. The sample consists 18 participants which provides adequate information.

The couples participated in this study are elected on the criteria of differing in ethnicity, native language, religion and the country they are raised in. No limitation is considered regarding the specific religious or ethnic groups however those who are raised in the same country even if differing on religious and ethnic backgrounds are not accepted to the study. One other criteria was at least six months of cohabitation or marriage for having a more detailed information regarding the daily life of participants.

Although it wasn't aimed at first, eight of nine female participants are Turkish and eight of nine male participants are from varying countries in and out of Europe.

This could be one of the limitations of this study because not enough information is obtained regarding the experiences of Turkish men who are in multicultural relationships.

The study aimed to enlighten how cultural differences are experienced in the relationship however almost all participants defined themselves as not sharing the major characteristics of the culture they are raised in, and they were all exposed to different cultural environments due to professional or educational reasons. Thus, they did not reflect their cultural orientations into their relationships. This might be one of the limitations of this study, which prevented to detect what kind of cultural motives are experienced in romantic relationship. Also most of the participants in this study defined themselves as either not believing or not practicing the religion. Thus the impacts of religious differences are also not evident in their relationships. This situation also limited our research.

One other limitation is only interviewing with couples who live in Istanbul. Only one couple out of nine, lives in Berlin. Living in cosmopolitan cities like Berlin or Istanbul may be helping those individuals to get detached from the local culture that they could have been exposed to in different parts of Turkey. Thus a further study should consider the experiences of multicultural couples who habit in other regions.

The age of the participants is also noteworthy. The age range of participants is 22-43. Thus they in general are exposed to same generational culture. The experiences of older couples could have been different. Further studies could also consider including older participants. Also all participants are university graduated professionals, which also might help them to be impacted by the traditional culture in a lesser degree. Further studies could also consider including participants from different educational and socio-economic groups for a wider information. Also the study is conducted with a non-clinical sample. Further studies could also be conducted with a clinical sample.

The different child-rearing practices is one of the most prominent issues which challenge multicultural couples. However only two couples in this study have



children. Although all participants expressed their concerns regarding child-rearing, because they don't have children yet, not enough concrete experience is obtained from their narratives.

Furthermore, a detailed information regarding the demographics of participants is not obtained before the interviews. The participants described themselves basically in terms of age, profession, ethnicity and additional information they want to share. It would provide a better analysis if a more detailed demographics is obtained.

The initial interviews are double-checked but the remaining interviews are only coded and analyzed by the researcher. Thus this study doesn't have an interrater reliability. For increasing the reliability, the analysis of another researcher will be needed for the publication of the study. Also the generated themes are not approved by the participants, thus a member checking will be required for the publication process.

What the researcher transmits from her experiences is also important to consider. This researcher is not or has never been in a multicultural relationship. This may have helped the prevention of transmission of subjective experiences into the study.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aims to explore the relational experiences of multicultural couples who are from different ethnic and religious groups. The study focused on the experiences of 18 participants, half Turkish and half from different countries. The main objective is to understand how the participants' romantic relationships are impacted by their differing cultural practices, beliefs, interactional attitudes and values. The existing literature analyzing the experiences of multicultural couples in Turkey is limited. Thus this study aimed to provide detailed information about the

topic for researchers and for clinicians who work with patients from different cultural groups.

The existing literature shows that partners in multicultural relationships are challenged by social and familial rejection, religious differences, gender-role expectations and communication styles. The results of this study shows that multicultural differences in terms of language, religion, and family dynamics do not negatively impact the romantic relationships. This may be resulting from their detachment from their own cultures and their openness to explore new cultures.

When inquired how they deal with the differences they have, the participants highlighted the importance of constructive coping strategies, exposure to differences, open-mindedness and flexibility in attitudes. Their mutual interest towards exploring new cultures and understanding each others' cultural background also positively contributed to the quality of the relationship. Overall the findings of this study, demonstrated that as partners effectively communicate their differences and as partners detach themselves from the rigid boundaries of traditions, such relationships can be enriching for both partners.

As a couples and family therapist, I also benefited from the findings of this study in this manner. Not just as clinicians but as social individuals, we usually have certain expectations from a family and from a partner. Most of them being shaped by our individual experiences, we quickly fall to the assumption that the ones who are raised in similar environments to us, have similar expectations with us regarding family life and romantic relationship. I personally learnt not to fall into any quick assumption about anyone, I learnt that curiosity is a very fundamental interactional capacity to understand and learn about someone, both as a practitioner and as a social living.

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## **APPENDIX A: The Questionnaire in Turkish**

- 1) Nasıl tanıştınız, birlikte yaşama / evlilik kararı nasıl gelişti?
- 2) İlk tanıştığınızda neler düşündünüz? Neler hissettiniz? Sizi çeken şeyler nelerdi?
- 3) Ailelerinizin ve arkadaşlarınızın sizin birlikteliğinize dair ilk baştaki tutumu nasıldı? Bu tutum değişti mi?
- 4) Çok kültürlü bir birliktelik içinde olmaya dair deneyimleriniz neler?
- 5) Kültürel olarak ne gibi farklılıklarınız var? Bunlar hayatınızı nasıl etkiliyor?
- 6) Sizce çokkültürlü bir birlikteliği devam ettirmeyi kolaylaştıran tutumlar, beceriler ve dinamikler nelerdir? Zorlayan unsurlar nelerdir?
- 7) Zorlandığınız durumları (var ise) nasıl çözdüğünüzü paylaşabilir misiniz?
- 8) Sizce gelecekte farklı kültürlerden gelmekle ilgili ne gibi sorunlar yaşayabilirsiniz?
- 9) Gelecekte yaşayabileceğiniz sorunlarla başa çıkabilmek için ne gibi şeylere ihtiyaç duyabilirsiniz?
- 10) Sizce aynı kültürden iki bireyin birlikteliği sizin birlikteliğinizden farklı mıdır? Anlaşma ve zorlanma alanları açısından bakınca aynı kültürden insanların sizden farklı deneyimleri olabileceğini düşünüyor musunuz?

## **APPENDIX B: The Questionnaire in English**

- 1) How did you meet/ How did the decision of marriage/cohabiting taken?
- 2) What did you experience the first time you met?
- 3) How was the attitude of your friends and family regarding your relationship? Did this attitude change?
- 4) What are your experiences regarding being in a multicultural relationship?
- 5) Have you been observing differences in terms of your culture? How those differences impact your life with your partner?
- 6) What are the attitudes, skills and Dynamics which facilitate the continuation of a multicultural relationship? What are the challenging factors?
- 7) How do you resolve the cultural challenges, if there are any?
- 8) What do you think you may be experiencing with your partner about being from different cultures in future?
- 9) What do you think you may need in future for coping with conflicts?
- 10) Could the intimate relationship of two individuals from same cultures be any different from your relationship? Considering the points of conflict and consensus, could the individuals from same cultures have different relational experiences from yours?

## APPENDIX C: Quotations in Turkish

*Yoo yok hayır. Yani ikimiz de çok kendi kültürüne bağlı insanlar olmadığımız için belki pek olmadı. (C06FTR)*

*O da mesela bir sürü şey okuyor Kürtler, Dersim, Ermenilerle ilgili falan. Tarihin getirdiği yükler var tabii ki üzerimizde ama biz bunları konuşabiliyoruz. Eğer ben daha stereotipik bir Türk olsaydım, F benim kaşıma gözüme vurulduysa da ilk başta, bir hafta iki hafta ya da bir ay! Ya da ben onda. O da böyle çok işte İspanya sempatzanı olsaydı ben de bir yer de eeh be olurdu. Çünkü ben de karşıyım milliyetçiliğe. (C09FTR)*

*Ben de belki o yüzden okuldan arkadaşlarım yanında sadece çok rahat hissediyorum. Ona biraz şey gibi geliyor sanki ben kültürsüzüm gibi. Türk kültüründen çok kopuğum evet ama hani böyle ıyy iğrenç Türkler bunu yapıyor gibi değil. (C05FTR)*

*Ben kendi kültürümüzü tam olarak, yani seviyorum tabii ki ama tam olarak benimsediğim bir kültür değil. Hani ee, kafama yatmayan, içime sinmeyen ya da karşı çıktığım, sinir olduğum çok fazla şey var. (C06FTR)*

*Ee... Ya bu farklı kültürlerden gelmekle alakalı mı acaba... Birimiz bir yere... Mesela ben Türkiye'yi çok böyle aşırı özlemiyorum örneğin. Ama bunun sebebi şu an Türkiye'de olmak istememem. Daha çekici olsaydı yaşamak daha kolay olsaydı mesela özleyebilirdim. (C01FTR)*

*Şimdi o Hristiyan, vaftiz edilmiş falan ama inanmıyor Allah'a. Yani öyle bir şey var (gülüyor). Benim de günlük hayatımda dinle ilgili hiçbir şey yok, şu andan sonra da olmayacak. (C09FTR)*

*Yani ilişkimiz açısından çok da etkilenmedik. Çünkü ikimiz de zaten dindar insanlar değiliz. İnançlı değiliz hatta. İ de o yüzden çok umursamadı... Ama belki daha dinine,*

*kültürüne bağlı tipler olsaydık sorun olabilirdi bu durum. Bir tarafın değişmek zorunda kalması kötü olabilirdi yani ama bizim değişmemiz gerekmedi aslında. (C06K).*

*Ben daha şeyim böyle. İnancım var ama bunu odakladığım belli bir yer var mı hayır. Bir inancım var bir yer bulmaya, bir yere gitmeye çalışıyorum. Biraz daha kendi kendime bir şeyler yapmaya çalışıyorum. Bu inancın nereye gideceğini bilmiyorum ama sonuçta orada bir şeyler var. (C01FTR)*

*Hayır ama sana çok yardımcı olamadım gibi geldi, çok uç farklılıklar olmadığı için senin konuna uyduk mu bilemedim. (C05FTR)*

*Ama ya bir farklılık yok aslında gerçekten. Şu an Türk biriyle de bir ilişki yaşasaydım aynı şeyler olacaktı. Yabancı olduğu halde yine aynı bence. Değişen hiçbir şey yok aslında. Sadece dil konusunu aşarsan yani o konuşma seviyesini aşarsan hiçbir farklılık kalmıyor zaten. (C06FTR)*

*Aa, gelenek olarak da çok büyük bir fark yaşamadık (gülüyor)... Ya benim bildiğim kadarıyla bizim ilişkide gelenekten kültürden kaynaklanan bir şey yok. (C02MUK)*

*Çünkü kültürlerle fikirler aynı bence. Şimdi seninle benim fikrim farklı. Senin fikrin senin kültürünü oluşturuyor. Bir şeye inanıyorsun ya da inanmıyorsun. Atıyorum geleneksel şeyleri uyguluyorsun ya da uygulamıyorsun. O senin kültürünü oluşturuyor. (C06FTR)*

*Ortak şeyler bulduğunda şaşırıyorsun, mutlu oluyorsun. Ortak şeyler bulmak daha yakınlaştırıyor, bağlıyor. Birçok ortak şey olduğunda da diğer farklılıklar zaten önemini kaybediyor gibi oluyor. İlişkinin temel bir parçasıymış gibi hissetmiyorsun kültür farklılığı için. Çünkü ilişkinin kurulma dinamiği aslında farklılıklar değil benzerlikler oluyor. (C01FTR)*

*Çünkü ben de şeyi severim, gezmeyi seven bir insanım. Müzikmiş, edebiyatmış, sinema hep oldum olası alakalı oldum. Ortak konuşabileceğimiz şeyler oldu bunlar hep. (C09FTR)*

*Böyle bir sürü ortak özellik keşfettik. Aynı müzikleri seviyoruz, yok aynı aile şeylerimiz benziyor falan filan. (C04FTR)*

*Bence kültürel farklılık değil da karakter farklılığı daha önemli. (C03FTR)*

*I: Devam ediyorum. Kültürel olarak ne gibi farklılıklarınız var? Ya da var mı?*

*F: Var var var. Kültürel mi kişisel mi onu çok bilmiyorum. (C01FTR)*

*Yani aramızda öyle farklar var kesinlikle ama hiçbirini gelenek farkı değil de genel kişisel fark olarak görüyorum ben. İşte o Türk yetişti de ondan, o yüzde böyle bir farkımız var. Yok ben İngiltere’de yaşadım o Türkiye’de büyüdü ya da benim annem İngiliz diye ben böyle şeyim çok ondan ziyade herkesin kendi kişisel değişik, kişisel farklardandır diye düşünüyorum. Geleneksel bir trigger göremiyorum. Kültür de ne bileyim sadece bir ülkenin vatandaşı olmaktan ziyade yaptığın işte hobilerin, işin, gücün, okuduğun kitaplar, genel olarak uğraşlarınla ilgilidir. (C02MUK)*

*Yine gelenekten ziyade kişiselden, işte senin ailen senin nasıl yetiştirdi, senin öğrendiklerin senin bildiklerinle ilgili. (C02MUK)*

*Mesela ilk buraya taşındığımızda şeyi çok garipsemişti. Mesela biz babamla yan yana evlere taşındık hani babam bizim eve geliyor, yemek yiyor, bu onun için çok garip. Hani ne kadar daha gelecek? Kendisi Fransa’da yaşarken mesela dedesi ve babaannesiyile altlı üstlü oturuyorlarmış hani ayda bir kere falan oraya gidilirmiş. Bizim ilişkiler öyle fazla fazla yakın. (C04FTR)*



*En büyük farklılıktan bahsedersen, biz Fransa'da ailemle çok yakın değiliz. Bu kadar çok birbirimizle yaşamıyoruz. Hani ee... Görüşüyoruz ama işte her haftasonu beraber bir şeye gitmiyoruz. (C07MFR)*

*Yani mesela onlar da ailesine çok düşkün. Ne bileyim. İşte mesela bayramlarında falan bir arada olmayı çok önemsiyorlar. O yüzden böyle mesela aile konusunda çok zorluk çekmedim. Çok iyi anlıyor mesela benim annemlerle sürekli iç içeyiz. Onlar da o şekilde yaşadıkları için ona çok garip ya da çok farklı gelmiyor. (C03FTR)*

*İlişkilerde aileler çok karışıyor. (C03FTR)*

*Özellikle ilk şu Türkiye'ye geliş ve babamla yan yana yaşama bizim ilişkimizdeki en büyük sorunlardan biriydi. Onun mesela, babamın beni yirmi kere günde araması. Bu onu rahatsız ediyordu mesela. O da alıştı ama. Bu bir denge zaten. Hani evet yirmi kere aramaması lazım onun da ama böyle bir dengeleme meselesi. Onun annesiyle babası da onu haftada bir arıyor. Bence de bu garip. (C04FTR)*

*Benim tarafımda şey ailem tarafında şey zaten ilişkilere karışmıyoruz o yüzden pek sıkıntı yok. (C07E)*

*Ya da karşı gelme karşı koyma bir şekilde söyledikleri herhangi bir şeye ters laf etme düşünülecek bir şey değil. Burada ama mesela çok daha rahatlar, birbirleriyle dalga geçiyorlar daha böyle ne bileyim kapıyı çarpıp gitme ya da kendi kararlarım, çok geç oldu bunlar bende. Daha üniversite çağında oldu. J çok daha erken ve çok daha sağlıklı yaşamış gibi gördüm her anlamda. Daha iki yetişkin birey gibi daha ziyade anne ve küçük çocuk şeyinden ziyade. (C02FTR)*

*Arkadaş çevremde çok kendi kafamda insanlar var ama genel olarak konuşacak olursam onlar daha açık kafalılar. Bir şeyi oturup konuşabiliyorsun rahatlıkla. Yani kimse kalkıp da yanlış anlamıyor. Bizde alınganlık var çünkü. Bir şeyi konuşurken*

*önünü arkasını düşünmen gerekiyor. Ama onlar, onların kültürü öyle değil. Daha böyle şey. Bir şeyi oturup açık açık konuşabiliyorsun, tartışabiliyorsun. Eksiklerini onu bunu. Yani bence bu çok farklı. Farklı bir hissiyat bunu yaşamak. Böyle olduğu için de aslında insanlar daha rahat oluyor birbirine karşı. (C06FTR)*

*İşte 2 yılın sonunda da şeyi konuşmaya başladık. Ben haftasonları hep onda kalıyordum, ben gerçekten tedirginim. Çünkü ben evdekilere İstanbul'a gidiyorum diyorum çünkü bütün arkadaşlarım İstanbul'da. Dedim gelmişim ben 33-34 yaşına ve yalan söylüyorum. (C09FTR)*

*Ailem tabi şey olmadı yani, hiç kolay olmadı. Bir seneden biraz daha fazla olmuştu. 14-15 ay sonra söyledim. Tabi şey diye söyledim ee, hani benim görüştüğüm biri var ve evleneceğiz. (C05FTR)*

*Ya da işte böyle sarılma falan. Mesela babam bana çok sarılmaz ya da ben babamın yanında bacaklarımı açıp oturamam, düzgün oturmam gerekir. Ya da belli kelimeleri söyleyemem. Hayatta mesela annemle ya da babamla dalga geçemem. Salak mısın ya diye bir espri yapamam, benim için bunlar çok uzak konseptler. (C02FTR)*

*Ben bu durumu ilk anneme söyledim, annem de aa hadi ya diye çok sevindi. Sonrasında işte ben söyleyemedim babama, annemle ağabeyim beraber söylediler. (C09FTR)*

*İlk kardeşimle tanıştı, kardeşim bayıldı zaten... Çıkmaya başladıktan çok kısa süre sonra da annemle tanıştı, annem de çok sevdi ama. Anlaşamamalar da sevdi yani olabilir dedi bana. Sonra babamla tanıştırdım zaten. (C03FTR)*

*İlk anneme söyledim hani biraz böyle onunla bir karar verip ona göre bir şey yapmak üzerine aslında söyledim. Hemen babamı çağırdı falan. (C05FTR)*

*Ama Türkiye’de ilişkiler daha yakın, daha aileler arasında herkes tek bir takım gibi hareket ediyor. Düşünüyorum şu anda, nerelerde şaşırımdım. Aile çok önemli Türkiye’de. Bizde Fransa’da maalesef o kadar değil. (C07MFR)*

*F: Yaşadığımız bütün farklı şeyler buradan geliyor. Yani ee... Onların daha bağımsız, aileden daha kopuk olması ve bizim aileyle çok iç içe olmamız. Yani iki zıt uç gibi ortası değil. Ve bütün sorunlar da oradan oluyor yani. Ama bir şekilde idare ediyorsun.*

*I: Daha bireysel olmaları?*

*F: Ailenin şeyi yani, rolü. Anne babası onun hayatına atıyorum yüzde 15 dahilse benim yüzde 85 dahil. Öyle bir fark var yani. Bu ne kadar şey bilmiyorum hani kültürel diye de genelleyemem ama hani şey Fransız Türk diye ayırırsak böyle bir şey var. Bana söylediği kadarıyla da Fransızların çoğu böyle. Türkler zaten ailelerin, çekirdek yani, anladın mı? Her şeyin içinde aile var. (C04FTR)*

*O yüzden benim için şey işte daha böyle rahat, bağımsız bir aile görmek ilginçti. (C02FTR)*

*İşte ne bileyim daha rahatlar hem giyim kuşam hem hal tavır. Daha bireyseller. Yani herkes masanın etrafında oturup konuşurken, o gidip kenarda kitap okuyabilir. Ya da bizler mesela herkes aynı anda uyur uyanır, yemek yer falan. Onlarda böyle bir aynı anda yapma hali olmayabiliyor. Aileme ilk başta garip ve kaba geliyordu bu durumlar. Çünkü biz mesela acıksak bile bekleriz değil mi? Onlar beklemek zorunda hissetmiyorlar. Daha doğrusu bu beklememenin saygıyla ilgili bir şey olduğunu düşünmüyorlar. (C01FTR)*

*Yine mesela kültürel bir farklılığa geldim o mesela memnun olmadığı hiçbir şeyi yapmaz. Ben ise Türk şeyinin de örf ve adetlerinden dolayı memnun değilsen de*

*katlanırsın. Özellikle büyüklere karşı. Onun hiç öyle bir şeyi olmadığı için mesela annem ve babama çok garip geliyordu başta. Hani... Bu çocuğun da hiç tahammülü yok x y z falan gibi çıkışları oluyordu. Ama onlar da zamanla M'yi tanımış oldular. Yani M gerçekten istemiyorsa şunu şuradan şuraya kaldırmaz şekerlik olsun diye. Nereden geldim buna... Zorluklar.. Mesela bu bir zorluk. (C04FTR)*

*Çünkü işte daha öğrenciyken de mesela bu şeyleri düşünüp şu moda giriyordum, benim ekonomik özgürlüğüm yok. Hani şu an açılmam mesela, bu da çok bencil bir düşünce gibi geliyordu bana. Şu an böyle bir şey söylersem ve eğer kabul etmezlerse, beni evlatlıktan reddederlerse ben hala okuyorum. (C05FTR)*

*Mesela onun ailesi 16 yaşından beri çalışıp para kazanıp istediği şeyleri alma kültürü var. Daha çok adult olma, yetişkin olma. Hani yetişkin hayatını benim çevremdeki insanlardan çok daha iyi biliyor bence. Kültürel olarak ilk başta o bana çok değişik gelmişti. (C04FTR)*

*Yine başlarda hem parayla ilgili hem biraz galiba bu yine parayla ilgili. Mesela D beni daha çok ziyaret ediyordu Türkiye'deyken. Çünkü mesela benim aileme sormam gerekiyordu, sevgilimi ziyaret edebilir miyim diye (gülüyor). Şu uçak biletini alabilir miyim falan gibi. Öyle şeyler vardı. (C01FTR)*

*Parayla ilişki! Bambaşka iki şey. Bizim için, benim annem mesela para verdiğinde bana, babam için de aynı şey, verilir zaten. O sorgulanacak bir şey değil. Her yaşta desteklenir. Verilir, olabildiğince verilir. J'nin ailesinde şey daha ziyade. Zor durumda kalsa tabii ki verilir ama kendi ayakları üstünde durabildiği andan itibaren olabildiğince kendi ayakları üstünde durmalı ki bunu öğrensin. Maaşını alıyor, o aldığı maaş yetecek çünkü öğrenmesi gerekiyor ayakları üstünde durması gerekiyor. (C02FTR)*

*Mesela benim ailem de daha öyledir, yani, rahattır. Onlar da öyle yargılamaz, illa ki evlenecekler gözüyle bakmaz. Arkadaşım olarak görüp severler. Ama ülkece sanki daha bunun tersi olduğu durum ço oluyor işte. Yani buralı bir kız arkadaşımın ailesiyle tanışacak olduğumda eminim daha çok gerilirdim çünkü artık her şey çok ciddi gibi görülüyor ya aileyle tanışma noktasında. (C08MTR)*

*Bir de şey de geliyor aklıma, bizde evlenmeden beraber yaşamak ve onlarda. Biz de hani olmaz ya, hele çocuk yapacaksın falan. Kimse evlenmeden beraber yaşamaz ancak böyle ünlü falan olacaksın manken olacaksın bilmem ne, kaldırabileceksin. Ben şu an düşünüyorum, yani evli olmasak ve ben hamile kalsam işyerindeki dedikouduyu sen düşün, o işte barınamam. Avrupalılar daha rahat bu konuda. A'nın teyzesi, işte yeni ayrıldı adamdan, yirmi üç yaşında çocukları var, hiç evlenmemişler. Evlilik diye bir şey çok da yok onlarda. Mühim olan beraber yaşamak. Sevmek. (C03FTR)*

*F: Ama annemle babam çok uzun süre J ile tanışmadı, üçüncü yıla yakındı tanıştıklarında. Bizimkiler o konuda çok daha şey, ağır muhafazakar olduğu için o konuda evleneceğini düşünmediğin biriyle hayatta tanışmayız kafasındalar daha.*

*I: Peki sen onun ailesiyle tanıştın mı?*

*F: İkinci günümüzde (gülüyor). (C02FTR)*

*Ya biz zaten üç senedir beraber yaşıyorduk. Yani aslında evliydik, sadece kağıt üzerinde evlendik. Hem benim aile tarafım geleneksel Türk ailesi klasik. Beraber yaşadığımızı bilmiyorlardı, o açıdan rahat etmek istedik. (C06FTR)*

*Sadece annem babam için önemli olan neyse, annemle babam için evlilik önemliydi benim hani beraber yaşayabilmem için. Onu yaptık. (C09FTR)*

*Misafir bizim için önemli. Şöyle ki işte her şeyi hazırlamam lazım... O daha rahat mesela. Mesela gider alır kendine bir şey koyar yer misafirin yanında. Ben de ona şeyi öğretmeye çalışıyorum, bizde misafirlerin yanında bir şey alıyorsan ona da getirmen gerekir. O tabii ki benim gibi değil bu tarz şeylerde, mesela misafirler varken kalkar gider gitar çalar. Ben kıızıyorum ona neden böyle yapıyorsun diye... (C09FTR)*

*Düğünler de biraz farklı. Şöyle... Bir liste veriyoruz biz mesela. Türkiye'de bir liste olabilir mesela ama daha çok salon ortasında dik durup böyle bir eşarp üzerine altın koymak bana çok şaşırtıcı geldi bir Avrupalı için. (C07MFR)*

*Ne tarz farklılıklar... İşte aa... Mesela bizim süreçleri biliyorsunuz düğün zamanı falan. Hani baya bir merasimli. Baya bir takıydı bilmem neydi. Onlar bekleniyor yani ama onlarda öyle bir şey yok, öyle bir durum yok. (C07FTR)*

*Yaani, sonuçta benim ailem ne bileyim Noel'i falan kutluyoruz. A'lar ilk defa benimle kutladı herhalde Noel'i ne bileyim. Ondan önce hiç kutladı mı... (C02MUK)*

*Tabi tabi kesinlikle, yani E'nin bahsettiğini de düşünüyorum konuşmuşluğumuz çoktur çünkü bu konuyu. O bile farklı yani kahvaltı, yemek vesaire. Mesela onlarda kahvaltı yok, direk güne başlıyorlar. Türklerde kesinlikle öyle bir şey olmaz. Akşam yemeği çok geç yenir onlarda. İlk önce aperatifle başlanır ve aperatif iki saat sürer. Ama sen o esnada çok açsındır çünkü Türkiye'de öyle alışmamışsındır hemen yemek yemek istersin. Bizde her şey çok hızlı, çok çabuk çabuk böyle. (C07FTR)*

*Her gün neredeyse beraber yemek yiyoruz, hafta sonu kahvaltı ediyoruz. Beraber oturuyoruz ediyoruz. Bir Alman falan bu kadar iç içe olmaktan biraz zorlanabilirdi diye düşünüyorum. (C03FTR).*

*Ya da bizler mesela herkes aynı anda uyur uyanır, yemek yer falan. Onlarda böyle bir aynı anda yapma hali olmayabiliyor. (C01FTR)*

*Belki kendi ülkemden bir erkekle bu kadar rahat bir hayatım olamazdı. Çünkü İ'de şey yok mesela, işte kadın şöyle yapar, böyle davranır, işte bu kadın işidir bu erkek işi. O öyle biri değil. (C06FTR)*

*Bizde bir de şey de var, annenin rolü var babanın rolü var. Anne çocuğa bakacak altını değiştirecek, yemeğini yapacak. Ama Avrupalılarda İtalyanlarda anne rolü baba rolü diye bir şey yok. İşte A çocuğuna yedirir, altını değiştirir... Çünkü onlara göre bu çok normal. Benim kayınpederim de öyle. Gelir buraya yemeği yapacak ne yersin diye soruyor. Ben rahatım. Benim kocam bakar çocuğuma, yemeğimi de yapar... Eğer o erken gelmişse o yapar, ben erken gelmişsem ben yaparım. Hiçbir zaman çocuklara bakmaktan gocunmaz, çocukların gece sütünü de içirir, uyutur. Bunun için teşekkür de beklemez. Ay ben bunu yaptım hani teşekkür falan beklemez çünkü onun için çok normal. (C03FTR)*

*Türk kadınlar biraz daha şey, gelenek. T öyle değil ama genel konuşuyorum şu anda. Türk kadınlarda şey var bu erkek yapması gereken belli, kadın yapması gereken belli. Ee... Fransa'da daha genel anlamda ortak. Kim yemek yapar, kim temizlik ya da okula çocuğu bırakalım gibi. Yani böyle bir kural yok, eskiden belki varmıştır. (C07MFR)*

*Ya da ne bileyim, kadın erkek davranışları. Biz ne deriz işte seni seven erkek merak eder, kollar, kıskanır, atıyorum sen eve gelmeden uyumaz, gelip seni alması gerekir gibi gibi şeyler. Ne ablamın eşinde ne benim sevgilimde böyle şeyler yoktur. Annemler bunları da ilk başta çok garipsiyorlardı. Yok seni almadı mı, bırakmadı mı. (C01FTR)*

*Çünkü yani ilk etapta zorluk oluyor bazen dil konusunda. Çünkü şey çok iyi biliyorum Türkçe mesela ama çok hassas şeyler söyleyemem. Ya da söylemek istediklerimi çok o kadar çok net söyleyemiyorum. Bazen mesela yanlış anlaşılma olabilir. (C07MFR)*

*Bazen tabii ki dil! Bazen. Mesela böyle ağdalı ağdalı konuşasım geliyor ama konuşamıyorum. Tabii ki benim dilim öyle acayip değil ben üniversiteyi İngilizce okumadım, hep bir İngilizceyle şeyim oldu alakam oldu gide gele. Ama sonuçta onun İngilizcesi benden çok daha iyi. Bazen tabii ki zorlanıyorsun ama çözemediğimiz şeyler de olmadı. (C09FTR)*

*Çünkü dil mesela çok önemli çünkü mesela E bazen bir şeyi çok direk söylüyor ama aslında onu öyle söylemesinin sebebi kelime dağarcığı o kadar olduğu için onu öyle söylüyor. Onu söylemenin çok daha yumuşak şeyleri var ama bilemiyor çünkü o kadar dile hakim değil. (C07FTR)*

*Yani mesela şöyle oldu. Ben İngilizce bilmiyordum, onunla beraber öğrendim. O da aynı şekilde Türkçe'yi benimle değil de çevresinden öğreniyor. Bazen çok böyle tıkanırdım zamanlar oldu. Ama dille alakalıydı bunlar. Yani şey çünkü anlatmak istediğini kavga ederken ya da tartışırken ya da başka bir şey anlatırken tam olarak anlatamadığın zaman, tam böyle Türkçe karşılığı olmayan şeyler, İngilizce'nin şeyinde olmayan şeyler var Türkçe karşılığı olmayan. Onları söyleyemediğim zaman bunaldığım çok oldu. Herhalde en büyük problemimiz bu olmuştur aramızdaki. Dil farklılığı. (C06FTR)*

*Bizimkiler her zaman şunu düşünüyordu, ben yabancı birini bulacağım ve annem de babam da İngilizce bilmiyorlar o yüzden de yabancı birini bulmamdan çok korkuyorlardı. Hani hiçbir şekilde ailenin içine giremeyecek diye. (C02FTR)*

*Biz beraber olmaya başladıktan üç ay sonra falan A'nın ailesi geldi. Ben böyle post-it'ler falan hazırlamıştım işte hoşgeldiniz altına Yunancası yazıyor. Masama falan*



*yapıştırılmıştum sürekli görüp öğreneyim diye. İşte böyle küçük küçük cümleler işte ne bileyim yemeği beğendiniz mi, afiyet olsun böyle bu tarz küçük şeyler. O dönem sadece kadarını konuşabiliyordum. Onun dışında evet sonrasında da yani birlikte mesela onlarla baş başa kalmak beş dakika bile, çok korkutuyordu beni. Bir şey söyleyecekler anlamayacağım, işte awkward silence'lar. O açılardan evet o zordu sadece. (C05FTR)*

*Yani biz flört etmeye başladıktan 4 ay sonra ben Fransa'ya gittim, E beni ailesiyle tanıştırdı. Ama zor oldu çünkü ben o zaman Fransızca bilmiyordum. Ve iletişim çok kolay olmadı tabi. Onlar çok zorlanıyorlar Fransızlar İngilizce konuşurken ve biraz tabi yaş da ona göre. O yüzden ilk başta... Yani tabii ki hani taniyorsun seviyorsun ama dil çok önemli. Ortak bir dili konuşmak çok önemli anlaşmak anlamında. O haftasonu benim için zor geçti çünkü anlamıyorum, E sürekli simültane tercüme etmek durumunda kalıyordu. (C07FTR)*

*Tabi şey bir tek, dillerini bilmediğim için çok kolay olmamıştı anlaşmak. Yani onlar da çok iyi İngilizce konuşmuyor, ben de. (C08MTR)*

*Benim tarafımdan yani şey oldu, İngilizcem o kadar iyi değildi onunla beraber geliştirdim ben İngilizcemi. (C08MTR)*

*Hani dil bariyeri bizde bir problem oldu hani ailesiyle tanışırken falan. Hani ben biraz Yunanca öğrenmeye çalıştım onlar gelmeden önce. (C05FTR)*

*I: Dil bilmeden nasıl oldu peki?*

*F: Ben kursa falan gitmeye başlamıştım hemen zaten. Sonra konuştukça konuştukça çok hızlı gelişti. Bilmiyorum aslında anlatması da zor. Ama bizim ilk başlarda bile alışma sürecimiz çok hızlı oldu. (C06FTR)*

*Aklıma çocuk geliyor açık söylemek gerekirse. Çünkü ben farklı bir şekilde büyüdüm, T farklı bir şekilde büyüdü o kesin ee... Nasıl yani bir ortak bir şey kurabileceğiz bilmiyorum. Benim annem biraz katı. Böyle olması gerekiyor, böyle iyi böyle kötü, çok strict bir şekilde ve... Ee.. Nasıl diyeyim. Bizi sevdi ama farklı bir şekilde sevdi. Ee... Anne tarafım özellikle biraz soğuk. Böyle göstererek şey yapılmıyor. Alışkanlık aslında yani. Biraz saygı var. Mesela anneannem de öyle, annem ona siz diyor. Yani böyle bir kültürel bir şey ve bir şekilde bize bunu yansıtmaya çalıştı. Benim içimde böyle bir şey olabilir bilemem. Ne çıkacak yani. (C07MFR)*

*Gelecekte herhalde hani şeyler olabilir, çocuk yetiştirmekten olabilir. O konuda belli farklar olur herhalde. (C02MUK)*

*Mesela çocuğun yetiştirilmesinde... O biraz sıkıntı olabilir önümüzdeki dönemde. Çocuğun eğitimi, çocuğun yetiştirilmesi, çocuğa karşı yaklaşım. Yani tabi ben farklı bir yerde farklı bir kültürde yetiştim, o farklı bir yerde farklı bir kültürde yetişti. Şimdi ikisinin senteziyle çocuğumuzu büyüteceğiz. O yüzden kaçınılmaz böyle bir şey. İşte ne bileyim biz illa çocuk yesin de ağlamasın da, daha böyle üstüne düşeriz mesela. Onlar öyle değiller. Daha rahat çocuk büyütme halleri. (C06FTR)*

*Çocuk yetiştirmek olabilir. Büyük ihtimal orada baya bir şey çıkar, farklı bakış açıları çıkar. Ben ailemden gördüğümü yapacağım o ailesinden gördüğünü. O biraz daha bireysel işte sorumluluk kafasıyla yetiştirmek isteyebilir. Ben biraz daha verici olabilirim çocuğa ona kıyasla, çünkü kendi ailemizde öyle görmüşüz yani. (C04FTR)*

*Yani belki çocuk olduğu zaman farklı problemler ortaya çıkabilir kültürel olarak. Ama İ zaten bir tane kültüre ait bir insan değil. Benim daha çok kültürüm var. Ben burada doğdum büyüdüm. Bu kültüre aitim ben. Belki çocuk olduğunda böyle bir farklılık ortaya çıkabilir. Ben kendi kültürümden bir şeyler katmak isteyebilirim, o istemeyebilir. (C06FTR)*

*Din! J ateist. Ağır bir ateist. Ben daha şeyim böyle. İnancım var ama bunu odakladığım belli bir yer var mı hayır. J çok sert ve net bir ateist. Çocuk olursa ne olur o yüzden hiçbir fikrim yok (gülüyor). (C02FTR)*

*Şöyle bir zorluk yaşayacağımızı düşünüyorum. Burada kalmak istemiyor. Benim için çok, yani bilmiyorum yurt dışında yaşayabilir miyim? Bilmiyorum çünkü vize alma problemleri var, kalacak yer. Bir sürü sıkıntı yani bu yurtdışına taşınma olayı. Bu bir büyük soru işareti kafamızda. Çünkü gerçek anlamda kalmak istemiyor.*

**(C08MTR)**

*Bir de mesela nerede yaşanacağı. Ben mesela Türkiye'de kalmayı çok istiyorum. M bir ara çok istiyor bir ara hiç istemiyor. Kanada'ya gidelim diyor saçma sapan, ben hiç istemiyorum. Nerede yaşanacağı da ileride sorun olabilecek konulardan biri. (C04FTR)*

*Mesela ben Türkiye'yi çok böyle aşırı özlemiyorum örneğin. Ama bunun sebebi şu an Türkiye'de olmak istememem. Daha çekici olsaydı yaşamak daha kolay olsaydı mesela özleyebilirdim. Berlin ikimiz için de yeni bir yer, biraz zaten o yüzden de istemiştik burayı. O yüzden şeyi bilmiyorum. Hani...Öyle bir sıkıntı olabilir gelecekte. Buradan ayrılmak istemeyebilir, Almanya'dan. (C01FTR)*

*Ben yurt dışında yaşayabilecek miyim, iş bulabilecek miyim bunlar büyük bir soru işareti. Şu anda bizi düşündüren tek nokta bu diyebilirim çünkü kolay değil kalmak için, oturmak için, çalışmak için vize almak. Öyle bir sıkıntımız var. (C08MTR)*

*Evet hani bilmiyorum senin sorduğun soruya cevap olur mu ama... Yani bir noktada Türkiye'den taşınmayı düşünüyoruz ama bir noktada bürokratik olarak imkansız olursa hani buradan çıkıp Hollanda'ya yerleşmemiz atıyorum imkansız olursa bir süre Atina'da yaşamak zorunda kalabiliriz. Bunların haricinde dediğim gibi başka*

*bir ülkeye gitme şeyimiz var. Özellikle zaten çocuk sahibi olmaya karar verdiğimizde gitmeyi düşünüyoruz. (C05FTR)*

*Annem çok sıcak bakmadı ilk başta çünkü din meselesi de çok önemli annem için. O yüzden sıcak bakmadı... Benim püre Müslüman birisiyle evlenmemi istiyordu, o yüzden. Bilmiyorum da aslında. Geleneksel sayılabilir bir aile benimkisi ama böyle çok da kapalı insanlar falan değillerdir. (C07FTR)*

*Türkiye’de bence zaten hani bir dindar olmayanlarda da bir gelenekselcilik var. Yabancı damadı kabullenmekte zorlanıyorlar, yabancı gelini kabul etmek daha kolay. O gelenekselliği gelmeden zaten aşırı bir dindarlık bizdeki söz konusu olan. Ben mesela çok uzun süre şey gibi düşündüm, babamın kabullenmemesinin bir sebebi olarak hani insanlara ne diyeceğim? Sonra o da şey olduğunda bir konuyu açıldığında babam şey demiş, benim umurumda bile değil. Ben hani ben öteki dünyada nasıl hesap vereceğim, ben böyle bir şeye göz yumarsam nasıl hesap vereceğim? (C05FTR)*

*Ama aile...Benim ailem açısından farklı kültürde oluyor olması annemi zorladı mesela. O zorlandı. Annemin bakış açısı dinle alakalı, tamamen kültürle alakalı değil aslında. Tamamen dinle alakalı. Dinlerin farklı olmasına odaklandığı için ona odaklı bir zorluk yaşadı. Müslüman biri olmasını tercih ederdi. Tabii ki. Biz zaten Müslüman oldu diye yalan söyledik annemlere. Öyle biliyorlar. (C06FTR)*

*Ondan sonra ama işte o loophole dediğim şey de şu. A yarı Arnavut. Babası Arnavut, Yunanistan’da doğup büyümüş işte. Onu hani şey işte annesi de Yunan asıllı değilmiş gibi hani, sanki tamamen Arnavut ve Müslüman yetiştirilmiş, sadece Yunanistan’da doğup büyümüş gibi söyledim. (C05FTR)*

*Ailemin insani özellikleri bence ya. Çünkü ona böyle Avrupalı, sünnetsiz ya da Hristiyan gibi şey yapmadılar. Öyle oluşmadı kafalarında. Onlar için benim sevdiğim*

*bir insan, beni seven bir insan olarak oluřtu. O anlamda da insani taraf diyorum ben. Yani o kadar anlayıřlı oldular ki mesela F'nin kardeři gay ve sevgilisiyle gelmek istedi nikaha. Çok çekindiler F'nin ailesi hani Türkiye muhafazakar bir yer, sizin için sorun olmasın falan diye. Benim ailem bunu çok anlayıřla karřıladı. Kimse ne bir řey dedi, ne bir řey ima etti. Bu hep insan sevgisine sahip oldukları için.(C09FTR)*

*Benim tarafımdan yani řey oldu, İngilizcem o kadar iyi deęildi onunla beraber geliřtirdim ben İngilizcemi. Onlar biraz bu durumdan ötürü řařırdılar. Hani yani bu İngilizceyle sevgili mi yaptın falan gibi (gülüyor). Bunun dıřında benim ailem çok normal karřıladı, yani bir řey olmadı tabii ki. (C08MTR)*

*Saygılı çok, bana, işime, hayatıma, aileme vesaire. (C08MTR)*

*Genel olarak sabırlı olmak çok kritik sanki. Hani tüm ilişkilerde öyledir belki de diller aynı olmayınca anlamamayı da anlaşılmanmayı da tolere etmek gerekiyor. Kabullenebilmek de önemli. Bazı şeylerin farklı olabileceğini kabullenmek. Bunlara saygı duyabilmek. Bu kadar herhalde. (C06FTR)*

*Bu onun kültürü onun adeti diyorsun. En önemli şey o yüzden alttan almak, iki taraf için de yani. Alttan almak, toleranslı olmayı öğreniyorsun. (C03FTR)*

*Karşılıklı özveri. Karşılıklı anlaşabilmek için daha çok çaba sarf etmen. Yine aynı şekilde yani, bir noktada, benim için çok önemli olan bir noktada o biraz geri çekilecek, onun için çok önemli olan bir noktada, olmazsa olmaz bir noktada, sonuçta ikimiz de mantıklı insanlarız, ikimizin de istediği çok mantıksız olmayacak yani. O yüzden onun çok önemli olan bir noktasında ben bir adım geri duracağım, o da aynı şekilde bende. Yani yine karşılıklı özveri olacak. (C07FTR)*

*Tabii ki saygıdır yani. Bu... Onun inancına saygım var, onun da benim inançsızlığıma saygısı var diyeyim. Ben çok inançlı olan bir insan değilim. Birbirimize saygı*

*duyuyoruz. O kiliseye gitmek istiyor, beraber gidiyoruz. Mutlu oluyorum, çünkü o kendini iyi hissediyor orada. Onun mutluluğu beni mutlu ediyor. Saygı olduktan sonra inanç açısından bir problem yaşanacağını sanmıyorum ben. (C08MTR)*

*Hmm inancı farklı tabi. Ama o da bak karşılıklı saygı. Mesela onların Noel'i çok önemli, şöyle yapılır, böyle yapılır. Onlar ne yapıyorsa ben onlara uyum sağlıyorum. O da bizim bayramda ne yapılıyor, el mi öpülüyor, öper yani. Biraz saygıyla ilgili. (C03FTR)*

*Evet bunlarla ilgili şey değilim ama bir Allah inancım var. Bu konuda da hiçbir zaman şey olmadık, ne tartıştık, hep saygımız var karşılıklı. (C09FTR)*

*Hmm, iletişim. Güven. Bunlar kolaylaştıran şeyler. Yani ben Ali'yle ya da Mehmet'le bir ilişkim olsa o ilişkiyi ne devam ettirir, güven devam ettirir, açık olmak devam ettirir. Ne bileyim o hep konuşmaya teşvik etti. Ben de daha şey oldum zamanla, beni sikan bir şey varsa böyle içime atmak değil lank diye söylemek. (C04FTR)*

*Ama yani baz aldığın şeyleri açığa dökmek gerekiyor. Yani kafanda bir şey kuruyorsan mesela beş basamaklı bir işin var diyelim. İlk üçü senin kültüründe senin içine yazılmıştır sen sadece şey yaparsın, atıyorum ee... Gece etekle çıkmayayım dersin Türkiye'de o yüzden yatağın üstüne direk iki pantolon koyar onlardan birini seçersin falan. Ama mesela neden öyle yaptığını o bilmiyor olabilir falan o yüzden böyle basamaklarını geriye gidip açıklamak bence güzel bir yöntem. Açık bir iletişim kolaylaştırıyor. (C01FTR)*

*Çok açık. Bir şeyi hatalı yaptığında ya da bir hata olduğunda hemen söylüyor. Veya bir hareketimden rahatsız olduğunda bunu göstermekten hiç korkmuyor... Şey benim becerebildiğim bir şey değil, en çok kızdığım şeydir. Halı altı yapmak bir şeyleri. Hem çok çok doluyorum, patlayacak gibi oluyorum hem de zarar verir ilişkiye. (C02FTR)*

*Konuşmak o yüzden çok önemli bizim için. Eğer karşıdaki insanın bir problemi varsa onu anlamak veya onu kendisinin anlamasına yardım etmeye çalışmak.*  
**(C01FTR)**

*Yani bir şeyi yargılarken a niye böyle yaptı diye şeyi sürekli hatırlamak lazım, a o farklı bir kültürden, onun alıştığı şey bu değil. Anlatabildim mi yani o bana bunu yapıyor ama onun için çok normal aslında bu. Ya da benim için normal değil. Atıyorum benim yaptığım şey ona çok kaba gelebilir ama benim alıştığım şey bu. Yani onu ilk önce yargılamadan önce farklı kültürden olduğunu düşünerek yargılamak mantıklı. Ondan sonra zaten empati kuruyorsun a öyleyken böyle diye.*  
**(C07FTR)**

*Yani karşılıklı özveri aslında. Bir yerde onun dediği oluyor bir yerde benim dediğim oluyor.*

*Ya bence hep şey lazım. Aklın yolu bir. Akıl ne diyorsa onu yapmak lazım.*  
**(C04FTR)**

*Mantıklı olan hangisiyse onu yapıyorsun günün sonunda. Mantıklı olanı yaptığın sürece zaten her sorun aşılabiliyor. İkimiz de çok şey ee sert değiliz. Konuşuyoruz ve mantıklı olan bir orta nokta buluyoruz.*  
**(C07FTR)**

*Söylediğin her laf senin hayatında kalacak silinmeyecek. Ne kadar kızgın olursan ol. Onu bilerek konuşmak çok önemli. O tartışma bittikten sonra da ağızdan çıkanlardan pişman olmamak çok önemli. Ben ağızımdan çıkan hiçbir şeyden tartışma bittikten sonra pişman olmadım, J'nin de hiç pişman olduğunu sanmıyorum. Birbirimizi aşağılayıcı ya da kırıcı bir şey söylemedik. İkimiz de yumuşak tabiatan ziyade mantıklı insanlarız diye düşünüyorum. Kontrolsüz bir parlamanın herhangi bir gerçek sonuca ulaştırabileceği kanaatinde değiliz, neden böyle bir şey yapalım!*  
**(C02FTR)**

*Ben yani haklı da olsam haksız da olsam biraz zaman geçtikten sonra açıklıyorum kendisine. Bu şekilde olsa daha iyi olmaz mıydı, ben bu sebepten şöyle yaptım, sen neden öyle yaptın gibi. Biraz zaman geçtikten sonra tekrar konuşmaktan yanayım. Bunun faydasını görüyorum açıkçası. (C08MTR)*

*Tabii ki! Şöyle diyeyim biz iki buçuk senedir beraberiz, böyle gerçekten kavga ettiğimiz bir keredir. Hani gerçekten böyle kavga ettiğimiz. Hani şimdi mesela anlamadığımız zamanlarda daha çok konuşuyoruz. Biraz zaman veriyoruz aslında birbirimize. Ben ona zaman veriyorum. Bir beş on dakika. Bir içeri giderim, pek yapmadım ama öyle bir şey olsa yaparım. Giderim düşünürüm, objektif bakmaya çalışırım. Biz böyle duygusal bakmıyoruz genelde. (C09FTR)*

*F: Kavga edemiyorsun ana dilin değil ya (gülüyor). Mesela biz İngilizce konuşuyoruz. İkimiz de ana dili değil. O yüzden çok çetin kavgalar edemiyoruz.*

*I: Çok çetin kavgalar edememek de diyorsun tutan bir şey oluyor?*

*F: Yani evet. (C03FTR)*

*Bağrış çağrış oluyor ama bazıları o kadar klasik ki birimiz bağırınca gülünüyor çünkü aslında biliyorsun o insanın o tepkiyi vereceğini biliyorsun ama kaçmış oluyor falan. Mesela sabah... D bana sabah şaka yapıyor, sabahları çok lanet bir insan oluyorum. Bu sabah da yaptı mesela evden çıkana kadar konuşmadım. Akşam ama mesela şey, akşam eve geldiğimde dalga geçtik benim sabahki o gerginliğimle, onun şakasının komik olmamasıyla falan. (C01FTR)*

*Ahha, herkes kendi dilinde küfrediyor. İkimiz de birbirimizi anlamadığımız için sorun olmuyor (gülüyor). (C03FTR)*



*Ondan sonra tabii ki şey biraz ciddi olduğu zaman ilk tanışmada, benim babam şey Tunuslu. Annem Fransız. Biz zaten multikültürel bir ortamdaydık sürekli o yüzden hiç hiçbir sıkıntı olmadı açıkçası. (C07MFR)*

*Öyle ya ben lise zamanlarımdan itibaren çokkültürlülüğü seven bir tiptim yani şöyle diyeyim sana, hazırlık okudum lisede, hazırlıktan sonraki yıllarda uluslararası gönüllü gençlik kamplarına gitmeye başladım... O da aynı şekilde. Hep yalnız yaşamış bir sürü yıl, farklı farklı ülkelerde, bir sürü insan tanımış. Bu deneyimlerimizin, tecrübelerimizin getirdiği bir bilgi var ikimizde. (C09FTR)*

*Zaten Londra'da okuyordum, bir sürü farklı kültürden arkadaşım var. O da o yüzden öyle hiç bu çocuk Fransız gibi bir şey olmuyordu. (C04FTR)*

*Kültürle ilgili beni çok zorlayan bir şey olmadı ama ben de çok enternasyonel bir şeyde, alanda büyüdüm her zaman. Hem birçok erkek arkadaşım yabancı oldu J'den önce de hem de Dame de Sion'dur şeydir hep yabancı insanlar oldu etrafımda, ben de buna çok açık bir insan oldum. (C02FTR)*

*Benim ailemin.. Ee, benim ablamın şu an bir yabancıyla evli olması benim açımdan çok kolay. Mesela onun ilk böyle sevgilisini getirişini vesaire düşünüyorum. Mesela birçok hareketi kaba buluyordu annem, anlamıyordu. Veya ablama haksızlık ettiğini düşünüyordu bazı konularda. Sonra zaman geçtikçe şey ortaya çıktı. Hee Avrupalılar böyle, (gülüyor). Aslında kötü niyetli değil, böyle yetiştiriliyorlar, böyle büyüyorlar, o yüzden bu hareketler böyle. (C01FTR)*

*Yani tabii ki şaşırdılar. Çünkü daha önce böyle bir şey yaşamamışlardı. Yani aile olarak yaşamamıştık. Öyle yabancı gelin damat vesaire. (C06FTR)*

*Belki biraz yabancı olana dair endişe olmuş olabilir çünkü yoktu bizim çevremizde öyle enternasyonel insanlar ilişkiler falan. (C07FTR)*

*I: Sen bu farklı deneyimlerin daha zenginleştirici olduğunu söylüyorsun.*

*F: Kesinlikle kesinlikle. Yani ikisinin bir ortasını bulmanın ne kadar böyle şey, farklı şeyleri toparlayıp kendi görüşünü oluşturuyorsun. Kendi orijinal görüşünü bulmak için de o farklılıkları görmek önemli bir şey. (C02FTR)*

*İlişkiyi besleme olayı. Farklı kültür olunca daha fazla oluyor. Tanıyacak çok şey var. Her şeyi sorup öğrenmen, merak etmen gerekiyor. Öyle olunca da daha çok hikaye oluyor anlatacak. (C03FTR)*

*Ve birbirimize sürekli bir şeyler katıyoruz. Farklı muhabbetlere giriyoruz. O yüzden eğer aynı kültürden bir insanla beraber olsaydım birbirimize bir şey katmayacaktık. (C06FTR)*

*Karşıdakiyle konuşmak zorundasın bir sürü şeyi anlayabilmek, anlaşabilmek için. Ya aslında bence bu normal aynı kültürdeki ilişkiler için de geçerli ama onlar için mecbur değilmişsin gibi bir şey var galiba. Birtakım şeyleri varsayıyorsun ve beraber varsayıyorsun. Veya karşıdaki insanın farklı düşünüyor olabileceği aklına gelmiyor bazen. Başka bir kültürden biriyle birlikte olunca bir noktada her şeyi merak edip sormaya başlıyorsun çünkü varsayma hatasına düşmemen gerekiyor. Öyle olunca da daha çok konuşuyorsun, daha çok şey paylaşıyorsun. Aynı kültürde büyüdüğün biri olunca sanki konuşabilecek şeylerin yarısı, sırf bir şeyler varsayıldığı için kaçırılıyor. Bir de burada daha çok öğrenecek şey var, beslenecek daha çok bilgi kaynağı var gibi hissediyorum. Farkı o bence. (C01FTR)*

*Soruyorsun bu senin için nasıl bir şey ne demek. Yani belki aynı ülkeden biriyle sevgili olduğunda soruna dönüşecek şeyleri konuşup çözmek daha kolay oluyor. (C08MTR)*

*Ha pozitif tarafı diyeyim önce, ben ondan bir sürü şey öğreniyorum gerçekten. (C09FTR)*

*Karşıdaki bu kadar açıkken sen kendini bir şekilde kapatamıyorsun zaten yani. O böyleyse ben neden ona karşı bu kadar açık olmayayım diyorsun. (C07FTR)*

*Şu an aslında bir buçuk sene önceki halime dönüp baktığımda diyorum ki beni de değiştirmiş. Hani beni de zihin olarak daha rahat bir insan yaptı aslında. (C05FTR)*

*Normalde ben böyle çok sabırlı bir insan değilim. Böyle bir şeyi anlamaz tekrar anlatayım tekrar anlatayım. Sıkılıyorum çabuk. Onu biraz aştım herhalde. O daha rahat olduğu için ben de daha rahat olabiliyorum aslında. (C06FTR)*

*Ben de daha şey oldum zamanla, beni sıkı bir şey varsa böyle içime atmak değil lank diye söylemek. (C04FTR)*

*Yani ne düşünüyorsa söyledi. Hiçbir zaman bir şeyin etrafından dolandırmadık. O açıklık bana da yansıdı. Ben de hayatımda çok daha açık olabilmeye, bir şeyi istediğimde bunu çok daha açık söyleyebilmeye başladım. (C02FTR)*

*Ben babamın yanında ne kadar rahatsam ya da annemin yanında onun yanında da o kadar rahatım. (C04FTR)*

*Çünkü İ'de şey yok mesela, işte kadın şöyle yapar, böyle davranır, işte bu kadın işidir bu erkek işi. O öyle biri değil. Ben de öyle biri değilim. O bu konularda rahat olduğu için ben kendim gibi olabiliyorum. Yoksa zor olurdu. (C06FTR)*

*Best of all şeklinde. Hem sen kendi tarzında rahat böyle kendin olmana izin verecek birini buldun hem de biz çocuğun ne dediğini anlayabileceğiz şeklinde bir mutluluk oldu. (C02FTR)*

*Evet tabii kendin olabilmek. Çünkü önceki ilişkilerimde hep işte şunu yapma bunu yapma, şöyle davranma, şunu fazla şöyle yapıyorsun gibi gibi konuşmalar duydum. Bunlar çok sinir bozucu. Tabii ilişkinin zararına olan tavırları değiştirelim ama her şeyime de karışılması da yani abartı oluyor o noktada.***(C05FTR)**

*İki farklı kişi olmak yerine biz olalım, bir olalım duygusu. Bunu mesela şu an baktığımda çok sağlıklı gelmiyor bana. Şu an olduğum yeri daha çok seviyorum yani. Ayrı ayrı insanlarız ama beraberizi daha çok seviyorum...***(C02FTR)**

*Bizim ilişkide mesela, az önceki soruya döneceğim de, kolaylaştıran şey, iki tarafın da kıskanç olmaması. Ben de değilim ilişkide, ikimiz de mesela arkadaşlarımızla çıkıyoruz. Böyle olunca anlatacağın şeyler oluyor, daha rahat, daha özgür oluyorsun. Hani özellikle çocuklar falan olduktan sonra hayata renk katacak bir şeyler arıyorsun. Ne bileyim flört. Farklı insanlarla dışarı çıkmak da hayatına renk katıyor. A'nın kıskanç olmaması benim için kolaylaştıran bir şey... Birbirimizi kısıtlamamaya devam etmek de bir o kadar önemli olacak zaman geçtikçe.***(C03FTR)**

*Benim alışkın olduğumdan çok daha farklı bir erkek profili olması. Tabii onunla ilk tanıştığımızda bilmiyordum ama hani kıskançlık falan böyle bir şey yok yani ilişkimizde. O tür şeyler de birlikte olmamızı kolaylaştırdı.***(C04FTR)**

*Yani en basitinden mesela kıskançlık konusu. İşte biliyorsun yani Türk erkekleri vesaire bu konuda. Yani genelleme yapmamak gerekiyor tabii farklı insanlar da var ama genel olarak bu tarzda olduğu için ee... Biz mesela İ ile çok farklı şeyler konuşuyoruz. Aslında ilişkinin bu şeyinde takılı kalmıyoruz işte. Ya şunu mu giydin şu mu oldu şuraya mı gittin işte şu arkadaşınla görüşme falan. Bu muhabbetler hiç yok.***(C06FTR)**

*İlk başta mesela çok farklı geliyordu ama şu anda o kadar o konfor alanını sağlayan hareketler ki! İşte hiç kıskanmaması yani garip değil mi falan oluyordum, rahatsız*

*oluyordum ama şu anda, iyi ki böyle! Belki hem ilişkiyi hem hayatı kolaylaştırıyor.*  
**(C07FTR)**

*Yok hayır F asla, benim ne mailime bakar, ne telefonuma bakar, ne neredesin ne yapıyorsun mesajı atar. Ben bu akşam iş çıkışı gelmesem eve, ben şuraya gidiyorum desem hiç sormaz kimlesin nereye gidiyorsun. Ben de ona sormam zaten.* **(C09FTR)**

*Öncelikle Yunan kültürü bize çok uzak bir kültür değil biliyorsun. Ee... Yıllarca beraber yaşamışız aynı topraklarda. Yemek kültürümüzden tut eğlence kültürümüze kadar her şey birbirine çok yakın. Yani ağabeyinin düğününe gittim söylediğim gibi. Bildiğin sokakta, sokağı kapatıp düğün eğlencesi yapıyorlar evlerinin önünde (gülüyor). Gerçekten çok yakın kültürlerimiz var; çok fazla aynı kelimeyi kullanıyoruz. O yönden bir zorluk çekmedim açıkçası.* **(C08MTR)**

*Yani kültürel olarak... İspanyollar, özellikle Kordoba, Endülüs tarafı bize yakınlar gerçekten. Sonuçta orada bir Arap devleti kurulmuş ve Kordoba da oranın başkenti. Orada bir cami var mesela kocaman, şimdi katedral olmuş ama görüyorsun o Arap mimarisini. Ya çok çok bambaşka değil. Sonuçta orada da Müslümanlar yaşamış.* **(C09FTR)**

*Yani bir de şimdi bir şey gibi değil, bir İngiliz olması gibi değil. Kültürlerimiz gerçekten aslında yakın... Ama ben Yunanistan'a gitmediğim için belki, hani bir de hep bir şey vardır ya, komşu! Suyun öteki tarafı bizim Hristiyan versiyonumuz gibi bir algı var yani. Gidip orada yaşamadığım için bende de kırılmayan bir algı bu yani.* **(C05FTR)**

*Şimdi aman aman çok farklı diyemeyeceğim. Belki İtalyanlar işte Akdeniz kültürü bize yakın olduğu için çok farklılık görmedim yani. Ama dediğim gibi bu A'nın kültürünün bize yakın olmasından kaynaklanıyor. Çünkü o bize çok rahat alıştı. Ne bileyim bir İngiliz olsa, bir Alman olsa belki biraz daha zor alışabilirdi.* **(C03FTR)**

*Hmm yok ya. En fazla İngiltere'deki arkadaşlarım Türk kızla mı çıkıyorsun dedi ama yani onlar bile Türkiye yani çok da garip bir şey değil.*

*T: Ne olsa garip olurdu?*

*J: Hmm, Çinli olsa mesela. Harbi Çinli. Çünkü Çinle hiçbir alakam yok ve uzak bir yer (gülüyor). O biraz şaşırtıcı olablirdi. (C02MUK)*

*Hah bir de şey söyleyebilirim, genel olarak diğer kişinin kültürünü biraz bilmek aşağı yukarı. Mesela D Alman, ben spesifik olarak Alman kültürünü bilmiyorum ama işte Belçika kültürünü biliyorum, Hollanda'yı biliyorum. Almanya hakkında genel bir fikir veriyor. Aynı şekilde D mesela biz tanışmadan önce İstanbul'da yaşamış, genel bir fikri var. Hani Türk insanının genel ahvali nedir. Sokakta nasıl yürür falan. Bir fikrin olması bence çok iyi. Ki hatta ilk tanıştığımızda bunlar üzerine baya konuşmuştuk. İkimizin kültürlerini birbirimizi tanımadan önce görmüş olmamızın çok büyük bir artı olduğunu baya konuştuk. (C01FTR)*

*Sonuçta dili var, kültürü biliyor, benimle çay içiyor, kebab yiyor, annemle babamla muhabbet edebiliyor. (C02FTR)*

*Bir de kültür ve dil bilmek de önemli. Yoksa bazı şeyler olmuyor. Kültürü biraz tanımak gerekli, dili bilince de çok şey kolay geliyor. (C07MFR)*

*Hmm... Kesinlikle şey olması gerekiyor şey, esnek ve hoşgörülü olması gerekiyor. Açık olunması çok önemli, yeni şeyler çünkü, kapalı olursan anlayamazsın o kişiyi... Çünkü çok inat edersen bir çözüm bulamayabilirsin. (C07MFR)*

*Bence kolaylaştıran şeyler iki kişinin de böyle hayata bakış açısının akla kara olmaması. Alternatifli düşünebiliyor olmaları. Mesela bazı şeyler bazı anlarda bana çok ters gelebilir ama ben asla oo nasıl olur böyle bir şey tribine girmem. O da*

*girmez. Yani anlamaya çalışmak çok önemli. Ama ikimiz de gerçekten easygoing insanlarız. (C09FTR)*

*Var tabii ki var ama ikimiz de flexible olduğumuz için bir şekilde bir ortak nokta buluyoruz her zaman. (C07FTR)*

*K: Karakter işte şey, atıyorum daha açık fikirli olmak belki. Yeniliklere açık olabilmek. Dediğim dedik katı bir insansan zorlanabilirsin çünkü. (C06FTR)*

*Çok Türk kızları hakkında yorum yapıp linç olmak da istemiyorum (gülüyor). İlk başta böyle değildi M ama yavaş yavaş kaprisleri falan artmaya başladı. Yani yavaş yavaş Türk kızı kültürünü sahiplendi, aradaki fark yok oldu diyebilirim aslında (gülüyor). İlk başta çok daha rahattı, hala rahattır öyle çıkma etme lafları hiç yapmaz da ne bileyim. Daha çok ilgi bekleme hali mi belki de... (C08MTR)*

*I: Türk kızı olmak ne demek biraz açar mısın?*

*F: Mesela işte bu trip atma olayı. Bana sorsan 4 sene öncesinde ben hiç trip atmam, ben çok anlayışlıyım derdim. Ama ne zaman bana her seferinde şu an şunu yapıyorsun, şu an bunu yapıyorsun diye yaptığım şeyin ne olduğunun üzerinde durarak anlatınca yani şey gibi şu an bana trip atıyorsun ve atma nedenin de bu diye oturup düşünürsen bu neden mantıklı mı diye o gösterip de ben oturup düşündüğümde şey oluyordum, evet abi çok da mantıklı değil. Sonucuna varıyordum. (C02FTR)*

*Sevmiyorum bunu söylemeyi aslında. Türk kızı biraz ırkçı da duyuluyor, Türkiye vatandaşı kadınlar diyeyim (gülüyor). Daha önceki kız arkadaşlarımdan edindiğim deneyimlere dayanarak söylüyorum bunları, yani belki de benim şansımaya denk geldi bilmiyorum. Yani o kadar saçma sebepler yüzünden trip yediğim oldu ki çevremdeki insanlar da dahil olmak üzere! (C08MTR)*

*Ben mi nasılım? Ben de hiç taşımam o Türkiyeli kadın şeyini. Bir kere o şeyle fiştklanıyor. Sen öyle bir ilişkinin içindeyken, seni kıskanan biri varken sen de ulan diyorsun bunları düşünüyorsan kim bilir. Sen de o psikolojiye giriyorsun. (C04FTR)*

*Tam bir Türk kızydım J ile çıkmaya başladığımda. Ve bunun farkında değildim ne kadar Türk olduğumun. Bu hani şey minik kıskançlıklar gibi. (C02FTR)*

*Benim bir tane eski yöneticim vardı o da İtalyan, o demişti, ya Z demişti, Türkiye’de 30 yaş üstü bekar kadınlar neden bu kadar negatif dedi. Haklı. Çünkü o bizim genlerimizde gibi. Evleneceğim çocuk sahibi olacağım. Evlilik bizim için bir statü sembolü. Kadınlar sanki bir sınıf atlıyor evlenince. Hele zengin biriyle evlendiyse ooh. O yüzden de sanki öncelik sevgi falan değil de zengin bir erkek. İşte kalifikasyonları ne. (C03FTR)*

*Hiç kafamda ne evlilik, ne tek taşlar hiç öyle kaygılarım olmadı. Bilindik Türk kıızı kaygıları hiçbir zaman olmadı. (C09FTR)*

*Hoş tabii şey diye bir kavram da var Türk kıızı diyoruz ama Türk erkeği de var. Onu da sormak lazım. (C08MTR)*

*Yani en basitinden mesela kıskançlık konusu. İşte biliyorsun yani Türk erkekleri vesaire bu konuda. (C06FTR)*

*Benim alışkın olduğumdan çok daha farklı bir erkek profili olması. Tabi onunla ilk tanıştığımızda bilmiyordum ama hani kıskançlık falan böyle bir şey yok yani ilişkimizde. O tür şeyler de birlikte olmamızı kolaylaştırdı. (C04FTR)*

*Erkeklerde de tam tersi işte şununla da yatayım, bunu da götüreyim, bir rahatlık. Belli bir yaşın üstündekileri diyorum. Avrupalılarda bu hiçbir zaman tabu olmadığı için hayatlarının hiçbir kısmında, onlarda önce aşk sevgi. Cinsellik daha sonra*



*geliyor. Bizimkiler de işte istediği kadar Amerika'da okusun bilmemne, süper medeni ailelerde büyüsün, o bizim genlerimizde, kodlarımızda o tabu. (C03FTR)*

*Türk erkeklerini çok immatur görüyorum bir yabancıyla olduktan sonra. Gerçekten çok çocuklar ve hepsinin bir yeterlilikle ilgili bir meseleleri var. (C04FTR)*

*Yani hiç öyle oturup da yabancı bir kocam olsun diye düşünmedim ama bir yabancıyla ilişkim olsun isterdim çünkü hep oldu da zaten, hoşuma da gitti. Çünkü hani benim sonuçta Türkiye'de bu kültürde benim kafamda Türk erkeği bulmak gerçekten çok zor. Hani çünkü rahat diyeceğim ama rahat da tam karşılamıyor kastettiğim şeyi. Yani öyle rahat derken de tabii ki gelenek görenek bunları bilen, ortamına göre de davranan bir insanım. Ama zihnimin çalışması daha açık. (C09FTR)*

*I: İstemezsiniz bir Türkle evli olmak?*

*F: Yok istemedim.*

*I: Bunu size dedirten ne acaba?*

*F: Ya tamamen E ile ilgili. Bu kültür şu kültür diyemeyeceğim ama E'nin yetiştirildiği kültürde kendimi çok daha rahat hissediyorum. Yani Türkle evli olsam böyle olmazdım (C07FTR)*

*Kendimi düşünüyorum Türk bir insanla birlikte olsaydım nasıl olurdu gibi düşünerek bir kıyaslama yapmaya çalışıyorum da daha farklı olabilirdi..Çok daha zor olabilirdi. Kesinlikle. Biliyorsun bu kısıtlama konuları, kıskançlık. Farklı olduğun şeyler olduğunda bunu sindirmekte çok zorlanıyorlar. Benim hep öyle oldu Türk erkekleriyle en azından. Bizim ilişkimizde böyle kısıtlamaların, belli kalıplara sokmaya çalışmaların olmaması beni daha rahat hissettiriyor. Kendim olduğum için ya da*

*yaptığım şeyler için yargılanmak durumunda kalacağım bir ilişkide olmamak çok güzel. (C05FTR)*

*Aynı kültürden bir insanla birlikte olsaydım onlar karşıma çıkacaktı ve ben çok tartışacaktım. Yani en basitinden mesela kıskançlık konusu. İşte biliyorsun yani Türk erkekleri vesaire bu konuda. (C06FTR)*

*Ben mesela düşünüyorum bir Türk erkeği olsa biraz zorlanabilirdim. Ne bileyim hemen evlendim, çocuğum oldu. Dinamikler değişti. Kaç sene ben yalnız yaşadım, arkadaşlarımla olmaya alışmışım. A'nın tavrı mesela o açıdan beni çok rahatlattı, hiç kısıtlanmadım. Ama işte o da mesela çok rahat gezer eder. İkimiz de birbirimize güveniyoruz bir de. O yüzden benim için en kritik şey kıskançlık olmaması oldu. Hoş kadınlarda da var bu! Kocalarına izin vermiyorlar falan. Ne olacak oysa ki! (C03FTR)*

*O yüzden bir Türk erkekle kendimi düşündüğümde çok daha zor bir ilişkim olabilirdi. Çok daha az huzurlu bir ilişki immatüritesinden dolayı daha çok kavgaların olduğu ne bileyim. (C04FTR)*

*Aynı kültürden iki birey.. Yani ben kendi deneyimlerimden şey yapabilirim. Uzun süreli ilişkilerimi düşünerek. Biraz daha baskınlar benim için Türk erkekleri... Bir tanesi çok dominantı. Şöyle işte kıskançlıktı işin içine giren, güzel olmayan şeyler. Ama sorsan şöyle seviyorum, ölüyorum geberiyorum. Ama bir yandan da seni hem kendine güvenini, hem varoluşunu, arkadaşlarıyla ilişkilerini kötü etkileyen şeyler bunlar. (C09FTR)*

*Mesela ilişkinin nasıl yürüyeceğine dair farklı şeylerin var. Yani offend etmemek adına değil ama doğruların ve yanlışların ne olduğuna dair farklı fikirlerin var. Onun versiyonu mesela kesinlikle daha özgürlükçü daha açık. Mesela bende onlar yoktu ve*

*bir sürü şey için özür diliyordum. O çok şaşırıyordu yani neden özür diliyorsun bir şey yapmadın. Çok normal, bu senin hakkın falan gibi şeyler. (C01FTR)*

