

İSTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM

COUPLE PLAYFULNESS AND EFFECTS OF PLAYFUL TECHNIQUES IN  
COUPLES THERAPY:  
AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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2019

Couple Playfulness and Effects of Playful Techniques in Couples Therapy:  
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Çift Oyunsallığı ve Çift Terapisinde Oyunsal Tekniklerin Kullanımının Etkileri:  
Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz

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Date of Thesis Approval:

Total Number of Pages: 108

Keywords (Turkish):

- 1) Oyunsallık
- 2) Çift Oyun Terapisi
- 3) Cansızlaşmış Çiftler
- 4) Türkiye
- 5) Fenomenolojik Analiz

Keywords (English):

- 1) Playfulness
- 2) Couple Play Therapy
- 3) Devitalized Couples
- 4) Turkey
- 5) Phenomenological Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Since the ancient times, the importance of playfulness has been discussed, researched, and has shaped psychological theories and interventions in psychotherapy. Even though couple playfulness is found to be connected with crucial aspects such as; relationship satisfaction, constructive communication, conflict resolution, intimacy, high self-esteem, creativity, exploration of the self and other, and fulfilled attachment needs; the research and implementation of play therapy with adults and couples are still very scarce. As the divorce rates increase and most of the couples seeking couples therapy are “devitalized” (missing the energy, affection, intimacy, joy, and fun) more research on couples play therapy has grown vital. This study aims to understand the couple playfulness in Turkey and examine the effects of couples therapy with playful techniques via phenomenological analysis. To understand the couples’ experiences of playfulness; interviews with four heterosexual Turkish couples were conducted, and they were supported with scales (Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Relationship Assessment Scale, Adult Playfulness Trait Scale, Communication Patterns Questionnaire, and Relational Humor Inventory). Then, they participated in an eight-week therapy with playful interventions, and post-interviews were conducted. Overall couple playfulness in Turkey was found to be linked with contradictory perceptions; immaturity, and childishness, with joy, happiness, intimacy, and safer communication. Couple therapy with playful techniques was found to not only validate previous research findings on the increased relationship satisfaction, playfulness, constructive communication, intimacy, couple bonding, and exploration of self and other; but also demonstrated their relationship with a change in the perception of playfulness in a positive direction and increased sexual desire and behavior. These results portray the importance of using playful techniques in clinical settings, especially with couples experiencing devitalization.

*Keywords:* playfulness, couples play therapy, devitalized couples, Turkey, phenomenological analysis

## ÖZET

Antik dönemlerden beri oyunsallığın önemi tartışılmış, araştırılmış ve psikolojik teori ve psikoterapiyi şekillendirmiştir. Çift oyunsallığı ilişki tatmini, yapıcı iletişim, çatışma çözümü, yakınlık, yüksek kendine güven, yaratıcılık, kendini ve bir başkasını keşfetme, bağlantı ihtiyaçlarının giderilmesi gibi çok önemli hususlarla ilişkilendirilse de yetişkinler ve çiftlerle oyun terapisi üzerine araştırma ve uygulama hala çok yetersiz kalmaktadır. Boşanma oranları arttıkça ve çift terapisine başvuran çoğu çift de “cansızlaşmış” (enerji, sevgi, yakınlık, keyif ve eğlenceden yoksun) hale geldikçe, çift oyun terapisi üzerine daha çok araştırma yapılmasının önemi oldukça artmıştır. Bu araştırma Türkiye’de çift oyunsallığını anlamak, oyunsal tekniklerle çift terapisinin etkilerini fenomenolojik analiz yöntemiyle incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çiftlerin oyunsallık deneyimlerini anlayabilmek için, dört heteroseksüel Türk çift ile mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiş ve ölçeklerle (Çift Uyum Ölçeği, İlişki Doyumu Ölçeği, Yetişkin Eğşence Eğilimi Ölçeği, İletişim Şekilleri Ölçeği, İlişkisel Mizah Envanteri) desteklenmiştir. Ardından çiftler, oyunsal müdahaleler içeren sekiz-haftalık bir terapi sürecine katılmış ve yeniden mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir. Türkiye’deki genel çift oyunsallığı, olgun olmama ve çocuksulukla beraber keyif, mutluluk, yakınlık ve daha güvenli iletişime dair çelişkili algılarla ilişkilendirilmiştir. Oyunsal tekniklere dayalı çift terapisi sadece ilişki tatmini, oyunsallık, yapıcı iletişim, yakınlık, bağlanma ve kendi ile diğerinin keşfinde bir artışı işaret eden geçmiş araştırma sonuçlarını desteklemekle kalmamış, oyunsallığa yönelik algının pozitifleşmesi ile cinsel arzu ve davranışta da bir artış olduğunu da göstermiştir. Bu sonuçlar, özellikle “cansızlaşmış” çiftlerle klinik bağlamlarda oyunsal teknikler kullanmanın önemini vurgulamıştır.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* oyunsallık, çift oyun terapisi, cansızlaşmış çiftler, Türkiye, fenomenolojik analiz



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of couples wait six years on average before seeking couples therapy, which unfortunately is taken to be a last exit before the bridge (Gottman, 1999). These couples usually experience similar symptoms: emotional, behavioral, and cognitive struggles such as; the decreased physical intimacy, emotional alienation, and communication obstacles that lower the relationship satisfaction, which cause a gridlock in the relationship and eventually lead to divorce (Gottman, 1999). While Belgium takes the lead with 71% on divorce rates, in Turkey it is 22%. Even though the divorce rate in Turkey is relatively low compared to other countries, it has increased rapidly by a 38% in the past decade (TÜİK, 2016), indicating the need to scholarly focus on the couple relationships in Turkey.

Divorce is found to be correlated with emotional, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms both for the couple and the children (Lorenz *et al.*, 1997; Amato, 2012; Chase-Lansdale *et al.*, 1995). Nevertheless, staying in a marriage with distress is not the solution either; depression, anxiety, secondary trauma, physical illnesses, and unhealthy social interactions are found to correlate with living in a household with high conflict, both for the couples and children (Rice, 2003; Amato, 2012, Johnson, 2003, Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001).

Research on romantic relationships reveal that the forgiveness, commitment, self-regulation, self-repair, realistic view of the relationship, satisfaction with communication and conflict resolution are linked with the relationship satisfaction, and also predicts the relational stability (Fowers *et al.*, 1996; Gottman & Notarius, 2002; Fincham, Stanley & Beach, 2007). However, for a gridlocked couple, one of the most important but the hardest thing to do is getting back to the stage where they used to enjoy each other's company, be flirtatious, humorous and playful among each other. From their research with a sample of 437 people Cuber and Harroff found five major types of marriages; conflict-habituated (involving observable tension and unresolved conflicts), devitalized (apathetic and

empty), passive-congenial (marriage as a sensible arrangement without affection, vital (enjoying each other but also have separate identities), and total marriage (additional to vital marriage, emotionally intense with mutual dependence) (1965). The most common type was found to be the devitalized couples; which lost the spark, intimacy, love, enjoyment of sex, fun, humor, excitement, playfulness, shared interests and mutual activities (Cuber & Harroff, 1965). Friedman states that the decrease in playfulness is significantly correlated with the marital distress (1973). Gottman and Levenson's longitudinal study reveals that the devitalized couples were one of the risky types in marriages, resolving in a divorce in an average of 16.2 years (2002). Additionally, intimate play is found to contribute positive bonding and communication, conflict reduction, and stabilization of marital relationship (Betcher, 1981). The recent literature also embraces play and playfulness as a significant inter-relational factor that correlates with the relationship satisfaction and stability (Vanderbleek et al., 2011; Aune & Wong, 2002; Johnson, 2003; Kennedy & Gordon, 2017).

Even though there are plenty of research revealing the benefits of playfulness both for the individual and the couple, the research on how to implement play and playfulness into couple's relationships in a psychotherapy setting are yet inadequate. In this regard, the aim of this study was to understand the presence of playfulness in romantic relationships in Turkey, to examine the effects of playful methods used in couples therapy on couple's relationship, and to propose a couples play therapy method for further examination.

## **1.1. WHAT IS PLAYFULNESS?**

### **1.1.1. Play and Playfulness**

The notion of play is recognized since the ancient Greek philosophy; play (*paidia*) shares the same roots with education (*paideia*), children (*paides*), and pedagogy (*paidagogia* - etymologically: learning by play) (Imre, 2009). Plato

viewed play as an instrument that encourages individual growth, leading to “good” living in a just society (Livescu, 2003).

Huizinga examined several different cultures’ approach on elements of play and found that the playfulness was composed of: movement/action, rhythmic movement, swinging and waving, insignificance, comparison, the divine, playful attention, contest, recreation, laughing, mocking, fun, humor, ceremony, affection and care (1950). Even though there is no common definition of adult play, previous research have defined adult play as something enjoyable, intrinsically motivated, joyful, fun, that which provides a sense of accomplishment, that is not goal oriented, and focused on the process of play itself (Ablon, 2001; Casado-Kehoe, Vanderbleek, & Thanasiu, 2007; Lauer & Lauer, 2000; Betcher, 1981; Terr, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Abramis, 1990). Schwarz and Braff sum up play as “a broad-based spectrum of consciousness and behavior that includes different degrees of freedom from constraint, openness, novelty, flexibility, lightheartedness, cooperation, humor, risk taking, trust, creativity, vulnerability and positive emotion that generates increased levels of positive emotion, behavioral flexibility, and interpersonal connection” (2011, p. 3).

Considering the variance in the definitions of play, the notion of family resemblance might be illuminating. According to the philosophical theory of family resemblance, the things which are thought to be in link with some major feature, might give us an alleged definition upon that shared feature (Wittgenstein, 1953). However, since they are rather connected by a series of coinciding similarities indicating a family resemblance, attempting to define those things with reference to a necessary feature which is common for all of them might be misleading (Wittgenstein, 1953). To explain this concept, Wittgenstein uses the analogy of play and game. Play involves various definitions within, and different notions of play or playfulness do not share one specific feature; rather it can be described as a set of “complicated network similarities overlapping and crisscrossing” (1953). In this research, rather than to suggest a single definition of play and playfulness, the existing components of play and playfulness provided by previous research will be regarded in line with the theory of family resemblance.

### **1.1.2. Animal Play**

Due to the evolutionary approach, the literature on animal play provides vital information on understanding the development and effects of human play. Play and playful behaviors are observed in animals in various contexts. Burghardt characterized playful activities of animals in five components; “incompletely functional in the context expressed; voluntary, pleasurable, or self-rewarding; different structurally or temporally from related serious behavior systems; expressed repeatedly during at least some part of an animal’s life span; and initiated in relatively benign situations” (2005, p.68).

Empirical and experimental research on the animal play behavior display that the animal play is positively correlated with emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and interactional development; adaptation to environment; and communicational, and problem-solving skills (Harlow, 1971; Fagen, 1981; Aldis, 1975; Pellis & Pellis, 2007). The rats deprived of play, show tremendously aggressive or avoidant behaviors as adults compared to the rats who were given at least one hour every day to play (Lore & Flannelly, 1977; Hol et al., 1999). Young male monkeys engage in play fights in order to get prepared for their roles in the adulthood where the mortality rates for adult monkeys gets much higher and both genders engage in play chasing, which serves as a practice to learn how to flee from predators (Drickamer & Vessey, 1973). Harlow’s infamous experiment reveals that the monkeys who were isolated and play-deprived from other monkeys for the first six months of their lives have showed emotional, social, behavioral and developmental delays in normal behaviors, and demonstrated the formation of abnormal behaviors (sucking behavior, excessive self-clinging, aggression, rocking, aggression) compared to normally reared monkeys (1970).

### **1.1.3. Child Play**

Since 1800’s, the emphasis on child play was made by the researchers from various fields. Four classical theories were formed to explain play. The surplus

energy theory basically believed that the play was an aimless way of excessive energy discharge after basic survival needs were met (Schiller, 1875). The recreational or relaxation theory argued that the play was used to restore the energy which were used during work (Lazarus, 1883). The practice or pre-exercise theory believed that the play's role is to motivate children to practice adult roles for future (Groos, 1901). Finally, the recapitulation theory suggested from an evolutionary view, that the play serves a cover for children to exhibit their primitive instincts which are not accepted in the societies of that time (Hall, 1906).

Modern theories lay more emphasis on the importance and necessity of play in normal development and use the benefits of child play in clinical contexts. Psychoanalytic theorists believe that the play serves as a tool for wish fulfillment, ego processes, corrective emotional experiences, conflict resolution, imitation of life and expertise gain on emotions and adult roles, for coping with traumatic experiences, narcissistic insults and emotional distress, for understanding the world and learning how to manage it (Freud, 1909; Hug-Hellmuth, 1921; Freud, 1946; Erikson, 1950; Klein, 1955; Takhvar, 1988). It is believed that the play has a catharsis role in children's lives; by serving a tool of reliving the negative emotions and life events with play and replacing them with positive ones. Play helps the children to understand these events or hidden negative emotions and desires; to search for alternative meanings which leads to communicate their feelings and transform the initial effects to a more pleasurable and meaningful state (Klein, 1955; Wehman & Abramson, 1976).

#### **1.1.4. Adult Play**

*“In every real man a child is hidden that wants to play.”*

— Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1883, p.57)

Even though play was shown to be a crucial variable in human development, literature and implications on adult play and playfulness are limited. As stated above, adult play involves an activity which is fun, spontaneous, and not goal

oriented. So far, playfulness has been described as form of creativity, curiosity, spontaneity, humor, and pleasure containing; and the playful people have been seen as approaching to activities in a non-serious attitude for self-enjoyment, as intrinsically-driven, fully-absorbed in activities, focused on the process of the activities, uninhibited, unconstrained by the rules, curious, spontaneous, comedic, gregarious, dynamic, high in fun seeking motivation (Glynn & Webster, 1992; Schaefer & Greenberg, 1997; Barnett, 1991, 2007; Guitard et al., 2005; Starbuck & Webster, 1991).

Although there is not a single inclusionary definition of play types, several researchers have provided various descriptions. Baxter have categorized the adult play as composed of private verbal code, verbal teasing, games, role-play, physical play, public performance, and gossip (1992). Colarusso added creativity and spectator play to the given definitions, wherein play provides new approaches to the exploration of the outside world and use of fantasies as a tool managing intrapsychic issues and conflicts via sports, games, music, movies, or books (1993). Ablon argued that the exploratory play, which is one of the three types of childhood play alongside to imaginative and amusement play, continued in the adulthood as well (2001). Lauer and Lauer described adult play in six categories; social play, cultural play, humor, games, physical play, and love play (2001). Blanche's research formed six patterns of play; mastery (activities requiring skills and involving challenges), restoration (stress reducing activities), heightened self-awareness (activities requiring physical, intellectual, or spiritual focus), adventure (energizing activities which are done for gaining new experiences), creation (process-oriented, flexibility boosting activities which produce novelties), and *ludos* (non-serious behaviors such as flirting, teasing, gossiping) (2002).

Colarusso states that the play serves similar functions in adulthood as it does in childhood, since the human development never ends (1993). Additional to the functions of children play discussed above, the research on adult play and playfulness reveals a significant range of benefits. Adult play and playfulness are found to be connected to stress release, role rehearsal, life mastery, pleasure, joy, fun, happiness, creativity, spontaneity, flexibility, empathy, constructive

communication skills, adaptation, decrease in interpersonal conflicts, improvement in relationships, unconscious or conscious fantasy fulfillment, resolving traumatic experiences and internal conflicts, regaining control of life, reorganizing life, increase in sense of belonging, increased healing, improved morale, increased motivation, problem solving abilities, learning, academic achievement, and gaining sense of accomplishment (Adatto, 1964; Jung, 1965; Klein, 1980; Auerhahn & Laub, 1987; Colarusso, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Schaefer & Greenberg, 1997; Terr, 1999; Guitard et al., 2005; Proyer, 2011; Yue et al., 2016). Jung (1921) believes that the creation is a product of the play instinct, and Winnicott (1971) states that the discovery of self comes from creativity, and in order to achieve creativity an individual must play. Playful attitude also helps one to gain a healthy distance from the problem, according to Etienne (1982) this leads an individual with disability to better apprehend the situation, adapt to it, and find meaning in life.

#### **1.1.4.1. Perception of Adult Play**

Even though the literature immensely presents how playfulness is crucial in adult life as well as intimate relationships, the inadequacy of research on clinical implications and of structurally adopting adult play therapy and couples play therapy as an applicable psychotherapy method could be due to the societal perception of how play is not accepted in adulthood (Lieberman, 1977; Klein, 1980; Solnit, 1998). Since the adult roles involve productivity and responsiveness, the perception of adult play as irresponsible, pointless, impractical, and a waste of time could be the reason of the lack of adult play observed both in the literature and in practice (Sutton-Smith, 2008; Klein, 1980). As stated by Lieberman, the “manifestation of joy and humor are less tolerated in adults (1977). In both Klein’s (1980) and Betcher’s (1977) studies, the couples reported embarrassment and concern of appearing childish when describing their play behaviors due to the negative cultural and societal beliefs on adult play.

Perception of adult play and playfulness seems to be contradicting; on one hand there are labels such as irresponsibility, immaturity, and laziness; on the other

hand adult play is an embedded and also a developing area in societies. These can be found in most of the reactions of athletes during sporting events; various content of the election campaigns in terms of their choice of music, dancing, banners and ads with puns, and humorous speech; several elements in protests and parades such as choice of clothes in LGBTI pride parades, the funny signs and slogans utilized. Adult play is also present with a wide range of playful elements in some holidays and rituals such as dressing up in costumes for Halloween, decorating Christmas trees, and wearing green St. Patrick's Day. Furthermore, increased playfulness is observed in work settings as well, such as the famous slides in the Google's offices, and the increasing number of workplace events like birthday celebrations, secret Santa gifts, picnics, drinking, and playing games to strengthen the team work and productivity.

Additionally, a gender difference on perception can also be discussed. Sayings such as the "Boys will be boys." and "manchild" reveals that the men are considered and allowed to be more playful from the society's point of view. This perception also fits in the family unit; it is found that, most of the fathers interact with their children by engaging in games or fun activities where mothers get stuck with stress promoting tasks such as feeding, putting them to sleep, and making them to do their homework (Musick et al., 2016).

As this research provides the first look on the playfulness in Turkey, the perception of play in Turkey is also discussed. Turkey also obtains contradictory perceptions of play and playfulness. Even though immaturity and irresponsibility are overtly linked with adult playfulness, Turkish culture contains many playful elements within: In various dance rituals (halay, horon, zeybek etc.) especially seen in celebratory events (Terzioğlu, 1992); coffeehouses (kahveler) which today, mainly used by men to play (card games, backgammon, okey etc.) and watch sports (Ulusoy, 2011); funny protest signs and slogans (such as writing spoilers from the T.V. show Game of Thrones on the road where protests were being held during Gezi protests) (Gürel, 2015); and gold days (altın günü) where women meet to socialize, bring gold to the host who serves them food, and talk, dance, play games (usually card games), and gossip.



A gender difference on the perception of play is observed in Turkey as well. Men are viewed as and given permission to never fully grow up and be more childish than women. A similar study shows in Turkey, that the fathers spend time with their children as their playmates, where the mothers take on responsibilities of the children's development and care (Taşkın & Erkan, 2009). On the other hand, there is also a contradictory factor; men are let to be more childish in some ways but need to be tough, strong, and capable as well: "Men don't cry. (*Erkek adam ağlamaz.*)". Although these values and meanings of being a man in Turkey have deep roots, the recent studies show that these are in transformation. It is found that although families transmit certain values to their children, today's families add some sense of affection and playfulness to this transmission, which is usually something novel to their family units. In this regard, especially fathers try to show affection and play behavior to their families which they were not able to receive from their fathers (Akyıl, 2012; Akçınar, 2017). A participant explains the changing value and perception of affection and playfulness in family units as: "Recently my father said: `Why are you letting your child sit on your lap? It is indecorous.` and I said `In your time I could not even come near you, now I let my children to come near me. So, I can know I am a father, and you can know that you are a grandfather.` Maybe it originates from my grandfather or maybe even his father. They never even let us play, they viewed it something like a sin. Now, it is free to play in my family." (Akçınar, 2017). In this study, 89% of the fathers were found to show affectionate behaviors (kissing, hugging, feeling close to his children etc.) towards their children, and 87% of them were found to engage in playful behaviors (joking around, playing games, enjoying spending time with them etc.) with their children (Akçınar, 2017).

### **1.1.5. Couple Play**

Many definitions and descriptions were suggested to comprehend couple play and playfulness. In previous research, the description of playfulness types in dyads includes; playful behavioral routines and rituals, private jokes, friendly insult

greetings, playful aggression or mock-fighting, verbal teasing or kidding, role-playing or fantasy enactments, playful nicknames, playing/watching sports, going to museums, having picnics, and basically “any pleasurable use of discretionary time” (Charles, 1983, p.4) (Alberts, 1990; Betcher, 1981; Lutz, 1982; Baxter, 1987; Oring, 1984).

On 1977, Betcher gave the first definition of intimate play in the literature as, “couple’s private language, sexual foreplay, wrestling and tickling, and various form of joking and teasing.” (p.iv). Later, Klein described couple playfulness as a joyful expression of one’s state of well-being which is acknowledged by the mutual cueing within the intimate dyad (1980). Her definition included four major elements; playfulness includes a pretend realm, mutual cueing, affect of delight, and absence of aggression, fear, anxiety, depression, and guilt (1980). On 1981, Betcher detailed his definition as; “a spontaneous, mutual interplay in a dyadic relationship whose content and/or style tends to be idiosyncratic and its personally elaborated by the couple”. And additional to the previously described couple play types, he stated that the playful attitude to an activity is important as the content of the playful activity; meaning that, in fact, any activity could involve playfulness with the right attitude (1981). Lutz added components of idiosyncrasy and mild regression to Betcher’s (1977) definition of couple play (1982). Baxter identified eight types of dyad play; private verbal code (the most frequent type 21%, all forms of playfulness which revolve around idiomatic expressions- shared pet names, inside jokes etc.), role-playing (20% frequency, imitating each other or someone/something else), verbal teasing (17%), prosocial physical play (15%, “transformation of a conventionally prosocial act into playfulness”), antisocial physical play (12%, mock fighting, wrestling, hitting etc.), games (8%, game like plays that involves a winner), gossip (2%), and public performances (2%, “public enactments in order to observe the reaction from the target” eg. a couple mock fighting in public to watch others freak out) (1992). Lauer and Lauer defined three rules for couple play: it should be not work, be enjoyable for both partners, and result in feeling better about themselves and their relationships (2002). Vanderbleek defined couple play as “pleasurable for both partners, involved a suspension of self-

consciousness, a release of emotion, was undertaken solely for the process, and resulted in positive feelings about self and the partner” (2005, p.4).

Research revealed various significant functions of couple play and playfulness. It is found that the playfulness promoted and positively correlated with the marital adjustment, couple bonding, intimacy, sexuality, self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, positive affects (where lack of playfulness revealed much more negative affect), increased positive emotions, and relationship closeness (Betcher, 1981; Lutz, 1982; Klein, 1980; Baxter, 1992; Aune & Wong, 2002; Lauer & Lauer, 2003; Vanderbleek, 2005; Bazzini et al., 2007; Schwarz & Braff, 2011; Proyer et al., 2018). Lutz also found that the play was a better predictor of marital adaptation than intimacy (1982). Couple play was also found to be “making light of any present difficulties” (Klein, 1980), by serving as a tool for tension release, conflict resolution, constructive communication, and a container for difficult situations without jeopardizing the intimacy (Betcher, 1981; Klein, 1980; Lutz, 1982; Lauer & Lauer, 2003; Vanderbleek, 2005; Casado-Kehoe et al., 2007; Schwarz & Braff, 2011). Intimate playfulness also creates a safe space where individuals can be themselves, and even allow them to engage in behaviors which might have been embarrassing for them without the playful aspect (Betcher, 1982; Klein, 1980). It also enhances creativity both individually and as a couple (Betcher, 1981; Abramis, 1990; Lauer & Lauer, 2003; Schwarz & Braff, 2011). Couples stated that if they would break up, they would miss “the unique manner of relatedness that could never be the same with anyone else” the most; that the play provides a wider range of shared communication repertoire which is authentic for the couple (Betcher, 1981) and that a special form of intimacy was formed when one’s partner picked up the play signals of the other (Klein, 1980). Klein (1980) and Ablon (2001) also states that the couple play has elements of mastery likewise child play, due to the inner assurance, the overcoming of difficulties and risks with play. Csikszentmihalyi found that the couples think one of the most important function of playfulness was the excitement of exploring something new about self and other (1997). Finally, the couple play also promotes mutual growth by fulfilling

attachment needs for the comfort, safety, and connection via adaptive regression (Betcher, 1981; Schwarz & Braff, 2011; Lauer & Lauer, 2003; Johnson,2003).

## **1.2. THE USE OF PLAY IN THERAPY**

### **1.2.1. Child Play Therapy**

*“The playing adult steps sideward into another reality; the playing child advances forward to new stages of mastery.”*

— Erik H. Erikson (1950, p. 199)

Psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories on the functions of child play evolved into a play therapy method for children in clinical settings. Therapists observe the child’s play, as the play becomes the transition object which links child’s inner world to external reality; by letting the child to play with whatever toy he wants in the room and engage with the therapist in the play, the therapists mainly aim to let the child to relive the distressing emotions in the session and provide a corrective emotional experience in a safe setting (Axline, 1974; Kjolrud, 2003; Klein, 1980; Adatto, 1964).

Cognitive and developmental theories also lay major emphasis on the child play and use interventions with play in various forms during the psychotherapy with children and their families. Piaget suggests that the play develops in three stages for children; sensory-motor play, symbolic play, and game with rules (1962) which serve for cognitive, literacy, social, and behavioral development. According to Erikson, the play serves as a tool for working through traumatic experiences, developing social interactions, self-expression, exercising newly developed abilities, and mastering complex life situations (1974). Additional to the Erikson’s and Piaget’s views on play, Vygotsky believes that the play also enhances abstract thinking among children, that is also associated with learning adult experiences (1962).

Research on play therapy for children and their families reveal significant benefits on cognitive skills, social skills, interactional abilities, working with

trauma, behavioral problems, emotion regulation, memory, academic success, and in general mental health disorders (Bratton & Landreth, 1995; Bratton et al., 2005; Kottman, 2011; Landreth, 2012; Meany-Walen et. al, 2014; Blanco et. al., 2015).

### **1.2.2. Adult Play Therapy**

Even though the implications of adult play in the clinical setting are getting wider, the literature on adult play therapy and its efficacy on individuals are scarce; but the results are promising and significant.

Using dolls with elderly therapy patients revealed; strengthened therapeutic bond, decreased the communication barrier, increased sensory stimulation, reduced agitation, and increased interaction (Alander et. al., 2013; Ehrenfeld, 2003; Libin & Cohen-Mansfield, 2004). Therapeutic doll play used with a patient with complex sexual trauma increases the emotion regulation, interaction; and improves the development of the self, and interpersonal and social functioning (Birnbaum, 2005). Sandplay therapy with adults were found to be helping the patients with promoted insight, making meaning of difficult life situations, decreasing PTSD symptoms, improving memory, encouraging playfulness, increasing therapeutic bond and psychological well-being (Carey, 1999; Morrison & Homeyer, 2008; Draper, Ritter, & Willingham, 2003; Lagutina et al., 2011; Moon, 2006; Doyle & Magor-Blatch, 2017). Integrative play therapy helps patients to engage with the therapists, especially by enhancing safety and trust, mastering cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills, and increasing social interactions (Olson-Morrison, 2017). Play therapy with adults, who have developmental disabilities, has shown the increased ability to express needs and desires, increased self-control and self-directedness, adaptations to transitions, and empathy (Demanchick et al., 2003).

### **1.2.3. Couples Play Therapy**

The literature provides us the benefits of couple play on the individual and the relationship, the possible functions of it in the clinical setting, as well as the

recommendations of implementing play into couples therapy. However, there are only a few studies on the effects of play therapy with couples. Kennedy and Gordon conducted a case study of a ten-week integrated play therapy with nine different play methods; genogram and photographs, sand play, art, music, Jenga, Pictionary, poetry, video games, and puppets (2017). Their results show major decrease in relationship discord, increase in satisfaction towards each other, increase in intimacy, and increase in frequency and range of playful activities (Kennedy & Gordon, 2017). Albert presents a theoretical framework for sandplay therapy with couples and based on the therapeutic outcomes states that the sandplay therapy “can facilitate transformation in the couple dynamics, revealing unconscious conflicts symbolically, thus providing the couple with the possibility of reflection and the opportunity to reorganize their psychological contents in a healthy manner”, and thus he uses sandplay therapy with couples in clinical settings (2015, p.33). The effects of the therapy method are; a created holding environment and a containment that makes room for conflict exploration in a safe space without the defensive attitudes; a possibility to access the unconscious within a creative setting; and a rich transference and countertransference materials which lead to a deeper understanding (2015). Rober’s case studies with two couples, regarding usage of relational drawings in couples therapy, revealed that drawing helps the couples to take a step back from the daily conflicts and irritations, listen to each other without blaming, to discuss difficult topics, and it provides an area to think on the important components in their intimate dyad (2009). Wiener and Cantor’s case study of 10-session couples therapy with the ‘Rehearsal for Growth’ (improvisational theatre techniques) displays an increased constructive communication, where the couple is accepting and opening to each other; shows a greater responsiveness to each other’s perceptions; experiences a decreased fear of arguments and self-expression; and an increased feeling of being a team (2002).

#### **1.2.4. Playful Therapy / Playful Therapist**

*“Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together. The corollary of this is that where playing is not possible then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play.”*

— Donald Woods Winnicott (1971, p.38)

As Winnicott (1971) states that the psychotherapy is a space where not only the patient, but also the therapist play together. Miscellaneous vital functions of play are also veridic in the psychotherapy since the human development and personal growth are the main aims. Play and playfulness can be implemented in therapy with all types of clients with all types of struggles.

Even though there is not a specific approach focusing solely on couples play therapy, nearly all approaches on couples therapy involves variance of playful interventions: PACT’s direct interventions of couple play (exercises such as Come Play with Me and Read Me) and indirect playful interventions, Gottman’s emphasis on couple play, Four Horsemen and Gentle Start Up techniques, Satir’s family sculpting technique; and various other techniques such as enactments, externalizations, miracle question, role-plays, and empty chair, play genogram (Tatkin, 2011; Gottman & Gottman, 2015; Satir, 1972; Harway, 2005; Gurman et al., 2015).

Several couples therapists state that the couple play can be used as a structured intervention method with couples for a wide range of couple problems, such as the mental health problems, conflict resolution, emotion regulation, and constructive communication, primarily due to the functions of playfulness which give the couple the needed creativity, motivation, affection, and a sense of partnership that creates a safe and loving space to overcome difficulties (Betcher, 1981; Baxter, 1992; Lauer & Lauer, 2002; Johnson, 2003; Markman et al., 2003; Casado-Kehoe et al., 2007; Schwarz & Braff, 2011). Additionally, positive couple interactions lead to an increase of resiliency in the case of negative and difficult life

events (Markman et al., 2003); since playfulness is found to be growable, play therapy would help to increase the playfulness and consequently to increase the functions of playfulness which would result in an increased resiliency as a couple.

In a play therapy, the playfulness of the therapist becomes more important. Schaefer states: “We [as psychotherapists] must be playful because we cannot expect our clients to go anywhere that we won’t” (2003). Marks-Tarlow suggests that the play is a major source for implicit learning and the play in the relational space between the therapist and the patient leads their relationship to creativity and personal growth that enhances the search for a meaning whether it is done consciously or unconsciously (2012; 2014). She also lays emphasis on the playfulness of the therapist, by stating the importance of the role of play in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development; and social flexibility and complexity which are very important aspects in the development of clinical intuition; primarily to form a safe and holding environment that allows new experiences, thoughts, behaviors and feelings leading to deeper self-awareness and change (Marks-Tarlow, 2012; 2014). Couples seeking help, usually feel very far away from a playful state in their relationships; thus, additional to the functions of play, therapist who is playful could also serve as a tool to trigger for the couple to engage in playfulness (Schaefer & Greenberg, 1997).

### **1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

As the divorce rates and people affected negatively from their consequences get higher, a relatively novel area of couple playfulness has grown much more significant. Lately, most of the couples seeking couples therapy are rather devitalized couples. In the case of these devitalized couples, the re-energizing of the relationship can be seen as a necessary first step in the psychotherapeutic process to work on other issues. In this regard, the enhancing of playful exchanges between couples have shown to contribute to this aim. With all the positive functions of couple play, and benefits of using play in psychotherapy, the researcher wants to widen the literature on possible effects of couples play therapy on the



intimate relationship. Since the couple playfulness is an untouched area in Turkey, firstly the phenomenological analysis of couple playfulness was made to obtain a deep and meaningful understanding of the phenomenon. Secondly, an eight-week couple play intervention program with games and playful activities was generated to comprehend the effects of playful techniques on the intimate dyad.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

##### **The Primary Investigator**

I am a clinical psychology masters student specializing on couples and family therapy. As a result of my courses on the couples and family therapy, and human development, I came to realize that even though play has a major impact on our lives starting from birth and play therapy with children and their families is a well-used successful method; research on and application of play therapy with adults and/or couples were neglected. Additionally, knowing that this was an untouched area in Turkey, where I believe is in a time which it needs playfulness more than ever, I wanted to further comprehend how play and playfulness presents itself in relationships and whether this could be an intervention method for couples therapy.

##### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was a) understanding how playfulness presents itself in heterosexual, Turkish couples' relationships, b) examining the effects of playfulness on the individuals and the relationship, c) figuring out if playfulness could be increased by interventions, and d) examining effects of playful interventions as a therapy outcome. The first research question was; "How playfulness presents itself in romantic relationships?" and the second question was; "What are the effects of using playful techniques and interventions in couples therapy on the couples' personal and relationship experiences?"

## **2.2. QUALITATIVE APPROACH**

I, as the primary investigator (PI), chose to investigate the experience and effects of playfulness using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2003). A qualitative approach was chosen as the research method for this study in order to gain a deep and meaningful understanding on the concept of playfulness, involving the participants' subjective experiences, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings; and the effects of the intervention on the individuals and the couple relationship, which have never been researched in Turkey. Qualitative approach also lets PI to construct the playfulness phenomenon with the participants own experiences by induction (May, 1997).

## **2.3. SAMPLE**

The sample criteria for the study were (a) Turkish, (b) heterosexual couples who (c) were aged in between 18-45, and (d) were in a committed relationship for at least six months and at most five years. Following the ethics committee's approval, snowball sampling was used to obtain a homogeneous sample; the primary investigator (PI) announced the study by informing acquaintances and colleagues and emailing to mail groups (psikoalan and bilgiklinikcamia). When couples started to get back, the PI had a conversation with them about the details of the study and set meetings for the pre-interviews. The PI stopped recruiting process after four couples were set for the study.

Following Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) suggestions on qualitative research, a small sample size was chosen in order to focus on the specific experiences to fully understand the phenomenon. Additional to the starting criteria, every individual turned out to be at least upper-middle class with a minimum of a college education. One couple was married, and the others were in committed relationships. Due to receiving inquiries from mail groups consisted of psychologists, every couple ended up consisting of at least one psychologist. Even though this will be discussed in the limitations section, the study came upon to be

more specified and helped us understand the experiences of couples which consisted at least one psychologist.

## **2.4. DATA COLLECTION AND ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS**

During the pre-interviews, after receiving each participant's informed consent, a demographic questionnaire, Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), Communication Patterns Questionnaire (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984), Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), Relational Humor Inventory (De Konig & Weiss, 2002), and Adult Playfulness Trait Scale (APTS) (Shen, Chick, & Zinn, 2014) was administered to each participant and then the interview was conducted. Scales took approximately 20 minutes and the interview an hour. One week after the pre-interviews, 8-session intervention program started. One week after ending the 8-week intervention program, post-interviews and the assessment scales were conducted. Post-interviews were mainly similar to the pre-interviews with a change of few questions to avoid redundancy (e.g. participant's childhood experiences of play). Finally, at the end of the process each participant's experience of the study and their feedbacks were discussed.

### **2.4.1. Assessment Instruments**

*Demographic Information Form.* The form included questions regarding the age, gender, level and field of education, employment status, monthly income and relationship duration of the participants.

*Dyadic Adjustment Scale.* The DAS is a self-report measure developed by Spanier (1976) to assess one's adjustment and quality of relationships by examining the subscales of level of dyadic satisfaction, cohesion, consensus, and affectional expression in their romantic relationships. The scale consists 32 items. They are primarily answered on a 2-point dichotomous items as "yes" or "no", 5-, 6- and 7-

point Likert-type scale. Most items use 6-point Likert scale, with options scored from 0 to 5; where 0 stands for “always disagree”, 1 stands for “almost always disagree”, 2 stands for “frequently disagree”, 3 stands for “occasionally disagree”, 4 stands for “almost always agree”, and 5 stands for “always agree”. The total score changes in range from 0-151 and higher scores show greater relationship satisfaction. Cronbach’s alpha were reported as .96 for the overall scale and ranged from .73 to .94 for the four subscales. As for its criterion validity, the correlation between the DAS and a similar instrument, Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale, was found as .86. The DAS was translated and adapted into Turkish by Fıfılođlu and Demir (2000). Cronbach’s alphas were reported .92 for overall scale and they range from .75 to .83 for each subscale.

*Communication Patterns Questionnaire.* The CPQ is a self-report measure developed by Christensen and Sullaway (1984) to assess partners’ behaviors in three stages of conflict; when some problem arises in the relationship, during discussion of a relationship problem, and after discussion of a relationship. The scale consists of 35 items answered on a 9-point Likert-type scale questionnaire ranging from 1 (very unlike) to 9 (very likely). The scale includes three subscales of communication patterns; self-demand/partner-withdraw, partner-demand/self-withdraw, and constructive communication. Cronbach’s alphas of these subscales range from .62 to .82. The scale is translated and adapted to Turkish by Malkoç (2001). The Turkish version of the scale consists of 25 items answered on a 9-point Likert-type scale questionnaire ranging from 1 (very unlike) to 9 (very likely). Cronbach alphas of this subscales range between .65 and .80 for women, between .57 50 and .85 for men, and .61 and .81 for total sample. The Cronbach’s alpha of the total communication score is found to be .86 for women and .84 for men (Malkoç, 2001).

*Relationship Assessment Scale.* The RAS is a self-report measure developed by Hendrick (1988) to assess general relationship satisfaction. The scale has 7

Likert-type items, responses ranging between 1 (low satisfaction) and 5 (high satisfaction). The Cronbach's alphas vary from .57 to .76. The correlation between the RAS and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was found as .80 in the sample of dating couples. Turkish translation and adaptation of the RAS was conducted by Curun (2001); Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .86.

*Relational Humor Inventory.* RHI is a self-report measure developed by De Koning and Weiss (2002) to assess how humor is used in romantic relationships. The scale has 34 Likert-type items, responses ranging between 1 (Not true at all) and 7 (Very true). The scale has three subscales for both self and partner: Instrumental Humor, Positive Humor, and Negative Humor. Cronbach's alphas vary from .72 to .84. Turkish translation and adaptation of RHI were conducted by Bacanlı et al. (2012); Cronbach's alphas of the scale vary from .56 to .85.

*Adult Playfulness Trait Scale.* APTS is a self-report measure developed by Shen, Chick, and Zinn (2014) to assess individual's disposition for uninhibited and spontaneous fun. The scale has 19 5-point Likert-type items ranging between 1 "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree". The scale has three subscales; fun seeking motivation, uninhibitedness, and spontaneity. Cronbach's alpha was found  $\alpha = .87$  and its subscales ranged between  $\alpha = .68 - .87$ . Turkish translation and adaptation of APTS were conducted by Yurt et al. (2016); Cronbach's alpha was found  $\alpha = .85$  and its subscales ranged between  $\alpha = .58 - .84$ .

#### **2.4.2. Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the PI. They took place in the PI's office, the Satir Human Development and the Family Therapy Institute and lasted approximately an hour. The data collection tool was mainly the interviews because the playfulness was an area which have not been investigated in Turkey before and there isn't even an actual translation of the word "playful" in Turkish

which can consist of all its meanings. Therefore, the research topic was considered to be complex, and this required the PI to explain and elaborate on some questions during the interview (Kumar, 2011; Sarantakos, 1988). In order to receive elaborated and personal information from the participants regarding their thoughts and feelings about these topics, semi-structured and open-ended questions were used to give space to the participants to be more flexible and authentic with their answers in a wider range (May, 1997). To observe the couple's interaction and the shared meanings of playfulness, the couples were interviewed together (Chesla, 1995; Racher et. al., 2000). All interviews were audio and videotaped, and later transcribed.

A pilot interview was carried out prior to the actual research. It helped the PI to understand how interview questions were in line with the research topic and how were they perceived. The data collected in this interview was not included in the analysis.

The interviews began when there was a consensus that both individuals understood the research purpose, legal and ethical principles, and they had signed the consent forms. Each participant was presented with the same set of questions relating to their overall experiences and perception of playfulness, play history, relationship history, communication patterns, problem solving skills and the impact which these have on their lives.

## **2.5. INTERVENTIONS**

The average length of face-to-face therapy without homework assignments was found to be eight sessions after a longitudinal examination of couples therapy was made (L'abate et al., 2005). Therefore, there were total of eight sessions, one per a week which PI was the therapist for all sessions. Each session was 50 minutes long and, in each session, both parties of the couple were present. Intervention schedules were the same for all couples.

Several playful techniques were selected for the intervention program by PI and the dissertation advisor. Each session started with a reflection to last session's

technique and effects of it on the couple's past week. Additionally, each session was designed to obtain at least one playful technique, brief information of the technique by the therapist, psychoeducation regarding the technique, and couple's feedback (thoughts and feelings) on the technique.

#### Session 1: Mirroring (Wiener, 1998)

Couples are placed face to face and chose the roles of leader and follower among themselves. The leader moves slowly and continuously from the waist up and the follower tries to imitate the movements like a mirror while not breaking eye contact throughout the whole game. The therapist calls "Switch" during the game which means switching the roles. After some time, therapist calls "Mutual" which means there are no roles and the couple must find a way to imitate each other without any particular leader in place.

This game was selected to promote impulse control, role shifts, intimate connection and cooperation among couples. Also, the game creates a safe place that helps the couples give and receive physical offer without touching each other. Using the peripheral vision to track the movements help one to trust their impulses. Imitation of the partner boosts collaboration among them when one partner willingly gives up control while other receives total cooperation. Finally, mutual phase boosts the sense of belonging and partnership.

#### Session 2: Collaborative Drawing Technique (Smith, 1985)

There is a big blank paper and multicolored crayons on a table and one chair in front of it. First each participant selects a particular crayon. The therapist holds a stopwatch to time the drawing process. The couple decides who will start the game. One person sits at the chair and starts drawing whatever he wants till the therapist calls "Stop" and then they change places. For each turn the time spent on the chair decreases, starting from 30 seconds to 3 seconds. Any kind of verbal communication is not allowed during the game.

The game was selected to reveal information of the individuals within the context of their romantic relationship and create an open space to discuss



boundaries, teamwork, individuality, and deeper meanings of the painting which is created mutually. The decreasing time intervals boosts the game-like atmosphere which helps to diminish conscious cognitive processes. This allows one to act more with their impulses spontaneously.

#### Session 3: 36 Questions (Aron et al., 1997)

A set of 36 questions was created by Aron et al. (1997) to create closeness in an experimental context which were studied with individuals who did not know each other. The study showed greater closeness levels over small-talk tasks. Couple is placed face to face and they answer each question one by one. During the conversation the therapist mainly stays distant not to interject the dynamic.

This method was selected to promote intimacy, affection, and vulnerability while enhancing curiosity. Even though the questions were designed for people who do not know each other, the content of the questions helps the couples who are in a romantic relationship as well because it leads to an exploration of self and other. This activity was selected in order to help the couples experience the kindling of the curiosity in long term relationships which is so easy to lose.

#### Session 4: Body Drawing of the Partner / Body Mapping (MacCormack & Draper, 1987)

In art therapy this technique can be used for several functions which all involve one's connection with his body. In our study, this was used for every individual in order them to learn about their bodily sensations the reasons of their physical reactions, alongside with getting to know their partner's system. Additional to these, empathy is enhanced due to a development of better understanding on each other's physical reactions.

First, one lies down on a big piece of paper and his partner draws the borders of his body and vice versa. After the body images are done, they're put side by side. One by one the therapist calls different emotions and ask the participants to choose specific colors for each of them. Finally, the participants have to display the effects

of these emotions by coloring and drawing whatever they want on their body images. Overall, three negative and three positive emotions were worked with.

#### Session 5: Inside / Outside Box - Self Box (Farrell-Kirk, 2001)

Using boxes is a very common art therapy tool. In this case the use of boxes was mainly due to its functions of containment, symbolism of personal borders, and exploration of self and the other. There are several ways to use “Self-Box” or “Inside / Outside Box” in a therapy context. In our study the box was symbolizing one’s self; inside of the box was a symbol of one’s inside (inner feelings, thoughts, behaviors, wishes, fears etc.) and outside of the box was a symbol of one’s outside (how he thinks he is perceived by others, how he acts around people, basically his feelings, thoughts, and behaviors perceived by others).

Everyone gets a box and given a brief information about the symbolism of the method. There are several magazines, newspapers, and multicolored crayons present for them to choose whatever they like to cut and stick on their boxes representing their inner and outer selves. At the end of the process the couple discusses the chosen figures with the help of the therapist’s questions.

This game creates a contained environment to express one’s true self in a secure place and enhances empathy among the couple while boosting curiosity towards each other.

#### Session 6: Emote Me and Read Me (Tatkin, 2012)

Emote Me: Couple is sat across each other and asked to complete three tasks. First each has to do / say something to their partner which would make him smile brightly, then something complementary to make him move, and finally something to make him excited.

This exercise reveals how much they know each other and also how much there is still left to find out about each other, while making one to test their knowledge on their partner in a game-like way. It also promotes playfulness among the couple while enhancing positive feelings and a comfort zone among each other.

Read Me: Without using any verbal cues one chooses an emotion, acts it out, and asks the other to guess the emotion. The game is played one by one for approximately three emotions each. This exercise mainly used for couples to learn more about their partner's emotions and their way of showing them. Both playful techniques were generated by Stan Tatkin and they aim for the couple to eventually become each other's user manual.

#### Session 7: Gentle Start-Up (Gottman & Gottman, 2015)

This exercise is used to replace the "Four Horsemen" (criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling which were found to be extremely toxic communication ways among couples that correlates with separation and/or divorce) with much more beneficial communication techniques and conflict management skills.

The couple is first given a psychoeducation about the Four Horsemen and the consequences of using these kinds of communication among couples on their relationship and on their individual well-being. Then the couple is offered several techniques (beneficial time-outs, "I" language instead of "You", avoiding generalizations, describing the situation without judgements, expressing needs in positive terms) which could be used instead of them. Following the psychoeducation, they were asked to argue about an important topic which have not been resolved yet. The therapist's job is to use the buzzer whenever she hears an example of the Four Horsemen, to ask the couple to determine what the problem was, and to ask them to use the techniques that they have just learned to replace them.

This exercise provides new communication skills and problem-solving abilities. With the buzzer the exercise gets into a game-like state which lowers the tension and organically creates a team among the couple. At the end mainly, a hope for having healthier arguments and sense of partnership are enhanced.

Session 8: Come Play with Me (Tatkin, 2012) & The Fun List (Hendrix, 2008)

Come Play with Me: A safe place is created by the therapist which both individuals would feel free to move without a risk of injury. The task is for the couples to play in the whatever way they want. There are two rules; not talking, in order to not disrupt the free playing process but sounds are allowed, and not hurting each other. A safe word is agreed on before starting to play to let them pause or end the exercise if they like. They are not provided with toys but they have been told that they can use any object around them if they like to.

This intervention is used to promote playfulness, relaxation, security and communication among the couple. This task also creates a new language among the couple and helps them to connect on a deeper unconscious level by reminding their childhood's free play activities. Being able to play with each other without any boundaries is not experienced by most of the adults.

The Fun List: The couple makes separate lists of fun and exciting activities which they enjoy doing with their partners. Then they share their lists with each other and create a third list which combines all the items. At the end, the couple picks one item on the list and starts doing it at least once, every week.

This intervention is mainly to help the couple to remember the ways they used to have fun with each other. As they have fun together, they start to identify each other as source of fun, pleasure and safety which results in an increased emotional bond.

## **2.6. DATA ANALYSIS**

The interviews were audio and video recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Following the steps of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the PI analyzed the transcripts; re-read the interviews several times with the field-notes; took descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual exploratory notes such as tone of voice, laughter, emphasized wordings, pauses, and affectionate behaviors (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et. al., 2009). From the initial notes, codes were formed and then themes were developed accordingly. Two triangulated investigators (TI), a

couples and family therapist and a PhD candidate sociologist, analyzed the data independently and assisted the primary investigator in coding and labeling the emergent themes to reduce the potential for researcher bias. Scale results were also used to support interview findings. Additional to the theme clusters, the effects of the intervention were analyzed for every couple in connection with the themes and scale results.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESULTS**

In order to demonstrate the effects of the intervention, the themes which emerged from the analysis of interviews are explained in two chapters according to the research questions; a) “How playfulness presents itself in romantic relationships?” and b) “What are the effects of using playful techniques and interventions in couples therapy on the couples’ personal and relationship experiences?”

Overall a total of eight themes emerged: a) Challenges of Being Playful as an Adult, Couple Play Experience, Effects of and Expectations on Couple Play, Conditions of Couple Play b) Couple Play Experiences, Learning New Things About Self and Other, New Interaction Tool, and Strengthened Relationship. For clarity, the quotes of the participants are labeled as M1, F4, etc.; here the numbers are identified as the interview order and the letters are identified as Male / Female.

#### **3.1. PRE-INTERVIEW THEMES**

##### **3.1.1. Challenges of Being Playful as an Adult**

Throughout the pre-interviews the couples stressed that, even though play and playfulness had a place in their lives, play contradicts with the adult lifestyle expected by the society. This theme involves the subthemes of leisure time activity, concerns of childishness, and play changes in time.

##### **Leisure Time Activity**

Two opposite opinions were found regarding the association between play and playful activities with leisure time. Many individuals have identified play and playfulness as time consuming. The participants supposedly struggled with finding time to fit play in their busy schedules. One participant explained that his job causes

him to feel as if he does not have any time for hobbies, let alone playful activities; “You can’t find time [referring play], you can’t even read a novel. You should go read something in this area and research something in that area [regarding work]. I can’t even enjoy myself when I’m playing, because of this.” (M1) Demanding work schedules and the feelings of inadequacy leads them to have little spare time and play does not make the list.

On the other hand, filling their time with playful activities was found to be pleasurable and beneficial. “Maybe playful activities are a tool to spend a very nice and quality time.” (M4) “I believe sometimes when you have nothing to talk about, you can create a synergy with play and playfulness in your spare time.” (M3) Even though finding time for playful activities does not seem to be the participants first choice to spend their free time; in this case, it is still thought to be a productive and beneficial way to spend time. Moreover, the participants regard play mainly as a free-time activity, rather than something that is diffused to the everyday life. So, as they mainly associate play with free-time, the perceived lack of free-time becomes the most-common internalized constraint or excuse for them not to play.

### **Concerns of Childishness**

In all the interviews, the most commonly observed perception of play and playfulness was a negatively toned childishness. The participants correlated play with child-like irresponsible and immature behaviors, which are not accepted in the “adult world” according to them. Thus, the perception of childishness was found to be leading the individuals to engage less in play or playful activities. “At that moment it is positive [referring playing experience] but when it lasts longer than it should, I feel it gets negative. I feel like a very empty person.” (M2) It appears that the experience of play is subconsciously linked to the idea of not being productive like a “proper adult”, which leads to avoiding play or not enjoying oneself while playing, as demonstrated in the previous example. Additionally, the participants not only internalize the feeling of childishness, but they also receive negative feedback from their partners accordingly. A woman participant stated that, “I am disturbed

by him constantly playing in the house. I perceive this as childishness... I sometimes criticize him, like a child, to do more productive things.” (F3) regarding her partner’s playing behavior.

### **Play Changes in Time**

Participants’ play history was also asked in order to fully understand the play behavior and its transformation. All individuals had a rich play history; women were mainly playing with dolls and playing house while men were playing with other children and sports. Throughout time, play type seemed to change into board, computer, console, and card games. However, after the college years, a difference in play behavior was observed between the genders. Most men have stated that, even though perceiving play as part of their lives sometimes makes them feel “empty”, they all engage in playful activities and play games by themselves or with their friends. For the woman participants, individual play have almost ended, rather than changing types: All the woman participants engage in playful activities with their friends, or some with their partners, but not by themselves. “She doesn't like to play. If we are playing a game, believe that it [the idea to play] is coming from outside.” (M3) “I do not play individually, thinking about it I haven’t played any kind of game in a long time, neither by myself or nor with my partner.” (F1)

#### **3.1.2. Couple Play Experience**

The expression of play and playful behaviors in the relationship was another area focused by the PI to understand the phenomenon. Theme of expression of couple play is divided into two sub-themes: variations of play and time course of play.



## **Variations of Play**

How play and playful behaviors present themselves in a relationship was an important question of the study in order to understand the range of playful behaviors of couples. The most common playful behaviors in the participants' relationships were: going to a play, theatre, cinema, sport event, dancing, playing sports, engaging in daily activities playfully, playing (board games, cards, computer games, and games which are created by the couple) together, playing with friends, inside jokes, playful sexual behaviors (role plays, costume usage, joking around...), baby talk, using affectionate nicknames, and being spontaneous. A couple who states that they don't play "real" games, have expressed their play behavior as turning daily activities into their own games: "I believe cooking is a game for us." (M3) "We act as a team, it turns into a team play (...) and it makes us feel joyful and happy at the end." (F3)

It also seems that there is no necessary link between the areas; a couple might not be very playful in the everyday life, but they might engage more in playful sexual behaviors: A couple identifying themselves as not very playful among each other have stated that "They [regarding playful behaviors] are much more common in our sexual life, than our normal lives." (M1).

## **Time Course of Play**

The variety and frequency of most of the couples' playful behaviors in the relationship seems to decrease in time. "I believe that these [playful behaviors] were much common before our marriage, now everything is more monotonous; we both work and come home tired and just want to sit and do nothing." (F4) "We used to be much more playful during the early stages of our relationship regarding our behaviors and display of affections, now it is more ordinary; maybe it is because of work life or other things, our energies are withdrawn." (F1) In most of the cases, an exhausting work life and being not able to create a quality time for themselves are

found to be the primary obstacles that cause the stated decrease in the playful behaviors.

### **3.1.3. Effects of and Expectations on Couple Play**

Most of the couples did not identify themselves as playful, therefore some of their answers are related with their perception of the idea of the benefits of playfulness. When the answers of the participants were analyzed, several mutual areas of benefits were acquired; creating a safe space, beneficial communication skills, and “spicing up” the relationship.

#### **Creating a Safe Space**

One of the most common concepts was that the playfulness is leading to a “couple bubble”. Participants stated that with play and playfulness a new, safe, and mutual area that is special for the couple, where they can feel more as a team would be acquired. A participant who experiences playfulness in his relationship stated that: “It creates a safe space where we can distance ourselves from the real life and be our truer selves.” (M4) According to the participants, playfulness creates or will create a mutual area where they can be their authentic selves without any restrictions. With playfulness, “We can start to develop a mutual space where we can be more like a team.” (F3) “We could be more relaxed and more flexible with each other.” (F1)

#### **Beneficial Communication Skills**

According to the participants, playfulness also affects the communication among them. When they are playful, they stated that they can be more empathetic towards each other. This leads to a development of a better understanding and eventually getting to know each other on a better and deeper aspect. “I believe that we would [regarding if they were a playful couple] start to understand each other

better. I think playfulness would also improve empathy.” (F1) Also, play and playfulness was thought to be beneficial, if they were to be used as a mean for discussions: “When you are discussing a problem, maybe using playfulness or games to talk about it can be an easier way than directly addressing it.” (F4)

### **“Spicing Up” the Relationship**

All participants stated that they would like to be in a vivacious and uplifting relationship. One of the perceived benefits of playfulness was its role in energizing the relationship, by making it livelier and more fun. “I believe playfulness saves the relationship from becoming monotonous.” (M2) Playfulness in the relationship is also thought to be correlated with other aspects of life: “(Playfulness) could help us for not just enjoying each other, but also getting more joy from everyday life.” (F3)

#### **3.1.4. Conditions of Couple Play**

Timing is found to be an important component to understand playfulness among the couples. Many couples addressed the effects of timing on their playful behaviors and their perceptions. Three sub-themes emerged: mutuality in play, reading the room, and boundaries on play.

#### **Mutuality in Play**

All participants expressed the importance of mutuality on their perception and behavior of playfulness. The general view was that, if both the parties were not on a similar level of playfulness, this could hurt the couple and leave them feeling lonely: “We might not be feeling playful at the same time, and the one who wants to be playful at that moment can get hurt sometimes.” (F4) “If one is not in the mood, but the other tries to keep on doing it [referring a playful behavior] it could frustrate one and hurt the other.” (M4)

Additionally, mutuality is also thought to be a necessary variable for the couple to be more playful and make use of the benefits that come with playfulness: “I believe that both members of the couple should be at the same levels of playfulness. It would be a lot easier and beneficial if they proceed on the same line.” (F3)

### **Reading the Room**

Most of the participants emphasized that there were some situations which were found to be not suitable for playful behaviors. “We struggle [with playfulness] when we are not feeling tolerant due to a fight or an external problem.” (M3) A serious fight or talking about a serious topic were found not suitable for the couple to be playful with each other. “Sometimes, she does not get that it is a joke and I have to explain myself in order not to hurt her.” (M2) “We can get hurt, the jokes and playful behaviors can escalate to an annoying point.” (F1) Additionally, it seems that especially when one or both are feeling fractious, some jokes might start to be perceived as crossing the line and be hurtful.

Reading the room is also important when using affectionate pet names. It is found that all couples use their real names, in private, only if there is a serious matter or if they are having a fight: “We don’t use them [pet names] only in serious situations, because it would lower the importance of the matter.” (M2) Untimely playfulness can result in perceiving the partner as condescending or indifferent.

### **Boundaries on Play**

The concerns of being childish reveal itself again in the romantic relationships: All couples expressed the importance of knowing when to control their playful behaviors in order not to become too childish in their own terms. When participants perceive themselves or are perceived by their partners as childish, it seems to create a discomfort in the relationship. Sometimes acting childish seems to be linked with being spoiled, being boring, or avoiding responsibilities. “I

wouldn't be able to bear if she acts very childish." (M1) "I might get angry [referring partner's "childish" playful behaviors], in a way that I can turn into an angry mother." (F1) "When we are constantly in the playful state for a long time and can't let go of the childish side, it can get to be draining because it becomes hard to pull ourselves away from it." (F4) It seems that the play and playful behavior in relationships have certain boundaries, in order not to lean on to a more childish area. Because perception of childishness was found to be linked with immaturity, this creates an unbalanced role distribution among the couple causing them discomfort.

## **3.2. POST-INTERVIEW THEMES**

### **3.2.1. Couple Play Experience**

After the intervention, a change in the expression of playfulness was observed, regarding the couples' relationships. This theme consists of two sub-themes; making room for play and change in the meaning of play.

#### **Making Room for Play**

"The intervention program reminded us of the presence of play." (M1) "This program made us realize that we were in need of playfulness in our relationship." (F1) All of the couples stated that they started to view playfulness as an essential component in romantic relationships. Couples stated that they engage in playful activities as a couple more frequently and in a greater range. "This intervention triggered our old spontaneous playful behaviors, led us to remember those times and increased the playful exchanges." (F4) "I found out that I was already a playful person but not in my relationship. Since the program started, I feel that I am becoming more playful in the relationship with my partner." (M2)

It also seems that the couples deliberately try to make time for playful couple activities. A participant stated, with regards to making time for playful

activities in the relationship that, “Normally I love playing games, but due to my busy work schedule I can’t find time for playing individually. I want to spend my free time on my relationship. Therefore, finding a new area in our relationship where I can engage in playful activities with my partner also satisfies my need for playfulness.” (M2)

All the participants stated that they either created or are trying to find games authentic to them, that which they can enjoy together as a couple. “We gained [from the intervention] play techniques that which we are integrating into our relationship.” (M4) “I think we are creating playful activities that we can both share and enjoy and will keep doing so.” (F2) A participant who used to describe herself not as a playful person at all, have stated: “I started to search for games and activities just for us, which we can enjoy as a couple. This was something that I definitely didn’t see coming.” (F3)

All the couples stated that they have become more playful and think that this will last. “I think that our new perceptions of playfulness will last. These new perceptions can manifest themselves in the form of games or any other playful activities.” (F3) “We remembered the joy of playing together as a couple. Since we experienced how games touched our mental health; I believe we will continue to learn new games and integrate them into our relationship; it [playfulness] will last for sure.” (F4)

### **Change in the Meaning of Play**

Post-interviews reveal that the definition and meaning of play and playfulness have changed for the participants. “I used to play in order to clear my head and get away from the reality, but it is not like this when we play as a couple. It [playing with my partner] is connected with the real world and our relationship.” (M2). Furthermore, the shift of perception has become even more crucial for some participants since their former perception of playfulness was either holding them back or evoking the feeling of guilt in them when they were engaging in playful behaviors. “My perception of playfulness has changed. I do not see it as a juvenile

act anymore.” (M1) “I used to think play and playfulness are solely linked with ambition and rivalry. Now I feel that the playfulness can contain anything, you can turn anything into games and use it as a source of joy, exploration, different kinds of communication, or anything.” (F3)

The participants also linked the new perception of playfulness to the couples’ motivation for and frequency of playful behaviors in their relationships: “Due to the shift in our perception of playfulness, I believe we are going to engage in playful behaviors in every phase of our lives or at least be open to try.” (F2)

### **3.2.2. Learning New Things About Self and Other**

According to the participants, one of the most prominent and beneficial effects of the intervention was learning new things about self and the partner. This theme contains increased awareness and greater empathy as sub-themes.

#### **Increased Awareness**

It is found that both the content and the playfulness of the intervention led the couples to create an awareness about themselves, their partners, and their relationships. The types of awareness, stated by the participants, were mainly about their and their partners’ behaviors, thoughts, and emotions. “Creating new meanings about our relationship and ourselves via the games we played here, made this process much more striking for me. Because even though I thought that we were both open to and close with each other in our relationship, I realized so many things regarding myself individually and as myself in the relationship, and also about yourself [referring the partner] individually and as you’re in the relationship.” (F4) “Ever since the games we have played here, our behaviors, which we could not make sense of in the past, started to make sense.” (M1)

The couples have also stated that, this awareness made them closer, by getting them to know more about each other. “I am more aware of myself and her now; I mean emotions, thoughts... there were so many things I was not aware of

before. And this gets us closer to each other now, since we know each other much better.” (M2)

Another benefit of awareness was creating a tool for breaking down the prejudices towards each other and also letting the couples to look at each other from a new lens. “Sometimes we used to be prejudiced towards each other; this used to constrain the relationship. I think these [playful methods] helped us to leave our prejudices behind, and this led to the change in our behaviors.” (F1)

### **Greater Empathy**

Empathy; which is created or increased by exploring new things about the partner, was another benefit that the participants laid emphasis on. The participants generally stated that, after starting to learn the mechanisms of their partner’s thought patterns, emotions, and behaviors, now they can put themselves into their partner’s shoes more easily. “After learning what causes you to express yourself in this way, the games created a tool for me to understand you and become more empathetic. (...) And now, she [regarding his partner] listens to me, tries put herself in my situation, and tries to understand why I think this or do that.” (M3) “After learning those things about you [regarding her partner] I think I am more empathetic towards you, or at least I try to be.” (F1) “Because now, I know him better. When a negative thing happens, I do not take it personally. But instead, I try to put myself in his position and then think about it.” (F2)

### **3.2.3. New Tool of Interaction**

Participants’ statements show that the playful methods helped them to embrace the effects of the playfulness and the playfulness itself as a new tool of interaction. The tool of interaction theme will be discussed in two sub-themes: new problem solving skills and container for difficult topics.



## **New Problem Solving Skills**

The increased ability of problem solving was one of the benefits of play stated. The couples think that they started to listen to each other, express their thoughts and emotions, find more useful and creative ways for problem solving, and argue without hurting each other. “We learned how to calm down and listen to each other. Now we know how to control our language and try to understand each other. If we still get angry with each other; now, we know how to manage it and if necessary, take a break and then get back to it when we are more open for communication.” (M3) “Now we use games and playful things to have better arguments.” (M4) “Now, when we have an argument, I start to think about the sessions and the games. Then adapt them to the situation; what we are thinking about, what we both want, what we are feeling... Therefore, I believe we do not hurt each other as much as we used to, and also get creative when we are trying to solve the problem.” (F1)

## **Container for Difficult Topics**

Alongside the increased communication skills, participants stated that, the playfulness created a safe area where they can express their emotions more freely and use this space to contain and look into difficult topics without hurting themselves or each other. “Plays and playful techniques created an area for us to manage hard topics. Back then that discussion [referring an argument they had several days ago] could have easily turned into a hurtful fight. But now, games help us to talk about topics which would have been very difficult for us, in an easier platform, before us realizing it.” (F3) “We came here every week and literally played games. Both in and out of the sessions, we sometimes discussed very hard topics by using games. It was easier and safer for both of us to talk these kinds of things with those methods [referring methods used in the sessions].” (F4)

### **3.2.4. Strengthened Relationship**

The participants' relationships seem to be strengthened after the intervention program. The couples state that they feel their relationship is in a better place than where it used to be. This theme involves increased relationship satisfaction and becoming a team.

#### **Increased Relationship Satisfaction**

The couples stated that, they experience an increase in sexual activities or desire, perceive their relationships as more exciting, think that the positive aspects of their relationships have enhanced, and their relationships got stronger after the intervention. "Even though we knew each other very well; knowing that there still are and will be a lot to know and explore about each other; this is exciting." (M4) "I find the dynamics in the games fun and exciting. Now, our relationship also has these features when we play. I would not think a romantic relationship can involve excitement." (M2) "This [the intervention] boosted our relationship strengths. (...) I was already contented with my relationship, but this process definitely intensified it." (F2) A participant who stated that she doesn't have a sexual desire much often, said: "Right after some sessions, we really wanted to make love. I believe it was because we started to feel closer to each other during the games." (F4)

Meaning of the perception of childishness was also changed and in fact, became a desirable component in the relationship: "Going to a play therapy and playing games let us feel the comfort and the authenticity that we used to feel as a kid and led us to open our hearts, strengthen our communication, increase the spontaneity and creativity in our relationship, and to endeavor for our relationship. These make me feel better about our relationship." (F1)

## **Becoming a Team**

According to the participants, the intervention also made them feel more like a team; which they perceive as an important milestone in a relationship. They state that the playfulness has become a new language among them, and they started acting more like a unit. “Now we can do things like housework, playing sports or studying together more like a team.” (M3) “We pay more respect to each other’s wishes, we try to act for the benefit of each other, and try to make each other happy, like a team. This also increases our love towards each other.” (F1)

Participants described couple playfulness as a unique language authentic to them which also enhances the perception of being a team. “We realized that the playfulness has healing capacities, that it also created a new language unique to us, or can involve others as well, if we let them, which made us understand each other more easily.” (M4) “Actually playfulness is a new language among us.” (F2) “It (playfulness) is a special language that develops among us.” (F4).

### **3.3. CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEMES AND SCALES**

In the study, a total of five scales (Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Relationship Assessment Scale, Adult Playfulness Trait Scale, Relational Humor Inventory, and Communication Patterns Questionnaire) were used solely to support the participants’ interview answers which constitute the primary source of data for the study. The links between the scales and themes will be discussed in this chapter.

The scale results, including the pre and post scores of all the participants, can be found in the Table 3.1. on the next page.

**Table 3.1. Scale Results**

	Couple 1		Couple 2		Couple 3		Couple 4		Total							
	Male 1		Female 2		Male 3		Female 4									
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post								
<b>1. Dyadic Adjustment Scale</b>	102	107	95	99	109	123	119	127	117	129	123	124	107	112	117	<b>151</b>
<b>2. Relationship Assessment Scale</b>	34	41	33	38	46	47	45	47	41	45	37	45	36	37	41	<b>49</b>
<b>3. Adult Playfulness Trait Scale</b>																
Fun Seeking Motivation	30	35	40	42	35	38	36	37	31	36	30	32	42	43	32	<b>45</b>
Uninhibitedness	18	18	17	19	12	17	15	17	18	20	16	19	19	21	15	<b>25</b>
Spontaneity	18	19	17	18	17	18	15	15	17	17	16	17	18	20	14	<b>25</b>
<b>4. Relational Humour Inventory</b>																
Self Positive Humour	20	21	17	18	27	27	23	29	24	30	24	26	29	29	32	<b>35</b>
Self Negative Humour	17	14	19	9	13	13	7	5	11	7	14	12	13	11	12	<b>21</b>
Self Instrumental Humour	40	42	16	21	49	54	11	15	21	28	32	33	43	35	35	<b>56</b>
Other Positive Humour	23	30	21	24	11	21	25	35	23	26	21	25	26	26	31	<b>35</b>
Other Negative Humour	17	15	27	25	16	13	21	16	18	10	12	11	16	15	21	<b>49</b>
Other Instrumental Humour	16	16	11	17	17	17	16	24	10	18	16	24	17	17	21	<b>28</b>
Couple Humour	6	8	7	8	9	13	13	14	12	12	11	11	13	14	14	<b>14</b>
<b>5. Communication Patterns Questionnaire</b>																
Constructive Communication	45	47	42	44	51	53	45	68	46	57	57	64	59	65	64	<b>81</b>
Self-Demand / Partner-Withdraw	37	36	41	33	23	22	39	25	35	30	29	20	21	21	20	<b>63</b>
Partner-Demand / Self-Withdraw	38	37	30	27	37	32	23	14	28	23	33	26	29	27	10	<b>63</b>

### **3.3.1. Difference in Experience of Men and Women**

During the pre-interviews a difference in experience of men and women on play behaviors was observed in the participants. Whereas most of the females engaged in play and playful behaviors with their partners and friends, rather than individually, most of the males were participating in greater levels of play compared to the female participants. Even though there are no scales specific to adult play behavior, the scales conducted to measure participants' playfulness levels shows a tendency to some differences in experiences of men and women.

A difference is observed on the playful behaviors of the participants: The Instrumental Humor subscale in the Relational Humor Inventory (RHI) revealed that all male participants, with an exception of one, used humor as an instrument in their lives much more than their partners. Additionally, all male participants, except for one, were found to be using instrumental humor in their relationships much more than they receive from their partners. Similarly, all female participants, except for one, were found to be using instrumental humor in their relationships much less than they receive from their partners, which shows a similarity in their perceptions.

Nonetheless, it seems that participants' play behavior seems to be not directly correlated with playfulness; in fact, some of the female participants who have engaged less in play displayed a tendency of higher levels of playfulness on Adult Playfulness Trait Scale (APS) than their partners.

### **3.3.2. Couple Playfulness**

As part of the first research question, the participants' pre-scales of the APS and the RHI were analyzed to understand the function and the tendency of playfulness. Results of the APS showed that except for one couple, all couples' playfulness levels are above the average score. Among the subscales of fun seeking motivation, uninhibitedness, and spontaneity; fun seeking motivation's ratio was greater than the other subscales for all the participants.

The RHI showed that most of the participants might have a tendency to use positive humor of self above the average score, and the scores are also in parallel to the positive humor of other. Results show a trend of the participants usage of negative humor of both self and other less than the positive. Also, most of the participants use negative humor in the relationship much more than they receive from their partners. Additionally, except for a single couple, all the couples' couple humor results are above the average score.

Finally, when results of the APS and the RHI are analyzed together, it seems that the individual playfulness does not have to be in line with relational playfulness. Some participants who scored higher than their partners on the APS got lower scores on the RHI or vice versa.

### **3.3.3. Communication and Problem Solving**

After the intervention, according to the participants, one of the most emphasized benefits of playfulness was the increase of healthy communication and problem-solving skills. Pre and post results of the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ) were compared and observed supportive results. The score of the Constructive Communication Subscale got higher for all the participants except one, for whom stayed the same. Additionally, the scores of the Self-Demand/Partner-Withdraw and the Self-Withdraw/Partner-Demand subscales decreased for all the participants.

Even though the scores of some of the participants did not changed majorly, for the others greater changes were observed both in the increase of constructive and decrease of destructive communication; which were in line with their statements of experiencing better communication, empathy, and problem-solving skills.

#### **3.3.4. Increase in Playfulness**

All the participants stated that they have become more playful throughout the study, which they believe to be a part of their lives and will last. Results of the APTS show an overall increase in the total scores of playfulness for all the participants.

The participants also stated that being more playful lets them, or will let them, be more spontaneous especially in their relationships. Even though most of the participants' score got higher on the Spontaneity Subscale of the APTS and for some stayed the same, none of the scores showed a major change (greatest difference among the pre and post scores was two out of twenty-five).

Results of the RHI revealed an overall increase of relational humor in all the participants; that most of the participants got full or close to full scores on couple humor. All participants' scores in the positive humor of the self and the positive humor of the other have also increased; for some it was slight and for others was major. Except for one participant, everyone's score of the Instrumental Humor of Self increased. Similarly, all participants' score on the Instrumental Humor of Other either increased or stayed the same. Scores of the Negative Humor of Self and Other have decreased except for one participant; whom the score on Negative Humor of Self have stayed the same.

In sum; the overall increase in playfulness, couple humor, and positive humor of self and other; and the decrease in negative humor of self and other were observed supporting the post-interview findings.

#### **3.3.5. Strengthened Relationship and Becoming a Team**

Post-interviews found strengthened relationship and becoming a team as effects of the study. Scores of the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) seems to support these outcomes. First of all, all the participants' scores in both scales got higher. Both scales mainly assess the relationship quality, but the DAS questions seems to mainly fit in the participants'

perception of being a team in a relationship. All the participants' scores on the DAS, especially the ones on the questions about how they agree on various subjects in their relationship, increased greatly. This increase seems to be in line with the increased perception of being a team in the relationship. Finally, the answers of the final question "How much do you love your partner?" on the RAS were five (the greatest score) for all the participants in the post scales.

Overall, the couple's relationship satisfaction, the love for one and other, and the dyadic adjustment have increased, which is adjuvant to participants' post-interview statements.

### **3.4. EVALUATION OF EACH COUPLE**

In this chapter the effects of the intervention on each couple will be assessed accordingly to the participants' pre and post interviews and scales.

#### **3.4.1. Couple No.1: M1 / F1**

Couple 1 was in a relationship for four years. Their ages were in between 25-30, and they have an upper middle-class background. F1 was a master's student in clinical psychology and worked part-time as a psychologist. M1 was a college graduate and worked as a banker.

"Oyun diye bir şey vardı ya!" / "Oh, there used to be play!" (M1)

Throughout the study, the couple have experienced changes especially in terms of their; perception of play and playfulness, awareness of self and other, and reminiscence of earlier playful stages.

#### **Perception**

M1 was one of the participants who used to feel very strongly about the correlation between play/playfulness and childishness. He believed that the



responsibilities of adulthood and demanding work life were leaving no room for playfulness. And, when he was able to create a space for playfulness, it was causing feelings of guilt and immaturity.

F1's perception of playfulness and play was relatively more positive. She talked about her own and the couple's former play and playful behaviors with yearning. However, her attitude towards partner's play behavior was like that of M1; referring to the fine line between beneficial playfulness and immaturity.

The couple's greatest transition during the intervention process was the shift in their perception. Although mainly M1, they have both stated various times that they no longer view playfulness as immaturity, a waste of time, or peculiar to children: "My perception of playfulness has changed, I don't see it as a juvenile act anymore." (M1). They also stated that they started to learn how to be playful in various ways with each other. "Every behavior can be turned into playful ones. But I am not kidding, I would also want to play house with you and talk about our future like this." (F1) In fact, now playfulness is a developing and essential part of their relationship and their individual selves. "Even though we are not playful or playing games each day, now there is a longing for games and motivation." (M1) They believe their motivation to engage in playful behaviors got higher and will reflect on their behaviors as well.

On the APS, M1's overall score increased by six and F1's by five. M1 displayed the main change in fun seeking motivation subscale and a slight increase in spontaneity. F1's scores had a minor rise in each subscale; making her score in fun seeking motivation subscale the second highest score among the participants (42/45). The PI believes that their new perceptions of playfulness creates the change in fun seeking motivation subscale. However, since the outside world's attitude on play has not changed; other subscales, especially uninhibitedness, might have not changed much for this couple, since their concerns with regards to the consequences of playfulness are still related with the third variables (society, work life, norms etc.). Their RHI scores of the Positive Humor of Self and Other, Instrumental Humor of Self, and Couple Humor increased, while the Negative Humor of Self and Other decreased. Again, this outcome seems to be in line with their statements

about viewing playfulness as an essential part of a relationship and learning how to be playful in a relationship.

### **Awareness of Self and Other**

Another topic the couple stressed on was the newly gained awareness of self and other. The playful methods used in the intervention made them learn and think about novel matters. “Ever since the games we have played here, our behaviors, which we could not make sense in the past, started to make sense.” (M1) This awareness mainly helped them to start making connections to some of the behaviors, both for themselves and each other, which they were not able to understand before. Additionally, the awareness led the couple to figure out and adjust their communication patterns which formerly used to result in destructive discussions. This insight helped them to be more empathetic towards each other, and they started to believe that it will break down criticisms and prejudices towards each other. “Because we did not just played games; we talked important relationship subjects while playing games. This made it easier to talk and experience the topic and each other.” (F1, on how the awareness had created and why will it last)

The CPQ’s results show slight increase in the constructive and decrease in the destructive communication. Besides the fact that the couple begun to understand each other; other benefits of the study were mainly about their expectations in a longer term, rather than their experiences. This view could explain why the CPQ did not reveal a major change that is closer to the couple’s descriptions.

### **Reminiscence of Earlier Playful Stages**

Lastly, reminiscence of earlier playful stages was an important outcome for the couple. The couple stated that they were much more playful during the earlier stages in their relationship. “[The games and playful methods] made us realize how much fun we used to have with each other.” (F1) This regained playfulness also nourishes their relationship: “Playfulness helps us to open our hearts, where it's not

easy to do, strengthens the spontaneity among each other and lets us be more like our true selves in each other's presence." (M1). "When I am playful in my relationship; I have fun, I become happier, livelier, and more satisfied. I believe this is valid for both of us. When we are like this, I feel that the relationship gives me more gratification." (F1)

The hypothesis of the couple can be summarized as such; the playful methods in the study reminded them both the earlier more playful stages of their relationships and have increased their playful behaviors and motivations, leading them to be more gratified with each other and in their relationship. When the results of the couple's DAS and RSA are analyzed, major increase in the relationship satisfaction and couple adjustment were found. These scales' results could show a tendency to starting to agree more on major topics in their relationship, spending more quality time with each other, and being much more satisfied with their relationship; they love each other more; and they have a greater motivation to stay in the relationship.

#### **3.4.2. Couple No.2: M2 / F2**

Couple 2 was in a relationship for a year. Their ages were in between 24-30 and they were both upper-class. They were both college graduates and unemployed at the beginning of the study, M2 started to work after session 1 as an engineer.

When pre and post results were analyzed, Couple 2 experienced changes in perception, relationship strengths, and awareness throughout the study.

#### **Perception**

*"I would not think that a romantic relationship could involve excitement." (M2)*

In this section, two perceptions will be discussed: the one which have changed and another which was met.

The couple described themselves as playful in the pre-interview: M2 was playful, he played games with his friends and by himself, whereas F2 was also

playful, but played games just with her friends. They were playful with each other in some ways (e.g. joking around, shared inside jokes, playful sexual life), but games were not a part of their relationship; they used to play together only if they were in a large group of friends. The major shift on their, especially M2's, perception was both on playfulness and romantic relationships. This perception shift led them to create a space for playfulness and games in their relationship. "I have realized that I was already playful, but not with F2, in our romantic relationship. The study made me learn how to integrate my trait of playfulness into our relationship. For the past 1-2 months I feel I am playful also in our relationship."

(M2) M2 continued to describe how his perception of relationships had also changed, where now he believes that a romantic relationship can include excitements, and that the trait of playfulness can be experienced in the romantic relationships as well. Considering the M2's statement in the pre-interview about his expectation that the play and playfulness would prevent the relationship from becoming dull, according to his current views, it can be said that his expectations have been met. Additionally, they think that their new play behavior would persist and become a part of their relationship "I believe now we are more playful in the relationship. We have also created a game just for us and believe that we will keep on playing games and doing playful activities later on as well." (F2)

With regards to the perception which was met; F2 was expecting playfulness to be: "A new kind of shared communication, a new color, an additive." and in the post interviews both of them stated that the playfulness had become "A new language." (F2 & M2) for them. "With the help of playful methods, we have gotten to talk about so many topics which were hard for us, explored so many things, created new games for us... It has become a new language for us." (F2) A new, creative way of interaction was formed in the couple's relationship, which also helps them to expand their shared space.

Both participants' APTS scores showed slight increases in all the subscales, except for one in the case of F2; which her spontaneity subscale was constant. This score could be in line with M2's statements about playfulness, that he was already playful everywhere but his romantic relationship; the study might have only led to

a slight boost on his playfulness in general. On the other hand, F2's scores are not as high as expected, regarding her statements on the increase of her playfulness. When the RHI results were compared a major increase was found. The Positive Self Humor was same for M2 but higher for F2; and the Positive Other Humor was higher for both participants. The Negative Self and Other Humor were lower for all the subscales, except for M2's Negative Self-Humor which stayed the same. The Instrumental Humor of both the Self and Other increased highly for both. Finally, the Couple Humor was the highest score for F2 (14), and almost the highest one (13) for M2. The results of the RHI are consistent with the couple's statements about the increase in their relational playfulness. F2's slight increase in the APTS and the major difference in the RHI scores could be due to the same mechanism as of M2: the study might have led to a minor rise in her playfulness in general, but it mainly has affected the couple's relationship.

### **Relationship Strengths**

According to the couple, one of the most emphasized effect of the study was their strengthened relationship. "(the study) reinforced the strengths of our relationship." (F2). "The process made us stronger. (...) The value which I give both to her and our relationship have increased." (M2). They state that the study strengthened their relationship by leading them to cherish each other more, and by making them realize how strong and unique their relationship was to start with. "We have realized we were a good partner to each other. And also, we have realized what we like about our relationship, what kind of problems we have, how can we better at them." (M2). For Couple 2, thinking about and finding out deeper things about their relationship and each other, with play interventions, helped them to understand how satisfactory and strong their relationship is. Also learning new ways of approaching to the problems contributed to their positive and strong perception of the relationship and each other.

Scores of the DAS show one of the greatest increases on dyadic adjustment for Couple 2 among the participants. In fact, M2's scores showed the highest

increase in the DAS. Additionally, the RAS scores revealed an increase as well. Even though there was a slight increase, their overall post scores were 47 out of 49. The scales measuring relationship satisfaction, love and care towards one and other, their motivation for their relationship, and adjustment as a couple revealed an increase for the couple, that which is in parallel with their perceived benefit of strengthened relationship, feeling as a better partners for each other, and as an united team.

### **Awareness**

*“Neler varmış da farkında değilmışiz.” (M2) / “How oblivious were we to what was around us.” (M2)*

According to their statements, gaining new awareness from the study was the most crucial benefit for the couple. Newly gathered awareness about themselves, each other, and playfulness via playful interventions was the major outcome of the study; which also led to other changes discussed above.

From the couple’s point of view, the most problematic issue within their relationship was their styles in an argument: M2 chose to distance himself, physically and mentally, whereas F2 wanted to continue arguing until they solve the problem. “I can provide an example where I had some realizations about myself and our relationship: There was a game in a session where I found out why I tend to avoid arguments and how this made her feel uneasy and sad.” (M2) “I got to know him better, and this also made me to not take some of his actions personally. For example, when he doesn’t want to talk right away after an argument, now I don’t perceive it negatively. I know this is how he copes with tough situations, and now we also learned ways to deal with this as a couple.” (F2). This awareness made them understand themselves and each other on a deeper level. And consequently, led them to gain a more profound perception of each other’s defense mechanisms which were present especially during their arguments. Thus, this awareness led them to construct a more beneficial communication among them.

The other valuable awareness that provoked changes for the couple was their awareness of couple play. The couple's newly gained awareness of play evoked a shift on their perception of couple playfulness, discussed above. A section of the couple's awareness of couple play is given below:

- These games made us more creative, helped us to see how it was more beneficial to talk about difficult topics using games, and made us realize so many things about us. I think I was playful before, but because now M2 is playful in our relationship, I might be more playful in the relationship as well. (F2)

- I totally agree. But now you [referring to the PI] will ask "Why weren't you more playful with each other before" right? (M2)

- I think we didn't know before: We didn't know how to play as a couple, in a romantic relationship and we didn't know we could create games for us. The study made us explore our playfulness, individually and as a couple, and encouraged us to involve games and playfulness into the relationship. (F2)

The CPQ scores are also in link with the couple's statements: they show improvements on beneficial communication patterns, especially for F2. Overall constructive communication of the couple increased and demand/withdraw patterns decreased. For F2, all subscales of the scale show improvements; the scores show increased constructive communication and decreased pattern of self-demand & partner-withdrawn which is parallel to her statements. Even though M2's scores show minor improvements, the greatest difference between the pre and post CPQ subscale scores was observed in Self-Withdraw/Partner-Demand subscale that is in line with his newly gained awareness of his avoidant behavior and the ways to work on it as a couple. Additionally, as discussed in perception section, the post results of the RHI show a trend in a great increase in couple humor after the intervention.

### 3.4.3. Couple No.3: M3 / F3

Couple 3 was married for six months and in a relationship for a total of two and half years. Their ages were in between 25-35 and they were upper-class. They were both college graduates. F3 was a psychologist and M3 was an engineer.

Couple 3's results display notable changes on their perception of play and relationship satisfaction.

#### Perception of Play

*“After each session we told to each other that ‘We wouldn't be able to talk about these without the games.’” (F3)*

Couple 3 described themselves as a slightly playful couple; they joked around - yet not often, due to the perceived negative consequences of the humor used (as the couple stated: offending each other, and perceiving one and other condescending and rude), used private nicknames for each other most of the time, played with their cat as a couple, and sometimes turn daily chores, such as cooking, into playful activities. Throughout the pre-interview, a major emphasis on F3's negative perception of play was made by both members of the couple. This emphasis was laid as an explanation on why play doesn't have a greater room in their romantic relationship, and also as an ironic factor due to the content of the study that they were to participate in. M3 described himself as playful; he enjoyed playing games by himself and his friends, engaged in playful activities such as playing and watching sports, and perceived play as “a joyful tool to gain new perspectives, improve self and form strong relationship with others.” (M3). On the other hand, for F3, play was generally composed of “the experiences of negative ambition and sense of a contest which moves [her] away from the concept all together because [she] doesn't want to engage in these feelings”. She perceived adults, especially her partner, who play games as “childish and not productive”. “In fact, I am not sure that I know how to play.” (F3)



“The study widened my perception of play. I used to think that the play and playfulness is solely linked with ambition and rivalry. Now I feel that playfulness can contain anything, you can turn anything into games and use it as a source of joy, exploration, different kinds of communication, or anything.” (F3) F3’s changed perception of play also affected M3’s play behavior in the relationship: “Now I want to play with F3 much more than before. I mean I also wanted to play with her before, but I was afraid even to ask.” (M3). Additional to F3, M3’s perception of play has varied as well; “With the games we played here I learned games can be used for so many things besides merely having a fun time, they also increased my self-awareness and observational skills.” (M3) Also on a relational level, they believe play helps them to “learn new things about self and other” (M3) and “serves as a tool for talking about how we feel and think; and managing hard issues in the relationship” (F3).

With the change in perception, their play and playful behaviors increased both individually and as a couple. They started to play games as a couple and create games and playful activities unique to them. “I started to search and create games and activities just for us which we can enjoy as a couple, this was something that I would not see coming.” (F3) F3 also states that she suggested “to play games or do playful activities in their sexual life to overcome minor problems which [they] experience from time to time.”

The APTS scores increased for both the participants. For M3 the greatest increase was in the Fun Seeking Motivation subscale and for F3 it was the Uninhibitedness. The RHI scores also increased in Relational Positive and Instrumental Humor, and decreased in the Negative humor, however the Couple Humor stayed the same. Whereas M3’s pre and post scores demonstrate a greater change, F3’s scores show slight increases in the Positive and Instrumental Humor, and a minor decrease in the Negative Humor. Even though the couple’s statements suggested a higher increase of playfulness on F3 compared to M3, the scale results indicate the opposite. This contrast might be due to F3’s rigidity in terms of her past play perceptions and experiences. Since these feelings were rooted in her for so

long, this recent adoption of play behavior might need more time and practice, for her to internalize her statements during the post interview.

### **Relationship Satisfaction**

During the pre-interviews the couple described their relationship with positive aspects as well as from time to time wearing them off. “We spend good time together, we can really have fun with each other” (F3), “Our commitment to each other and our capacity to understand each other are high, and I think we are like each other.” (M3). On the other hand, M3 thinks that the third variables in the relationship damages their harmony; “We are only good when there aren’t any outside factors which are affecting us, I believe that the outside factors make F3 tense.” They believed that they got stuck to their own rules and thoughts rigidly, got triggered easily and hurt each other in return. Additionally, they were, but especially F3 was, jealous in the relationship and they were experiencing trust issues towards each other. “I believe F3 tries to control me, and then I get angry when I feel that I am being controlled; this makes me quick tempered towards her.” (M3), “I have issues about jealousy and anger management, which direct me to try restricting his freedom.” (F3). The couple also describes themselves as a high conflict couple; their arguments tend to end in yelling and swearing at each other, and rarely in reciprocal physical violence - last one being three months prior - (e.g. throwing light stuff (pillows, clothes) at each other, throwing a punch to objects (walls, couches)).

During the post interview, they described their relationship much more positively. “I think about our commitment in the relationship, the love between us, our mutual aspects; and since the study, I count how we are trying to listen to each other and to be more understanding towards each other as are our strengths in the relationship.” (M3). “Additional to love commitment, mutual life goals, which we had before, I agree now to that we can listen to each other by putting ourselves aside for a moment, and that we started to understand each other.” (F3). They state that the games in the study made them “realize how high [their] love, and commitment

were, and let [them] work together towards [their] mutual goals by listening to each other” (F3) and “made [them] learn new things about [themselves] and each other, and strengthened [their] communication skills especially during arguments.” (M3). They believe that the content of the games itself, being able to just play with each other, talking about their relationship via games helped them to gain these positive aspects and created a “safe, interaction space” (M3) where they are “not afraid to be themselves in presence of each other” (F3).

During the two-month period, they observed how they were able to have arguments with each other without turning them into psychically and emotionally hurtful fights. “Some of the discussions could easily turn into harmful fights, but instead we used games to argue the topic. We didn’t get triggered instantly. We talked about feelings, and we were able to listen to each other and come up with a solution which would make us both satisfied. This would never happen before.” (F3). “We definitely learned how to argue. Our communication got much much better, now we can talk about anything which comes to our minds without hurting each other.” (M3). Additional to the difficult topics, which used to lead to severe fights, they started to use play and playful behavior on the other aspects of their relationship. “I used to think we could talk with each other about anything. And I realized that there were some taboo topics which we used to avoid. I gained the courage to talk about these such as the sexuality.” (F3) “We used to stick to our guns, judge each other, and didn’t listen. We learned how to manage them with the games and playfulness. This is the greatest benefit of the study.” (M3)

The DAS and the RAS results show an increase in the relationship satisfaction, commitment to one and other, couple adjustment, and the motivation to stay in the relationship. For each participant, the results increased in both the scales; for M3 especially the DAS and for F3 RAS results were highly increased. These scales are consistent with the couple’s statements on how their relationship and their perception of each other changed for the better. Additionally, the CPQ results show a great increase in constructive communication and decrease in demand/withdraw patterns for both, which are compatible with the stated changes in their communication patterns, especially during arguments. Finally, regarding

the questions about physical violence and insults, the couple's answers revealed that they were engaged in none of them for the past eight weeks.

#### **3.4.4. Couple No.4: M4 / F4**

Couple 4 was married for a year and in a relationship for a total of four and half years. Their ages were in between 24-35 and they have an upper middle-class background. M4 was a master's graduate in clinical psychology, and F4 was a college graduate in psychology. M4 was working as a clinical psychologist and F4 as a psychologist.

Couple 4's results show distinguished differences on their play behavior and vitalization of the relationship.

#### **Play Behavior**

Couple 4 was the most playful couple to begin with, according to the interview analysis and the scale results. They stated that they involve play and playful behaviors in their relationship, and they were also individually playful. When they were asked about the strengths of their relationship, the most emphasized answer was about how they were able to play with each other; "I like how we can be playful with each other. I am not just talking about playing games, but also when I am joking around or when I create a game-like thing, I love how he can understand it and get along with it. This is my favorite aspect of M4." (F4). They played games as a couple, engaged in baby talk, pretend to be children, had inside jokes, joked around, and used play as a "refreshing shower when the relationship got stuck in a routine." (M4). They believed that the playfulness was also a tool for "them to understand each other and create a new interaction area" (F4). However, they also stated, especially since they got married their play behavior started to decrease; "I think, because now our lives are so monotonous; since we are in the same house, we go to work, come home, eat, and sleep we don't create games as we used to or engage in playful activities as before." (F4).

Throughout the sessions they specified how they miss the earlier stages of their relationship, where they were much more playful with each other.

The most important benefit of the study according to the couple was making them remember playfulness and learn new perspectives on it. “We have realized that, now we started to engage in playful activities by ourselves rather than as a couple, unlike as we were used to do in the earlier stages of our relationship. With this study we started play more as a couple.” (M4) “We remembered the joy of playing together and explored how play was in touch with our mental health. We learned new games and incorporated them into our relationship.” (F4) The study worked as a motivation for the couple to start engaging in more playful behaviors, additional to using playfulness as a relationship component. “We realized how important was playfulness in a romantic relationship. Also, were able to use it as a gadget to understand each other and as a safe space especially for the difficult topics.” (M4) They also stated that they believe in their newly gained perspective on play and increased couple play behavior to last because; “games make an impression in the brain; become a symbol in mind, this also makes the process [the study] more memorable and more permanent.” (F4)

The APTS and the RHI results are consistent with the couple’s statements. The APTS scores got higher for the both; especially on Fun Seeking Motivation subscale, M4’s scores were nearly full (43 out of 45) and F4’s scores increased majorly. The RHI also reveals an increase in the Relational Humor and a decrease in the Relational Negative Humor and the couple got the full score on Couple Humor subscale. However, M4’s scores on the Instrumental Humor subscale show a major decrease. which could be explained by his post-interview comments about the alignment of their sense of humor. During the pre-interviews they talked about their sense of humor as compatible, however in the post interview M4 stated: “I use humor as a tool for forming relationships, so I use it with F4 as well. However, sometimes they are not of good quality, so sometimes F4 doesn’t laugh at them as others would have.” The process of the study might have made them more self-aware about their play behaviors as well as shared sense of humor. M4’s decrease

in Instrumental Humor might be due to realizing how their humor are not compatible all the time, and thus as a result using them less then he used to.

Finally, even though they didn't put a major emphasis on changed communication patterns, the couple stated that talking about difficult topics were much easier for them now. Overall, the CPQ scores a slight increase in the Constructive Communication and a slight decrease in the Demand/Withdraw Communication Pattern. However, for F4, the Self-Demand/Partner-Withdraw Pattern subscale results decreased majorly, and for M4 constructive communication subscale scores increased greatly.

### **Vitalization of the Relationship**

During the pre-interview the couple stated that, most of the time they struggle with when they get triggered by outside factors because they project them to each other. In addition, they believed that they were not able to discuss problems as they occur, but rather avoided them and then, finally talk about them when one of them was ready to burst. Furthermore, they stated that, especially since they got married, sometimes they felt that the excitement and fun in the relationship were fading away. Finally, they, especially F4, were experiencing a decrease in sexual desire and behavior since they got married. They stated that they wanted to “engage in sexual behaviors more frequently” (F4).

During the study they stated that, with the help of games they were able to “get much deeper with their emotions in each other's presence” (M4) and realized “even though [they] thought [they] knew everything about each other, there were still so many things to explore about [themselves] and each other.” (F4). They believe that this realization made them feel happier and more excited as if “the adventure in the relationship is not finished with the marriage, but on the contrary, the relationship holds so many areas which are not yet explored” (M4) that provokes curiosity and further excitements. Furthermore, they stated that, they became “more fun and spontaneous in their interactions, and this has vitalized their relationship.” As the couple started to feel closer to each other in a deeper emotional level and

have more fun with each other, their sexual behaviors changed as well. “Right after some sessions, we found ourselves very turned on and wanted to have sex.” (F4). One of the major impacts of the study was an experienced increase in F4’s sexual desire and behavior. She believes that, because they had fun as a couple and felt closer to each other during the sessions, they have experienced an increase in sexual desire and behavior.

Additional to the games they played during the study, they also believed that the construction of the study was an important aspect as well, considering the benefits: “Coming to a place once a week that was solely for games and our relationship made us feel good about ourselves and the relationship.” (F4).

Both the couple’s scores on the DAS and the RAS show an increase, in line with their statements of more positively perceived relationship. Especially the scores of the scale questions regarding their affection to one and other, motivation to stay in the relationship, and having fun with each other have increased majorly.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter discusses the results of the phenomenological analysis of couple playfulness in Turkey and the examination of couples play therapy as an effective method for the romantic relationship and the dyad. A qualitative study was conducted with four couples; pre-interviews were made to understand how playfulness presents itself in Turkish couples' romantic relationships, then an eight-session intervention program with play and playful techniques was executed, and finally post-interviews were made to understand the effects of the intervention, scales (Communication Patterns Questionnaire, Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Relationship Assessment Scale, Relational Humor Inventory, and Adult Playfulness Trait Scale) were also used to support the interview findings. The study revealed a total of eight themes, which provided significant information on two main research questions; a) "How playfulness presents itself in romantic relationships?" and b) "What are the effects of using playful techniques and interventions in couples therapy on the couples' personal and relationship experiences?"

The pre-interviews and the scales provided information to understand the first research question; the experience of playfulness of the participants. The information about perceptions on playfulness in general and in romantic relationships, the varieties and frequencies of playful behaviors and activities, and the effects of playfulness on their relationship were gathered. The participants' experiences were in line with the past research on adult and couple playfulness.

The data gathered from the post-interviews and the scales answered the second research question. Playful techniques in couples therapy revealed considerably promising results that were in line with and providing a deeper and more detailed understanding of prior research. After the eight-session playful therapy, the couples experienced a major increase in experiences of: the individual and couple playfulness, yearning for play and playfulness, relationship satisfaction, perceived relationship strength, positive emotions, happiness, love, intimacy, joy,



curiosity, excitement, fun, creativity, spontaneity, awareness, sexual desire, dyadic adjustment, feelings of being a team, empathy, problem solving abilities, and constructive communication; decrease in: discord, severe conflicts, defensiveness, demand/withdraw patterns, prejudices, mind reading, and negative emotions; and the transformation of negative perception of playfulness.

The mixed feelings and perceptions on playfulness which are observed both in the cultural and societal contexts and in the research field, also revealed itself in the participants' individual and couple play and playfulness experiences. Prior to the study one of the most encountered themes was the contradictory feelings in the playful behaviors. Playfulness was accompanied by perceptions of immaturity, unresponsiveness, and wasted time parallel to previous research (Lieberman, 1977; Klein, 1980; Solnit, 1998; Olsen, 1981). A cognitive dissonance was observed in most of the participants due to the expressed joy, fun, relaxation, and happiness with the concomitant negative feelings of unproductiveness and childishness. However, after the eight sessions of play therapy, a change in the perceptions and experiences of playfulness was observed. Post-interviews showed no connection between playfulness and immaturity, unproductiveness, or unresponsiveness; on the contrary the participants started to perceive playfulness as a creative and productive tool that which they could use individually and in their intimate relationships alongside the fun and happiness it brings. Playfulness transformed into a crucial component especially in romantic relationships, wherein it is thought to be an essential, even a prerequisite for a satisfactory, exciting, fun, and loving relationship. Additionally, the perception of a negatively toned childishness changed into the positive images of the free-spirited, the creative, and of knowing to find joy in every act.

When the range and varieties of couple play and playfulness are investigated, the stated behaviors are found to be in a similar cluster with the past research. Like past research, the participants go to the movies, theatre, sport events, dancing; play board, card, computer games together; invent games authentic to them; joke around, share inside jokes, and use nicknames; engage in playful sexual behaviors; and turn ordinary tasks or behaviors into play (eg. cooking game)

(Charles, 1983; Betcher, 1981; Lutz, 1982; Baxter, 1987; Oring, 1984). Consistently to Cuber and Harroff's (1965) research which revealed that the most couples were devitalized, participants stated that the playfulness, including but not limited with the spark, joy, and the energy in their relationships, have decreased through time. Post-interviews provided a promising information, similarly to the Kennedy and Gordon's (2017) findings, which indicates that the couples play therapy seems to lead to an increase in range and frequency of couple playfulness.

An additional interesting outcome regarding the increase in couple playfulness was the male participants statements regarding their perception of couple play. Pre-interviews revealed a difference in experience of men and women on play behaviors; especially on an individual level, men engaged in more play activities than women, which could be connected to the societal acceptance of male playfulness and the fathers' adopted role of the playmate in the family (Music et al., 2016; Taşkın & Erkan, 2009). It seems that, additional to the prior knowledge of gender differences in adult playfulness, these differences are also observable in the romantic relationships. All of the participants' play and playful behaviors, both individually and as a couple, increased after the intervention. Contrary to the female participants, some male participants stressed a specific change of their prior perception: they used to be playful outside the romantic relationship, but they didn't need and know how to transfer this into their relationship. However, this difference of playfulness in terms of in and out of the relationship was relatively lower in the case of female participants. Nevertheless, the play intervention seems to have taught the couple ways of being playful with each other.

One of the most beneficial outcomes for the participants was how play helped them to learn new things about themselves and their partners. Exploring these areas vitalized the participants' relationship, and created fun, excitement, and curiosity among them similarly to Csikszentmihalyi's (1977) findings. Even the possibility of experiencing that there still were many things left to learn about each other, enabled the couples to look at each other from a more interesting and an exciting place which is one of the most crucial elements to vitalize the devitalized (Cuber & Harroff, 1965) relationships. These explorations also led to an enhanced

empathy which resulted in an increased intimacy and a constructive communication among them.

Couple playful/play therapy was found to increase individual and couple playfulness. The increased playfulness of the participants correlated with learning new things about the self and other, increased conflict resolution, increased constructive communication, decreased withdraw/demand patterns, enhanced empathy, increased relationship satisfaction, increased intimacy and connection, feeling of being a team, creation of a new language and a shared space, creativity, spontaneity, and creation of a safe space especially for difficult topics; which were all in line with past research on effects of couple playfulness (Betcher, 1981; Lutz, 1982; Klein, 1980; Baxter, 1992; Aune & Wong, 2002; Lauer & Lauer, 2003; Vanderbleek, 2005; Bazzini et al., 2007; Schwarz & Braff, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

Furthermore, the effects of the study are supported by the past research on playful couples therapy (play therapy, sandplay therapy, art therapy, and psychodrama therapy). The outcomes are directly parallel to Kennedy and Gordon's (2017) findings of couples play therapy; by a demonstrated decrease in relationship discord, increase in relationship satisfaction, increase in intimacy, and increase in range and variety of playful activities. Participants' stated that playfulness creates a safe and objective space, that is especially useful to contain difficult topics, which enables the couple to gain a deeper understanding on each other's thoughts, feelings, and emotions without feeling the need to protect themselves, be defensive, and blaming. In this regard, this defined holding environment is very similar to Albert's (2015) findings on effects of couple sandplay therapy, and Rober's (2009) observations on couple art therapy.

Finally, in addition to the past research findings regarding the effects of playful couple therapy, also several novel aspects were stressed in this research. First of all, the participants made an important emphasis on how the intervention made them realize the importance and their yearning for play and playfulness that lead to a transformation of perception. Engaging in play in a professional setting, once a week, for two months made the participants realize how the socially

constructed meanings of adulthood were restricting their behaviors of playfulness and leading to the emergence of contradictory feelings about themselves, involving labels such as “unproductive, childish, and irresponsible”. The transformed perception of playfulness created a more flexible range of behaviors and emotions regarding playfulness. These helped the participants to be able to be more congruent with themselves, not only in terms of their playful behaviors but also in opening a space to get in touch with their authentic selves. Secondly, the past research on couples play therapy didn’t focus much on the possible differences in experience of men and women. This study showed that the men were playing more games and were individually more playful than women. Additionally, most of the male participants have experienced a slight increase in their individual playfulness. However, the most valuable observed change was the increase in their couple playfulness, where women participants experienced major increases in both individual and couple playfulness. Finally, one of the most emphasized constructs was not knowing how to play as a couple. Even though participants were engaging in various playful behaviors, most of them were either avoiding games due to an ambitious loser-winner pattern or they did not feel the need to play with each other as a couple. As the intervention taught the participants various types and functions of games played as a couple, the perception of playing behaviors changed as well. This change has increased the play behavior and especially led all the couples to start creating games and game-like activities authentic to them.

## **4.1. ROLE OF THE THERAPIST**

### **4.1.1. Playfulness**

I believe I am a playful person and I transfer some of the playful aspects to my psychotherapist identity. Both prior to the study and during the intervention program, by being playful myself I make sure that the clients perceive psychotherapy as a setting which playfulness is being accepted. During the study, starting from the brief phone call to set the meeting date I did not hesitate to use

appropriate humor, laugh with them, wear colorful clothes, and create inside jokes. With every participant couple we as a triad, developed a shared humor thorough time. They have made comments on my outfits as “cheerful / fun / joyful / elating”. Some of them stated that they thought psychotherapists were not allowed to laugh, make jokes, and also that psychotherapists treat each joke made by the clients as a defense mechanism or even as rudeness.

As the sessions progressed, I have observed that participants started to wear more colorful clothes, sit more comfortably and relaxed, made more jokes, used more affectionate nicknames towards each other, and be more affectionate with each other (such as holding hands, touching feet, and hugging). Just like Schaefer (2003) stated psychotherapists cannot expect the clients to be playful if they cannot be playful as well; I believe this intervention program would be harder for the participants if I were not a playful therapist who also made a room for them to be playful as well.

#### **4.1.2. Common Factors**

Lambert and Barley’s research finds that in change in psychotherapy are due to extratherapeutic factors which count for %40, expectancy effects for %15, specific therapy techniques for %15, and common factors for %30 (2001). Therefore, the research might show that, using games and playful interventions could only explain the %15 of the change. I believe additional to the interventions the common factors were accountable for the participants positive experience. Davis, Lebow, and Sprenkle’s research on common factors of change in couples therapy finds; conceptualizing difficulties in relational terms, disrupting dysfunctional relational patterns, and therapeutic alliance are the common factors when working with couples which lead to change (2012). I am trained as a couples psychotherapist from the systemic approach. Throughout all the playful interventions I have approached all the outcomes with a systemic point of view. I tried to create a holding environment for the participants which allowed them to discuss their relationship feeling safe which I believe also helped to increase the

therapeutic alliance. I have tried to break the dysfunctional patterns and change them with more constructive and effective ones which would serve both of the couple. I have tried to change the perception of trying to label one as the “identified patient” and show how problems become a problem in the system. We have worked on their relationship by also including their extended families and their patterns.

#### **4.2. CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This study strengthens the past research findings on the presentation and the functions of couple playfulness, as well as the effectiveness of couples play therapy, while contributing to this literature with several different meaningful aspects.

Firstly, the descriptions of the participants on the types of the couple play and playfulness could be used as a tool in the clinical settings both for assessment of the couple and to generate playful techniques peculiar to the couple. The kinds, settings, and functions of the usage of humor, nicknames, games, and various other playful activities could serve as an implicit assessment tool which could reveal interesting information on the relationship strengths, relationally problematic areas, problem solving skills, communication patterns, personality traits, and defense mechanisms. Additionally, these information could also be used for the benefit of selecting or creating specific playful interventions, which might directly address the couple’s needs.

Secondly, using games and playful techniques could serve as an important instrument especially for the people who are developing a defense mechanism towards psychotherapy process and who are not receiving enough benefits from talk therapy; as Landreth (2012, p.39) stated: “In play sessions, the adult becomes absorbed in the activity of play itself and engages in a kind of awareness that is not possible through mere verbalizations.” For people who are using rationalization, blaming, or avoidance as defense mechanisms, play would be an implicit intervention to help one to connect with himself/herself, and be more open to communication due to the experiential process of play. At the end of the sessions, most of the participants stated that they would not be able to talk about and/or

explore these topics without using play, especially because they were not able to “build up their walls” (M1) or start “blaming the other” (F3). For them, this condition is linked with their feelings of safety and intimacy in each other’s presence, and the lack of an explicit awareness during play.

Finally, parallel to the past research, the couple playfulness was revealed to contain various important functions and benefits both for individuals and couples. According to the results of the study, participants’ experience of the couples play therapy was found to be very positive and beneficial. Even though the couples were not “devitalized” in its fullest sense, they have been experiencing similar problems which devitalized couples encounter: From time to time, the participants have not been able to enjoy each other’s company, connect on an emotional level, and feel intimacy for a long time; they had communication problems, lack constructive problem solving skills to deal with difficult topics that are transformed into a kryptonite for them; were experiencing sexual problems; and were not able to connect with their inner selves. The positive experience of the participants will hopefully provide a promising path to further research and development of couples play therapy as an important and beneficial approach in couples therapy.

#### **4.3. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

There were several limitations in this study, that might provide grounds for further research. First of all, a qualitative research method with a relatively small and homogenous sample was selected to obtain a deeper understanding on heterosexual, Turkish couples’ play and playfulness experiences, and the effects of solely using play and playful techniques in couples therapy. While this method provided a profound and a unique view on the participants experiences, it does not provide broadly generalizable results due to its sample size. Additionally, the sample collection method of informing colleagues and using psychology related email groups led the sample to be consisted of psychology related participants; all of the couples ended up containing at least one psychology graduate. Although, this was an additional aspect which restricted the generalizability of the findings, it led

the sample be more homogenous and created an unanticipated function of gaining a deeper look into the playfulness in psychologists' romantic relationship. Additionally, another limitation regarding the sample consisting psychologists could be the possibility of the social desirability bias. Since each couple included at least one psychologist, the participants' positive experiences regarding the intervention program might also be due to wanting to provide the "right" answer (as in receiving benefits from the program) as a psychologist. Although, based on the sincerity and consistency of the participants' behaviors, emotions, and thoughts throughout the whole study, PI's personal and clinical judgement on the participants' experience is genuine and accurate, the study did not involve any further examination of the social desirability bias. Therefore further research exploring the possibility of this bias would provide more accurate information.

Even though the study provided an important apprehension on the presentation and the functions of couple playfulness; in order to gain more information on this construct and be able to generalize them, further research can be conducted with more couples from different levels of SES, ranges of age, relationship duration, sexual orientations, professional groups, and educational backgrounds. Conducting the study with a control group would help to differentiate the effects of playful methods from the common factors of couples therapy and provide a broader knowledge on implications of using play with couples. A follow up with the current participants would help to gain further understanding on the continuity of playfulness and durability on the experienced effects of the intervention. Additionally, a study conducted with "devitalized" couples would provide further information on using play in more difficult settings. Finally, for the purposes of the study clinical population was ruled out. Research with couples in clinical population would provide very essential and meaningful understanding on the functions of using playful techniques and play therapy with psychopathology in couples therapy.



## CONCLUSION

The study provided a first look on the playfulness in Turkey, and one of the first qualitative findings on the effects and implications of couples play therapy. It revealed the types of couple play and playfulness; the perception of couple playfulness; conditions of couple playfulness; and benefits of couple playfulness in Turkey. Additionally, it is found that the couples therapy with games and playful techniques led to an increase in playfulness, relationship satisfaction, intimacy, sexual desire and behavior, curiosity, excitement, empathy, and constructive communication; a decrease in demand/withdraw patterns of communication and prejudices; exploration of the self and other on a novel and a deeper level; and created a safe space unique to the couple especially for containing difficult emotions. The results contributed to the prior research findings with regards to the functions, types, and clinical usage of couple playfulness and also indicated the cruciality of couple playfulness both in romantic relationships and clinical settings.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

#### KISA DÖNEMLİ ÇİFT OYUN TERAPİSİ ARAŞTIRMASI BİLGİ VE ONAY FORMU

İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, klinik psikoloji programı öğrencisi Psikolog Aysu Hazar tarafından yürütülen bu araştırma “Kısa Dönemli Çift Oyun Terapisi” süreci ve sonuçları hakkında bilgi edinmek ve bu çalışma yöntemini yaygınlaştırmak amacıyla tasarlanmıştır.

Araştırma sırasında elde edilen bilgiler anonim olarak değerlendirilecek ve böyle bir çalışmada yer aldığınız bilgisi hiç kimse ile paylaşılmayacaktır. Kişisel bilgileriniz ile verdiğiniz cevaplar, kayıtlarınız ve doldurduğunuz formlar ayrı olarak saklanacak ve araştırmacılar dışında hiç kimse tarafından görülmeyecektir. Kişisel bilgileriniz bu araştırmanın sonuçlarının kullanıldığı herhangi bir sunum ya da yayında yer almayacaktır.

Bu çalışmaya katılmayı seçerseniz 8 hafta sürecek bir çift terapisi sürecine dahil olacaksınız. Çift terapisi öncesi ve sonrasında bu çalışmanın etkilerini değerlendirmek için iki ayrı görüşmeye katılacaksınız. Bu görüşmelerde ilişkinizde oyunun ve mizahın yeri ve ilişkiniz üzerine konuşup, toplam 15 dakika kadar sürecek dört ölçek (Demografik Form, Çift Uyum Ölçeği, İletişim Şekilleri Ölçeği, İlişkisel Mizah Envanteri, İlişki Değerlendirme Ölçeği) doldurmanız ve 5 dakika sürecek bir oyun aktivitesinde bulunmanız istenecektir. Bu ölçümler yapılırken araştırmacının sonrasında inceleme yapabilmesi için görüşmenin bir kısmı kayıt altına alınacaktır. Görüntü kayıtları ve doldurduğunuz ölçekler sadece araştırmacının ulaşabileceği, şifreli bir şekilde saklanacaktır. Bu görüntüler araştırmacı dışında kimse ile paylaşılmayacaktır, görüntülerden çıkan analizler çalışmada ise kimlik bilgileriniz saklanarak kullanılacaktır.

Bu çalışmaya katılımınızın size herhangi bir zarar vereceği öngörülmemektedir. Bu terapi sürecinin hem kendiniz için hem de ilişkiniz için iletişimi güçlendirme, ilişki tatminini artırma ve zorluklarla daha kolay başa çıkabilme alanlarında size yarar sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir. Katılmak gönüllülük esasına dayalıdır ve çalışmaya istediğiniz zaman devam etmemeyi tercih edebilirsiniz.

Bu çalışmaya katılarak Çift Oyun Terapisi sürecini iyileştirmeye katkıda bulunduğunuz için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz. Çalışmayla ilgili sorunuz olduğunda çekinmeden [hazaraysu@gmail.com](mailto:hazaraysu@gmail.com) adresine mail atarak veya 05382136133 numaradan arayarak araştırmacı Psikolog Aysu Hazar ile iletişime geçebilirsiniz.

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Yukarıda belirtilen bilgiler ve koşullar dâhilinde bu çalışmaya katılmayı kabul ediyorum.

Tarih:

İsim:

İmza:

## Appendix B: Demographic Information Form

### Demografik Form

**Cinsiyet:** \_\_Kadın \_\_Erkek \_\_Diğer

**Yaş:** \_\_18-25 \_\_25-30 \_\_30-35 \_\_35-40 \_\_40-45

**Medeni durum:**

- Evli - birlikte yaşıyor
- Evli - ayrı yaşıyor
- Sevgili - birlikte yaşıyor
- Sevgili - ayrı yaşıyor
- Diğer \_\_\_\_\_

**İlişki süresi:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Eğitim Durumu:**

- İlkokul terk
- İlkokul mezunu
- Ortaokul terk
- Ortaokul mezunu
- Lise terk
- Lise mezunu
- Üniversite terk
- Üniversite mezunu
- Yüksek lisans mezunu
- Doktora mezunu
- Diğer \_\_\_\_\_

**Meslek:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Aylık Gelir:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Dyadic Adjustment Scale

A. Pek çok insan ilişkilerinde anlaşmazlıklar yaşarlar. Lütfen aşağıdaki ölçek maddelerini eşiniz ve sizin için geçerli olan anlaşma ve anlaşmazlık derecesine göre cevaplandırınız.

	Her zaman anlaşırız	Hemen hemen her zaman anlaşırız	Nadiren anlaşamayız	Sıkça anlaşamayız	Hemen hemen her zaman anlaşamayız	Her zaman anlaşamayız
1. Aile ile ilgili parasal işlerin idaresi						
2. Eğlenceyle ilgili konular						
3. Dini konular						
4. Sevgi gösterme						
5. Arkadaşlar						
6. Cinsel yaşam						
7. Geleneklere bağlılık(doğru ya da yanlış davranışlar)						
8. Yaşam felsefesi						
9. Ebeveynlerle ilişkiler						
10.Önemli olduğuna inanılan amaçlar, hedefler ve konular						



11. Beraber geçirilen zaman						
12. Temel kararların alınması						
13. Ev ile ilgili görevler						
14. Boş zaman ilgi ve uğraşları						
15. Mesleki kararlar						

**B. LÜTFEN 16-22 ARASINDAKİ SORULARI İÇİN SİZİ EN ÇOK TANIMLAYAN SEÇENEĞİ İŞARETLEYEREK CEVAPLANDIRINIZ**

	Her zaman	Hemen hemen her zaman	Zaman zaman	Ara sıra	Nadiren	Hiçbir zaman
16. Ne sıklıkla boşanmayı, ayrılmayıya da ilişkinizi bitirmeyidüşünür ya da tartışırsınız?						
17. Ne sıklıkla siz veya eşiniz kavgadan sonra evi terkedersiniz?						
18. Ne sıklıkla eşinizle ilişkinizin genelde iyi gittiğini düşünürsünüz?						
19. Eşinize güvenir misiniz?						
20. Evlendiğiniz (ya da birlikte yaşadığımız) için hiç pişmanlık duyar mısınız?						
21. Ne sıklıkla eşinizle tartışırsınız?						

22. Ne sıklıkla bir birinizin sinirlenmesine neden olursunuz?						
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**C. Lütfen aşağıdaki soruları cevaplandırınız.**

	Her gün	Hemen hemen her gün	Ara sıra	Nadiren	Hiçbir zaman
23. Eşinizi öper misiniz?					

	Hiçbirine	Çok azına	Bazılarına	Çoğuna	Hepsine
24. Siz ve eşiniz ev dışı ilgilerinizin-etkinliklerinizin ne kadarına birlikte katılırsınız?					

**D. AŞAĞIDAKİ OLAYLAR SİZİN VE EŞİNİZİN ARASINDA NE KADAR SIKLIKLA GERÇEKLEŞMEKTEDİR?**

	Hiçbir zaman	Ayda birden az	Ayda bir veya iki defa	Haftada bir veya iki defa	Günde bir defa	Günde birden fazla
25. Teşvik edici fikir alışverişinde bulunmak						
26. Birlikte gülmek						
27. Birşeyi sakince tartışmak						
28. Bir iş üzerinde birlikte çalışmak						

E. Çiftlerin bazen anlaştıkları bazen de anlaşılamadıkları çeşitli konular vardır. Son bir kaç haftada, aşağıdaki konuların fikir ayrılığına yol açtığı ya da ilişkide sorun yarattığı olmuş mudur?

	EVET	HAYIR
29.Seks için çok yorgun olmak		
30.Sevgi göstermemek		

F. LÜTFEN YÖNERGEYİ OKUYUP AŞAĞIDAKİ SORUYU CEVAPLANDIRINIZ.

31.Aşağıdaki seçenekler ilişkinizdeki mutluluk derecesini temsil etmektedir. Ortadaki nokta pek çok ilişkideki “mutluluk” derecesini temsil etmektedir.Lütfen, tüm durumları düşünerek, ilişkinizdeki mutluluk derecesini işaretleyiniz.

Aşırı mutsuz	Oldukça mutsuz	Az mutsuz	Mutlu	Oldukça mutlu	Aşırı Mutlu	Tam Anlamıyla mutlu

H. LÜTFEN SORUYU OKUYUP CEVAPLANDIRINIZ

32. Aşağıdaki cümlelerden hangisi ilişkinizin geleceği hakkında hissettiklerinizi en iyi tarif eder?

	İlişkimin başarılı olmasını çok fazla istiyorum ve bunun için yapamayacağım hiç birşey yoktur.
	İlişkimin başarılı olmasını çok istiyorum ve bunun için yapabileceklerimin hepsini yapacağım.
	İlişkimin başarılı olmasını çok istiyorum ve bunun için payıma düşeni yapacağım.
	İlişkim başarılı olması güzel olurdu, fakat bunun için şu anda yaptıklarımın daha fazlasını yapamam.
	İlişkimin başarılı olması güzel olurdu, fakat bunun için şu anda yaptıklarımın daha fazlasını yapmayı reddederim.
	İlişkim asla başarılı olmayacak ve ilişkinin yürümesi için daha fazla yapabileceğim bir şey yok.

## Appendix D: Relationship Assessment Scale

Aşağıda romantik ilişkilerden sağlanan doyuma ilişkin ifadeler bulunmaktadır. Eğer halihazırda bir romantik ilişki içerisinde değilseniz, aşağıdaki maddeleri bir ilişki içerisinde olduğunuzu varsayarak cevaplandırınız. Her bir maddenin ilişkilerinizdeki duygu ve düşüncelerinizi ne oranda yansıttığını karşısındaki 7 aralıklı ölçek üzerinde, ilgili rakam üzerine çarpı (X) koyarak belirtiniz.

	Hiç karşılıyor						Çok iyi karşılıyor
1. Sevgiliniz ihtiyaçlarınızı ne kadar iyi karşılıyor?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Hiç memnun değilim						Çok memnunuz
2. Genel olarak ilişkinizden ne kadar memnunsunuz?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Çok daha iyi						Çok daha kötü
3. Diğerleri ile karşılaştırıldığında ilişkiniz ne kadar iyi?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Hiç bir zaman						Her zaman
4. Ne sıklıkla ilişkinize hiç başlamamış olmayı istiyorsunuz?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Hiç karşılıyor						Tamamen karşılıyor
5. İlişkiniz ne dereceye kadar sizin başlangıçtaki beklentilerinizi karşılıyor?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Hiç sevmiyorum						Çok seviyorum
6. Sevgilinizi ne kadar seviyorsunuz?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Hiç yok						Çok var
7. İlişkinizde ne kadar problem var?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7



## Appendix F: Adult Playfulness Trait Scale

### YETİŞKİN EĞLENCE EĞİLİMİ ÖZELİĞİ ÖLÇEĞİ (YEEÖÖ)

		<u>Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum</u>	<u>Katılmıyorum</u>	<u>Ne Katılmıyorum Ne Katılıyorum</u>	<u>Katılıyorum</u>	<u>Kesinlikle Katılıyorum</u>
1	Kurallara uymadığım zamanlar olur.					
2	Bir başkası eğlenceli bir şey başlattığında, ben de katılmaktan mutluluk duyarım.					
3	Bazen sonuçları hakkında endişeye düşmeden bir şeyler yapabilirim.					
4	Yaptığım ne olursa olsun, eğlenmeyi denerim.					
5	Sıklıkla planlanmamış şeyler yaparım.					
6	Birçok durumdan eğlence çıkarabilirim.					
7	Başka insanlar tarafından başlatılan eğlenceli şeyleri takdirle karşılarım.					
8	Sıklıkla bazı şeyleri anında, herhangi bir ön hazırlık yapmadan yaparım.					
9	Eğer bir şeyi yapmak istiyorsam, genellikle diğer insanların düşünebileceklerinin beni durdurmasına izin vermem.					
10	İyi vakit geçirilebileceğine inanırım.					
11	Sıklıkla dürtülerime göre hareket ederim.					
12	Sosyal kurallara anlayış gösteririm fakat çoğu zaman onlarla kısıtlanmam.					
13	Sıklıkla herhangi bir durumdaki eğlenceli şeyleri başlatan kişiyimdir.					
14	Başka insanların başlattığı eğlenceli şeylerden keyif alırım.					
15	Sıklıkla anlık DÜŞÜNCELERİMİN peşinden giderim.					
16	Sıklıkla anlık HİSLERİMİ takip ederim.					
17	Eğlencenin hayatım çok önemli bir parçası olduğunu düşündürtüm.					
18	Aptallık ederek bir şeyleri kaybetmekten korkmam.					
19	Neredeyse her etkinliği benim için yapması eğlenceli hale getiririm.					

## Appendix G: Communication Patterns Questionnaire

### İLETİŞİM ŞEKİLLERİ ÖLÇEĞİ (KADIN FORMU)

**YÖNERGE:** Aşağıda sizin ve eşinizin ilişkinizde karşılaştığınız sorunlarla nasıl baş ettiğinizi ölçen sorular yer almaktadır. Her maddeyi okuduktan sonra o maddede belirtilen durumun kendiniz ve eşiniz için uygunluğunu düşününüz ve **1 (=hiç uymuyor)**'den **9 (=çok uyuyor)**'a kadar sıralanan puanlar üzerinde size en uygun görünen puanı işaretleyiniz.

#### A. İLİŞKİYLE İLGİLİ BİR SORUN ORTAYA ÇIKTIĞINDA:

	HİÇ UYMUYOR	ÇOK UYUYOR
1. Her ikimiz de sorunu tartışmaktan kaçınıyoruz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
2. Her ikimiz de sorunu tartışmaya çalışırız.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
3. Eşim tartışmayı başlatmaya çalışırken, ben tartışmaktan kaçınıyorum.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben tartışmayı başlatmaya çalışırken, eşim tartışmaktan kaçınır.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	

#### B. İLİŞKİYLE İLGİLİ BİR SORUNU TARTIŞIRKEN:

	HİÇ UYMUYOR	ÇOK UYUYOR
1. Her ikimiz de birbirimizi suçlar ve eleştiririz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
2. Her ikimiz de duygularımızı birbirimize ifade ederiz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
3. Her ikimiz de birbirimizi olumsuz sonuçlarla tehdit ederiz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
4. Her ikimiz de mümkün olan çözüm ve anlaşma yollarını ararız.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
5. Eşim ısrarla kusur bulup üstelerken ve isteklerde bulunurken ben karşılık vermem, sessizleşirim veya konuyu daha fazla tartışmayı reddederim.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben ısrarla kusur bulup üstelerken ve isteklerde bulunurken eşim karşılık vermez, sessizleşir veya konuyu daha fazla tartışmayı reddeder.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
6. Eşim beni eleştirirken, ben kendimi savunurum.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben eşimi eleştirirken, eşim kendini savunur.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
7. Eşim bana bir konuda baskı yaparken, ben buna karşı direnirim.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben eşime bir konuda baskı yaparken, eşim buna karşı direnir.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
8. Eşim duygularını ifade ederken, ben mantıklı yaklaşım, sebepler gösterir, çözümler ileri sürerim.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben duygularımı ifade ederken, eşim mantıklı yaklaşım, sebepler gösterir, çözümler ileri sürer.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	

(2) 1 (K)



	HİÇ UYMUYOR	ÇOK UYUYOR
9. Eşim tehdit ederken, ben susar ve/veya geri çekilirim.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben tehdit ederken, eşim susar ve/veya geri çekilir.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
10. Eşim bana kötü sözler söyler ve/veya hakaretler eder.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben eşime kötü sözler söyler ve/veya hakaretler ederim.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
11. Eşim beni iter, bana vurur ve/veya tekme atar.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben eşimi iter, ona vurur ve/veya tekme atarım.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	

**C. İLİŞKİYLE İLGİLİ BİR SORUNU TARTIŞTIKTAN SONRA:**

	HİÇ UYMUYOR	ÇOK UYUYOR
1. Her ikimiz de birbirimizin sorunla ilgili düşüncelerini anlamış oluruz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
2. Tartışmadan sonra her ikimiz de kendi köşemize çekiliriz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
3. Her ikimiz de sorunun çözüldüğünü düşünürüz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
4. Her ikimiz de tartışmadan sonra pes etmeyiz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
5. Tartışmadan sonra her ikimiz de birbirimize özellikle iyi davranmaya çalışırız.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
6. Eşim söylediği veya yaptığından suçluluk duyarken, ben kendimi incitilmiş hissederim.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben söylediğim veya yaptığmdan suçluluk duyarken, eşim kendini incitilmiş hisseder.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
7. Eşim herşey normale dönmüş gibi davranmaya çalışırken, ben uzak dururum.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben herşey normale dönmüş gibi davranmaya çalışırken, eşim uzak durur.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
8. Eşim beni özür dilemek ve/veya bir daha yapmamam için söz vermeye zorlarken, ben buna direnirim.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben eşimi özür dilemesi ve/veya bir daha yapmaması için söz vermeye zorlarken, eşim buna direnir.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
9. Eşim başkalarından (anne-baba, arkadaş veya çocuklarından) destek arar.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ben başkalarından (anne-baba, arkadaş veya çocuklarımdan) destek ararım.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	



## İLETİŞİM ŞEKİLLERİ ÖLÇEĞİ (ERKEK FORMU)

**YÖNERGE:** Aşağıda sizin ve eşinizin ilişkinizde karşılaştığınız sorunlarla nasıl başettiğinizi ölçen sorular yer almaktadır. Her maddeyi okuduktan sonra o maddede belirtilen durumun kendiniz ve eşiniz için uygunluğunu düşününüz ve 1 (=hiç uymuyor)'den 9 (=çok uyuyor)'a kadar sıralanan puanlar üzerinde size en uygun görünen puanı işaretleyiniz.

### A. İLİŞKİYLE İLGİLİ BİR SORUN ORTAYA ÇIKTIĞINDA:

	HİÇ UYMUYOR	ÇOK UYUYOR
1. Her ikimiz de sorunu tartışmaktan kaçınıyoruz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
2. Her ikimiz de sorunu tartışmaya çalışıyoruz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
3. Ben tartışmayı başlatmaya çalışırken, eşim tartışmaktan kaçınır.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Eşim tartışmayı başlatmaya çalışırken, ben tartışmaktan kaçınıyorum.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	

### B. İLİŞKİYLE İLGİLİ BİR SORUNU TARTIŞIRKEN:

	HİÇ UYMUYOR	ÇOK UYUYOR
1. Her ikimiz de birbirimizi suçlar ve eleştiririz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
2. Her ikimiz de duygularımızı birbirimize ifade ederiz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
3. Her ikimiz de birbirimizi olumsuz sonuçlarla tehdit ederiz.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
4. Her ikimiz de mümkün olan çözüm ve anlaşma yollarını ararız.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
5. Ben ısrarla kusur bulup üstelerken ve isteklerde bulurken Eşim karşılık vermez, sessizleşir veya konuyu daha fazla tartışmayı reddeder.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Eşim ısrarla kusur bulup üstelerken ve isteklerde bulurken ben karşılık vermem, sessizleşirim veya konuyu daha fazla tartışmayı reddederim.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
6. Ben eşimi eleştirirken, eşim kendini savunur.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Eşim beni eleştirirken, ben kendimi savunurum.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
7. Ben eşime bir konuda baskı yaparken, eşim buna karşı direnir.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Eşim bana bir konuda baskı yaparken, ben buna karşı direnirim.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
8. Ben duygularımı ifade ederken, eşim mantıklı yaklaşım sebepler gösterir, çözümler ileri sürer.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Eşim duygularımı ifade ederken, ben mantıklı yaklaşım sebepler gösterir, çözümler ileri sürerim.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	



	HİÇ UYMUYOR	ÇOK UYUYOR
9. Ben tehdit ederken, eşim susar ve/veya geri çekilir.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Eşim tehdit ederken, ben susar ve/veya geri çekilirim.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
10. Ben eşime kötü sözler söyler ve/veya hakaretler ederim.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Eşim bana kötü sözler söyler ve/veya hakaretler eder.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
11. Ben eşimi iter, ona vurur ve/veya tekme atarım.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Eşim beni iter, bana vurur ve/veya tekme atar.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

**C. İLİŞKİYLE İLGİLİ BİR SORUNU TARTIŞTIKTAN SONRA:**

	HİÇ UYMUYOR	ÇOK UYUYOR
1. Her ikimiz de birbirimizin sorunla ilgili düşüncelerini anlamış oluruz.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
2. Tartışmadan sonra her ikimiz de kendi köşemize çekiliriz.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
3. Her ikimiz de sorunun çözüldüğünü düşünürüz.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
4. Her ikimiz de tartışmadan sonra pes etmeyiz.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
5. Tartışmadan sonra her ikimiz de birbirimize özellikle iyi davranmaya çalışırız.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
6. Ben söylediğim veya yaptığımdan suçluluk duyarken, eşim kendini incitilmiş hisseder.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Eşim söylediği veya yaptığından suçluluk duyarken, ben kendimi incitilmiş hissederim.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
7. Ben herşey normale dönmüş gibi davranmaya çalışırken, eşim uzak durur.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Eşim herşey normale dönmüş gibi davranmaya çalışırken, ben uzak dururum.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
8. Ben eşimi özür dilemesi ve/veya bir daha yapmaması için söz vermeye zorlarken, eşim buna direnir.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Eşim beni özür dilemek ve/veya bir daha yapmamam için söz vermeye zorlarken, ben buna direnirim.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
9. Ben başkalarından (anne-baba, arkadaş veya çocuklarımdan) destek ararım.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Eşim başkalarından (anne-baba, arkadaş veya çocuklarımdan) destek arar.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

## Appendix H: Pre-Interview Questions

1. Can you talk about the strengths of your relationship?
2. What aspects do you like the most about each other?
3. What would you like to be different in your relationship?
4. What kinds of topics cause the most struggles in your relationship?
5. What kind of solutions have you found for these problems? What has been helping you?
6. What is your most joyful memory throughout your relationship?
7. What kind of activities do you do together?
8. Do you play both as an individual and as a couple? What kind of games you play?
9. Can you talk about your play experience starting from childhood to today?
10. What is your play experience like?
11. Do the games generate spontaneously or with someone's initiation?
12. If there any, can you describe games or activities which you developed and authentic to you?
13. Are you feeling content about your sexual life? What are the factors that make you content? What would you like to be different?
14. What is the role of play in your sexual life?
15. Do you joke around with each other? What kind of jokes you do?
16. Do you have nicknames / pet names for each other? In what kind of situations do you use them?
17. Do you act like a child wꝑth each other? What kind of behaviors do you engage in?
18. Do you ever get irritated of your partner's childlike behaviors?
19. Do you have a shared sense of humor?
20. What comes to your mind when you hear involving play into the relationship and being playful in the relationship?
21. What could be the benefits and harms of a play involved / playful relationship?

## Pre-Interview Questions (Turkish)

1. İlişkinizin güçlü yönlerinden bahsedebilir misiniz?
2. Birbirinizin en çok hangi yönlerini seviyorsunuz?
3. İlişkinizde nelerin farklı olmasını isterdiniz?
4. En çok hangi konular ilişkinizde sorun yaratıyor?
5. Daha önce bu sorunlara nasıl çözümler buldunuz? Size ne yardımcı oldu?
6. İlişkiniz süresince aklınıza gelen en keyifli anınız nedir?
7. Beraber ne tür aktiviteler yaparsınız?
8. Hem birey hem çift olarak oyun oynar mısınız? Ne tür oyunlar oynarsınız?
9. Çocukluğunuzdan günümüze kadar oyun oynama deneyiminizden bahsedebilir misiniz?
10. Oyun oynamak sizin için nasıl bir deneyim?
11. Oyunlar genelde kendiliğinden mi geliyor yoksa biri mi başlatıyor?
12. Kendi geliştirdiğiniz, ikinize özgü, bir oyun veya aktivite varsa anlatabilir misiniz?
13. Cinsel hayatınızdan memnun musunuz? Sizi memnun eden etmenler neler? Neyin farklı olmasını isterdiniz?
14. Cinsel hayatınızda oyunun yeri nedir?
15. Birbirinizle şakalaşır mısınız? Ne tür şakalar yaparsınız?
16. Birbirinize takma isimlerle hitap eder misiniz? Hangi durumlarda takma isimlerinizi kullanırsınız?
17. Birbirinizle çocukça davranır mısınız? Ne tür davranışlarda bulunursunuz?
18. Bir diğerinin çocukça davranmasından rahatsız olduğunuz olur mu?
19. Espri anlayışınız uyuyor mu?
20. İlişkiye oyunu dahil etmek ve ilişkide oyuncu olmak deyince aklınıza ne geliyor?
21. İlişkide oyunun olmasının / ilişkide oyuncu olmanın yararları ve zararları neler olabilir?

## Appendix I: Post-Interview Questions

Please answer each question in connection with the eight-week intervention program.

1. Can you talk about the strengths of your relationship?
2. What aspects do you like the most about each other?
3. What would you like to be different in your relationship?
4. What kinds of topics cause the most struggles in your relationship?
5. What kind of solutions have you found for these problems? What has been helping you?
6. What kind of activities do you do together?
7. Do you play both as an individual and as a couple? What kind of games you play?
8. What is your play experience like?
9. Do the games generate spontaneously or with someone's initiation?
10. If there any, can you describe games or activities which you developed and authentic to you?
11. Are you feeling content about your sexual life? What are the factors that make you content? What would you like to be different?
12. What is the role of play in your sexual life?
13. Do you joke around with each other? What kind of jokes you do?
14. Do you have nicknames / pet names for each other? In what kind of situations do you use them?
15. Do you act like a child with each other? What kind of behaviors do you engage in?
16. Do you ever get irritated of your partner's childlike behaviors?
17. Do you have a shared sense of humor?
18. What comes to your mind when you hear involving play into the relationship and being playful in the relationship?
19. What could be the benefits and harms of a play involved / playful relationship?

20. What were the benefits of this intervention, both individually and as a couple?
21. What would you like to change about this intervention?
22. Do you think now you are more playful after the intervention? Would it be permanent? If yes, how?



## Post-Interview Questions (Turkish)

1. İlişkinizin güçlü yönlerinden bahsedebilir misiniz?
2. Birbirinizin en çok hangi yönlerini seviyorsunuz?
3. İlişkinizde nelerin farklı olmasını isterdiniz?
4. En çok hangi konular ilişkinizde sorun yaratıyor?
5. Daha önce bu sorunlara nasıl çözümler buldunuz? Size ne yardımcı oldu?
6. Beraber ne tür aktiviteler yaparsınız?
7. Hem birey hem çift olarak oyun oynar mısınız? Ne tür oyunlar oynarsınız?
8. Oyun oynamak sizin için nasıl bir deneyim?
9. Oyunlar genelde kendiliğinden mi geliyor yoksa biri mi başlatıyor?
10. Kendi geliştirdiğiniz, ikinize özgü, bir oyun veya aktivite varsa anlatabilir misiniz?
11. Cinsel hayatınızdan memnun musunuz? Sizi memnun eden etmenler neler? Neyin farklı olmasını isterdiniz?
12. Cinsel hayatınızda oyunun yeri nedir?
13. Birbirinizle şakalaşır mısınız? Ne tür şakalar yaparsınız?
14. Birbirinize takma isimlerle hitap eder misiniz? Hangi durumlarda takma isimlerinizi kullanırsınız?
15. Birbirinizle çocukça davranır mısınız? Ne tür davranışlarda bulunursunuz?
16. Bir diğerinin çocukça davranmasından rahatsız olduğunuz olur mu?
17. Espri anlayışınız uyuyor mu?
18. İlişkiye oyunu dahil etmek ve ilişkide oyuncu olmak deyince aklınıza ne geliyor?
19. İlişkide oyunun olmasının / ilişkide oyuncu olmanın yararları ve zararları neler olabilir?
20. Hem bireysel hem de çift olarak bu programın size nasıl yararları oldu?
21. Bu programla ilgili neleri değiştirmek isterdiniz?
22. Bu program sonrasında daha oyuncu olduğunuzu düşünüyor musunuz? Sizce bu kalıcı olacak mı? Olacağını düşünüyorsanız, nasıl?



**ETİK KURUL DEĞERLENDİRME SONUCU/RESULT OF EVALUATION BY  
THE ETHICS COMMITTEE**

(Bu bölüm İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurul tarafından doldurulacaktır /This section to be completed by the Committee on Ethics in research on Humans)

**Başvuru Sahibi / Applicant:** Aysu Hazar

**Proje Başlığı / Project Title:** Couple Playfulness and Role of Playful Techniques in Couple Therapy: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

**Proje No. / Project Number:** 2018-20024-21.

1.	Herhangi bir değişikliğe gerek yoktur / There is no need for revision	XX
2.	Ret/ Application Rejected Reddin gerekçesi / Reason for Rejection	

Değerlendirme Tarihi / Date of Evaluation: 20 Şubat 2018

Kurul Başkanı / Committee Chair

Doç. Dr. İtir Erhart



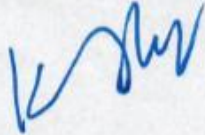
Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Hale Bolak



Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Koray Akay



Üye / Committee Member

Doç Dr. Ayhan Özgür Toy

(izink)



Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Aslı Tunç



Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Turgut Tarhanlı

Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Ali Demirci

(izink)