

A CHANGING SENSE OF SELF IN THE CONTEXT OF COERCIVE CONTROL

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A CHANGING SENSE OF SELF IN THE CONTEXT OF COERCIVE CONTROL

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## Thesis Abstract

Aylin Deniz Ülkümen, “A Changing Sense of Self in the Context of Coercive Control”

The present study aimed to gain an insight into how women's sense of self change in the context of coercive control. Building on the previous literature of complex trauma, it pursued an understanding of how male violence is gradually structured in marriage, how women experience, react to, and cope up with such violence, and how their experiences and definitions of self are transformed throughout this processes. A qualitative methodology was used and in-depth interviews were conducted with nine women with histories of intimate partner violence, who had ended their relationships and were in therapy. The interviews were analyzed using grounded theory. It appeared that the participant women experienced marriage as a period of intense loneliness and estrangement, with no space provided to exercise agency, and confronting repetitive rejections of their expectations of intimacy and closeness with their husbands. The partner, in overt or covert fashion, made the women feel incapable, useless, ignorant, as lacking of necessary resources, and unable to do things on their own, even unable to judge right from wrong on their own. Such a sense of self seemed to lead to both shame and guilt, in that feelings of shame was induced by perceiving self as defected, and feelings of guilt arose from perceiving self as leading the husband to inflict violence. The changes in the sense of self of the women during marriage could be conceptualized as falling into one broad category of shame and doubt: doubt regarding one's own worth; doubt regarding one's strength, accomplishments and independence; and doubt regarding one's decency and competency.

## Tez Özeti

Aylin Deniz Ülkümen, “Baskıcı Kontrol Ortamında Değişen Benlik Algıları”

Bu çalışmanın amacı, baskıcı kontrol ortamında kadınların kendilerine dair hislerinin nasıl değiştiğine dair bir anlayış elde etmektir. Çalışma, karmaşık travma literatüründen de hareketle, erkek şiddetinin zaman içerisinde nasıl yapılandırıldığını, kadınların bu şiddeti nasıl deneyimlediğini, şiddete nasıl tepki verdiğini ve onunla nasıl başa çıktığını, bunların yanı sıra kadınların kendilerini deneyimleme ve tarif etme şekillerinin bu şiddet bağlamında nasıl değiştiğini anlamayı hedeflemiştir. Çalışmada niteliksel bir metodoloji kullanılmış ve evlilik içi şiddet geçirmiş olan ve çalışmanın yapıldığı sırada terapiye giden dokuz kadınla derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler gömülü teori yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Analizler, katılımcı kadınların evliliği muazzam bir yalnızlık ve yabancılaşma dönemi olarak deneyimlediğini, evlilik içerisinde kendilerine tanınan ve fail hissedebilecekleri hiçbir alan kalmadığını, bir yandan da bu süreç içerisinde yakınlık beklentilerinin eşleri tarafından tekrar tekrar reddedildiğini göstermiştir. Kadınlar eşlerinin bazen açık bazen gizil şekillerde, kendilerini nasıl beceriksiz, yetersiz, işe yaramaz, cahil/bilmez, gerekli kaynaklardan yoksun ve yalnız hiçbir şeyi -yanlış doğrudan ayırt etmeyi bile- başaramaz hissettirdiklerini anlatmışlardır. Tüm bu hisler, utanç ve suçluluk yüklü bir kendilik hissine yol açmış gibi görünmektedir; kadınların kendilerini sorunlu, hatalı hissetmeleri utanca yol açarken, bir şekilde eşlerinin kendilerine şiddet uygulamasına sebep olmuş olma fikri ise suçluluğa yol açmış gibidir. Sonuç olarak, şiddete uğradıkları bir evlilik içerisinde kadınların kendilerine dair hislerinin geçirdiği değişimler genel bir utanç ve kendinden şüphe kategorisi altında açıklanabilir gibi görünmektedir: bu kategori, kendi değerine dair şüphe, gücüne, yetilerine ve kendi kendine yetebilmeye dair şüphe, kişi olarak 'iyi'liğine dair şüphe ve tüm bu şüphelerin getirdiği utancı içermektedir.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Prevalence and Sequelae of Violence Against Women

Violence against women is the most prominent form of violence that, in many countries, affect more people than war. In the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, it is defined as “...any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.’ (UN, 1993). Violence against women has been found to be trans-national, and to occur in all ethnic, racial, religious, and social groups, regardless of the level of education and income (Demographics Health Survey, 2004; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012). The most common form of violence against women is intimate partner violence (WHO, 2012; Garcia-Moreno et al.,2012; Tjaden & Thoennes, NISVIS, 2011; Mor Çatı, 1998). Different studies have found women to be three times at more risk of being victimized by their partners than by strangers (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012; Mor Çatı, 1998), and the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVIS, 2011) results show that in 51.1% of the women who had ever been raped, the perpetrators were their intimate partners, while 40.8% had been raped by an acquaintance. Accordingly, a study conducted with 12,000 women in Turkey (WSDG, 2009) found that lifetime prevalence rate of physical or sexual abuse by a partner was 42% nationwide, ranging from 26% to 57% as a function of region.

The Demographics and Health Survey (DHS) (2004) reports that the percentage of women exposed to physical violence by their current or ex- partners ranges from 12% in Cambodia to 48% in Zambia. Also according to the same report, the lifetime prevalence of sexual violence by an intimate partner ranged from 3.6% in Cambodia to 17% in Haiti. In a similarly large scope study of the World Health Organization (WHO) conducted in 15 sites with 24,097 women, the prevalence of lifetime physical or sexual partner violence was found to range from 15-71%, whereas current physical or sexual partner violence ranged from 4-54% (Garcia-Moreno, 2012). Analyses showed that variation among countries cannot be explained by age, partnership status, or education, thus implying that it may be a function of the cultural context.

According to the estimates of the National Violence Against Women Survey, 322,230 women in the U.S. were raped by their intimate partners in the year preceding the study (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). The survey also found physical violence to be the most prevalent form of violence; 22.1% of the 8,000 participant women (corresponding to more than one in every five women) reported having experienced physical violence by their partners, while lifetime prevalence of rape was estimated to be 7.7%. According to the same survey, 64% of the perpetrators of physical and sexual violence, and stalking were current or ex partners of the women. The NISVIS study (2011) showed that 42.4% of the female victims of rape had experienced their first completed rape before age 18, and in sum, 79.6% had experienced their first rape before age 25.

Both the DHS and the WHO studies show that women who experience violence from their male partners are more likely to be assaulted more than once (DHS, 2004; Garcia-Moreno, 2012), are also more likely to experience severe forms of violence rather than moderate forms, and it is the combination of various forms of violence that is most widely used (NISVIS, 2011). Similarly, according to the DHS study; 25% of the women reported experiencing only physical violence, while the rest reported experiencing various combinations of physical, sexual, and psychological violence (DHS, 2004). Studies show that emotional abuse almost always precede physical abuse (O'Leary, 1999). Only in Haiti, the most prominent form of violence was sexual violence alone. Similarly, the WHO multisite study also reported that the majority of sexual violence occurred in the presence of physical violence (Garcia-Moreno, 2012). On the other hand, when physical violence was present, sexual violence and emotional abuse were also often present (Garcia-Moreno, 2012; DHS, 2004). The nationwide study NISVIS (2011) also showed similar patterns in the USA; more than 1 in 3 women reported being subjected to combinations of physical violence, sexual violence, and stalking. Such high comorbidity of sexual violence with physical violence, and the severe and repetitive pattern of inflicting violence show the complex nature of violence and suggest that it must be considered as a systematic pattern instead of the sum total of separate violent behaviors.

### Understanding Violence

Violence against women takes many forms; and there is considerable debate in the literature over which terminology and measures should be used. Altınay & Arat (2008) have proposed that, from their inception in 1970's, studies regarding violence

against women have tended to follow one of the two trends: either to regard violence as a problem of conflict resolution that occurs between two individuals, regarded as the “family violence paradigm”, or to regard violence as a means to sustain male domination over women, regarded as the “male violence paradigm”. To examine more closely, the family violence paradigm has its roots in the work of Straus (2007) who has conceptualized violence as a non-rational means applied to solve conflicts that arise in the family. In this framework, violence is regarded as the sum total of specific and unsystematic violent acts and has a symmetrical nature in that it can be used by both partners. This framework has been criticized for disregarding the systematic and asymmetrical nature of violence occurring between a man and a woman and the application of violence as a means to sustain male domination (Altnay& Arat, 2008).

The asymmetrical nature of violence becomes evident in prevalence studies; for instance, according to Johnson (2006), intimate partner violence is almost exclusively a male pattern with 97% of the assaults being perpetrated by men. Besides, women are more likely than men to be victimized; according to national studies in the U.S., one in every 71 men, as opposed to one in every five women, have been raped in during their life course (NISVIS, 2011). Women are also more likely to be assaulted by their intimate partners; 10.7% of the women, compared to 2.1% of men have been stalked by their partners according to the DHS (DHS, 2004). The violence practiced on women is also more likely to occur in a systematic fashion; while 92.1% of men reported having experienced physical violence alone, more than one in three women reported combinations of physical violence, sexual violence, and

stalking. Besides, the costs of violence indicate the uneven nature of the violent acts; women are found to be twice more likely than men to be injured due to intimate partner violence. Therefore, the systematic, asymmetrical and political nature of intimate partner violence against women render the conflict resolution framework insufficient to explain such phenomenon, and there is the need for an understanding of violence that takes into consideration the broader context in which it occurs.

### Understanding Violence as a Means of Domination

According to Swanger & Petcosky (2003),

IPV encompasses the coercive behaviors of a partner on the other, realized through manipulating the process of decision making, division of labour, access to financial resources in order to assert domination. Forms of violence, either physical, sexual, psychological or economic, are used as means to exert power and maintain domination by depriving the women of the internal and external resources captivating the women in the abusive relationship.

Grounded in social structural power differentials, violence is used as a means to solidify such power in the relationship and maintain domination (Stark, 2007; Boonzaier, 2008). Stark noted that the asymmetrical power relationship between men and women provides men with the resources -social and material- with the help of which they can practice domination and subordinate women in their intimate relationship as well. Such practice of gender based violence is also an integral part of patriarchal social structure: the use of violence and the establishment of domination is essential in constructing masculinity, whereas femininity is constructed on the theme of subordination (Lundgren, 2004; Boonzaier, 2008). Lundgren (2004) exemplified this by noting that although it is contrary to the penal code, battering a wife does not only not damage the masculinity of a male, on the contrary, it reinforces it.

There exist several national studies that point to men's use of violence as a means to establish domination or regain domination in the face of threat. Such studies have shown that men are more likely to resort to violence when conditions favor the status of women or equal status of both partners. For instance, in a study conducted in Kentucky with 1,553 women, it was found that men were more likely to exhibit violence when they had higher educational status while having lower occupational status; life threatening acts were also found to occur 6 times more frequently if the woman had a higher occupational status than her husband (Hornung et al., 1981). Also parallel are the findings of Yllo (1984) who suggested that men are most violent if the marriage is husband-dominant while the state favors high status of women; Yllo considers this to be a result of the increasing need of the husband to use force in order to sustain his dominance. In a nationwide study in Turkey, Altınay & Arat (2008) have reported that the status difference between the husband and wife, where the income of the woman was higher than that of the man, appeared as an important predictor of violence; women earning more money than their husbands were found to be twice more likely than other women to experience violence at least once. The likelihood of experiencing violence was least when the income of both partners was equal. In a similar fashion, based on their focus group study in Turkey, (Bora & Üstün, 2005) have also concluded that physical violence tends to start or increase in severity especially when women start getting empowered. They also found that violence rises when women increase in their capacity to work and earn money, and thus when their self-esteem rises along with their capacity for mobility (and for what they call the capacity for subjectivity). Therefore, they conclude, that

the rise of violence occurs as a means to limit setting by the husband who feels he is losing his traditional boundaries as his marriage falls against the patriarchal norms. Thus, assessing and examining violence based on the description of specific violent acts, does not only miss the sociopolitical context in which violence occurs, but also misses how and in what purpose violence is used. Besides, it is important to consider that attempts at understanding violence by assessing the specific acts of harmful consequences instead of how it is experienced by the woman in her unique relational context, misses the noninjurious forms of domination that still undermine women's autonomy and personhood. As Stark (2007) notes: "It is the social endowment men inherit from social inequality, not the motives or frequency of these acts, that allow them to shape discrete acts into patterns of dominance that entrap partners and make them subordinate."

### Coercive Control

Domination is established not solely by physical force, as a matter of fact it can hardly be obtained by mere force (Herman, 1992; Stark, 2007). The use of more subtle forms of control which frequently are grounded in gender norms and that go hand in hand with assaults have been named by Stark (2007) as "coercive control". According to Stark, such forms of control are not consequences of violence, but they rather construct the very context in which violence occurs.

As mentioned earlier, it has been found that controlling behaviours frequently accompany physical and sexual violence (WHO, 2012). In the DHS (2004) study, controlling behaviors were operationalized to include being jealous if the women talks to other men, accusations of unfaithfulness, restricting the woman's contact

with her family and with other women, keeping track of the woman's location, and keeping track of her money. The results showed that in all countries under study, men who engaged in controlling behaviors were more likely to exert violence than those who did not (76% as compared to 10%). The risk of violence was also found to increase as the number of controlling behaviours increased. The WHO study similarly showed that men who displayed more controlling behaviors were more likely to exert violence, and showed higher rates of violence against their partners (Garcia-Moreno, 2012). For instance in the Dominican Republic, the percentage of women who had ever experienced violence was 10% among those whose husband did not present any controlling behaviors, compared to the 76% among those whose husband performed five or six of those behaviours.

Related issues of power and domination also appeared in the discourses of the women exposed to IPV in a study in Turkey; for instance approximately a quarter of the 1,800 women explained their husband's violent behavior as related to issues of power (as resulting from 'the woman's disobedience', 'the husband's impotence', 'his feelings of superiority', and 'his will to gain power over the woman') (Altınay & Arat, 2008). Similarly in another nationwide study in Turkey, men tended to explain their violent behaviors as resulting from 'their need to control their wives', and from 'the disobedience and increasing demands of their wives' (WSDG, 2009).

According to the coercive control theory described by Stark (2007), coercive control includes the use of violence, intimidation, isolation and control- the microregulation of the woman's daily life, in order to erode agency and undermine her personhood. The intimate context of such coercion is used to inform specific

individualized techniques of control and coercion, and these acts, after having been tried, retried and transformed based on the outcomes they generate, get organized into elaborate and exceedingly personalized patterns (Stark, 2007). Such acts may include assaults, isolation, intimidation, denying nutrition, sleep or other medical and social resources, limiting access to those people or institutions from which she may seek physical or psychological support, surveillance or close monitoring of her actions - directly or by using other means, accusing the woman and making her feel guilty, making her feel insane, enforcing trivial rules and placing sanctions in case she behaves otherwise, threatening to harm her or her loved ones, monopolizing her perception, insulting her in public (Stark, 2007). The perpetrator may use any means, stalking, calling, texting, or later interrogation for surveillance.

As noted by both Stark (2007) and Herman (1992), such tactics are used not to obtain mere obedience, but a personalized subordination in which the victim must, almost with consent, deny own autonomy and identify with the wishes, instructions, and even perceptions of the perpetrator. Control is extended over space and time; it extends to the woman's occupational and social, as well as psychic life, whether or not the perpetrator is present (Stark, 2007). As Herman (1992) notes, "...subjection to a relationship of coercive control produces profound alterations in the victim's identity. All the structures of the self... are invaded and systematically broken down." (p. 222).

The use of coercive control tactics often precede acts of violence (Herman, 1992) and they are informed by gender norms in the larger social context. Therefore, an ambiguity arises as to what extent such controlling behaviour falls into the

category of 'acceptable' and culturally 'normal', and at what point such acts become 'unacceptable' (Stark, 2007). In her book, "The Normalizing Process of Violence", Eva Lundgren (2004) describes how the boundaries between those acts that are seen as acceptable and those that are seen as unacceptable are transformed and changed as violence in the intimate relationship escalates. As unequal distribution of power, and thus domination, is accepted as normal to some extent at the societal level, it becomes difficult to decide the extent to which private acts of power may be defined as normal as well. Based on cultural beliefs about gender, the margins between love and violence gradually fades away, leaving the woman in a suspicious state while trying to differentiate which acts of domination refer to which. An important point to note here is that abuse, specifically psychological abuse that aims to break down the structures of self, may occur in a covert, as well as overt, fashion (Marshall, 1999). While overt acts of psychological abuse may include behaviours easier to detect and label as abusive, such as verbal aggression or obvious acts of control; covert acts may disturb the woman but still leave her in confusion while trying to identify her feelings about the act. Marshall (1999) emphasizes that such covert (or subtle) acts may be carried out in a loving or caring manner, which may confuse the woman; and therefore that while overt acts of psychological abuse may lead her to feel frustrated at her partner, covert acts may greatly harm her sense of self. As a matter of fact, men often carried abusive, controlling, and dominating acts in a loving, joking, or playful fashion, which rendered the women confused about the nature of the act (Marshall, 1996, as cited in Marshall, 1999).

With this normalization process of violence, the truth for the perpetrator becomes the truth for the woman, undermining her experiential self which perceives and experiences with its own self as the subject. Such a transformation is however, only possible by isolating the victim first.

### Isolation

Similar to Stark (2007), Herman (1992) explains that men exhibit controlling behaviours that result in eventual isolation of the women, even before violence begins. Findings of the study by Altınay & Arat (2008) is specifically important in this regard, for showing that violence is most likely to occur when women marry without getting consent from their families, in which women frequently ran away from the home of their family of origin and thus had no ties with them. Besides, high rates of childhood abuse among women who experience later domestic violence from their partners (Bora & Üstün, 2005) may discourage women from seeking help from their families who have previously abused them. It is also occasionally the case that the woman has married young in order to run away from an aggressor in the family, and therefore cannot turn back to receive support. According to the WSDG study (2009) women disclose their experiences of violence mostly to family members; therefore the absence of support from family may render the woman more vulnerable to exposure to prolonged violence. Besides, it is also important to consider that threats of harming family members is also a common form of psychological violence that makes it difficult for the women to share their experiences with family members out of the fear that they may be harmed (Bora & Üstün, 2005). According to the Mor Çatı report (Mor Çatı 1998), 58% of the 1259 women who had applied to Mor Çatı

between years 1990-1996 did not work outside their homes. Therefore, one out of every two applicants of Mor Çatı did not have neither financial independence, or social support from their workplace. The report also showed that 1 out of every 4 applicants had discontinued their education because of marriage. Therefore, it is possible to infer that women exposed to violence commonly lack supportive resources from workplace or education. It is also striking that men commonly force women to discontinue their education and work, thereby isolating them from potential social environments (Mor Çatı, 1998; Lundgren, 2004).

In both of the national studies conducted in Turkey (WSDG, 2009; Altınay & Arat, 2008), 49% of the women exposed to IPV reported that they had never disclosed their experience of violence prior to the study; this prevalence rose to 63% in the Eastern sample (Altınay & Arat, 2008). Even though the likelihood of disclosure increases with education and level of income and decreases with age, the prevalence of those who do disclose are still low (WSDG, 2009; Altınay & Arat, 2008).

Thereby, isolation is used strategically as a way of robbing the women of the means with which she may seek support and empowerment or against which she may test the perpetrator's description of truth (Herman, 1992; Lundgren, 2004). The process of isolation follows a gradual pattern, the extent of limits and isolation increase over time.

### Resetting Boundaries

By using isolation, violence, and control, achieving totalitarian control over the women physically and psychically becomes possible, which in turn, makes it possible

for the men to define not only the world for her, but also how she may feel, what she may want, what she may think (Lundgren, 2004). How she experiences the world, and herself, comes to be defined by the perpetrator, until there remains almost no space left for her subjectivity. He seeks to infiltrate into the psychic space of the woman; finds her “safety zones”, physical or psychic, where the woman may retreat in order to maintain a sense of autonomy and selfhood, and attempts to penetrate into and seize them (Stark, 2007). Lundgren (2004) describes how the narratives of the men who batter focus on the importance of 'limit setting': violence is used as a means to set the boundaries for the woman.

Throughout the process of increased boundary setting, violence and affection may be intermittently used (Lundgren, 2004). Following assaults, the perpetrator may meet some of the needs of the woman, show affection and intimacy. A similar process, though referring to one that is more extended in time, has been described by Walker (1984): 'the cycle of violence'. In the cycle of violence, a honeymoon period follows a period of severe violence in which the perpetrator may apologize, attempt to make up for the assaults, and show love. Lundgren (2004) points out that it is this alternation of violence and love that renders the perpetrator capable of achieving total control over his partner; with this alternation, the boundaries between love and violence gradually fade away and violence may be perceived as relating to love.

It is also important to note that by isolating the woman, the perpetrator renders himself the only figure available for attachment. The exertion of violence by the only attachment figure thus results in a double bind: following an overwhelming traumatic experience such as severe violence, the victim feels an increased need for attachment,

and in the case of an isolated and abused women, the only figure available for attachment is the perpetrator himself, therefore she has no other choice but to turn to her perpetrator (van der Kolk, 1989). Thereby, adults in violent relationships can, similar to children who have been abused by their parents, develop strong emotional bonds with their violent partners. This phenomenon has also been explained by the concept of traumatic bonding (Dutton & Painter, 1993). According to the traumatic bonding theory, such intermittent use of violence and intimacy (or love) in the context of an power relationship, reinforces behavioral patterns that hold on to the emotional bonding, making it extremely difficult to terminate. In her qualitative study, Stein (2012) notes that the narratives of women with violent relationships included moments of intimacy with the partners colored with positive affects, in which women described feeling loved and secure. Similarly, when the narratives of women staying in a shelter in Turkey were analyzed (Mor Çatı, 1998), affective ambivalence appeared as a striking common theme that presented itself frequently; many women report mixed feelings towards their violent husbands, and towards their experience of violence. Women point out to their confusion about the boundary between love and violence, and their feelings of anger is occasionally merge with their feelings of gratitude. Lundgren (2004) emphasizes that for this intermittent use of violence and love, is important to note that in all these cases, the perpetrator makes it clear that it is him who decides whether the woman may live or die, or receive affection or violence. Such creation of the feeling of omnipotence also parallels Stark's (2007) description of how perpetrators use tactics of control in such an extensive fashion that their partners come to believe that they are omnipresent. It is important to note how this

process is rooted in gender norms. As described earlier, tactics of control and intimidation frequently involve discourses regarding gender norms (Stark, 2007). Lundgren (2004) notes that the perpetrator, while seeking to limit and restructure the physical and psychological space of the woman, also attempts to define femininity for her.

### Leaving Violent Relationships

Why women stay in violent relationships is a frequently asked question. Considering the social and environmental hindrances to leaving partners, perhaps a more adequate question would be not why women stay, but how women leave. Johnson (1998) proposes to regard leaving violent relationships as a process that includes the gradual empowerment of women, following the disposal of the personal, moral, and structural commitments that had been imposed on her and that had served as major hindrances from breaking their ties with their aggressors. Taking all these factors into consideration, Heise et al. (1999) list the main reasons that keep women in violent relationships as the fear of retaliation, economical dependency on the partner, concern regarding their children, lack of social support, social stigmas related to divorce, and affection for the partner and hope for his change. On the other hand, factors leading to ending the relationship are stated as the rise in the severity of violence, the loss of hope regarding future change of husband's violent behaviour, and concern that children are being affected by violence.

Studies worldwide show that only a minority of women do seek help related to violence; the percentage of women who did not seek help was found to range from 41% to 78% as a function of the country (DHS, 2004). When they did seek help, women mostly turned to their families (14-40%), their friends and neighbours (3-

27%), and only a low percentage of women (0-6%) sought help from the police.

When the reason for not seeking help was asked, approximately every one in two women in the Dominican Republic, Egypt, and Haiti reported “it was no use”, and the majority of the women in Nicaragua reported that violence was “a part of life”.

Embarrassment about the abuse was also one of the most common reasons for not reporting; ranging from 10% in Egypt to 48% in Cambodia. Fear of further beatings was common only in Nicaragua (18%), followed by the Dominican Republic (8%) and Haiti (9%), however it was not commonly mentioned in other countries.

It has indeed been validated that violence escalates dramatically when women attempt to leave their partners; as a matter of fact, separation has been found to be the most dangerous phase for women (Walker, 1984; Mor Çatı, 1998). Indeed, 70% of the women attempting to separate from their husbands are exposed to severe forms of violence that may lead to death. Therefore it is important to note that in a Turkish sample of 1,500 women, as opposed to findings from Heise et al. (1999) and Walker (1984), violence was listed as one of the most frequently reported reasons for leaving (and was not listed among the most prevalent reasons influencing the decision to stay, as it is the case with the fear of retaliation) (Altınay & Arat, 2009). In fact, similarly in the WSDG study (2009), some of the most widely reported reasons for applying for services were decreased tolerance for violence, need for legal consultation, severe injury, and fear of being killed.

In the WSDG study the most prominent reasons for not seeking help were revealed to be: regarding violence as a trivial issue (64%), fear of accusation (16%), loving and forgiving the partner (11%), and reasons related to children (11%). The

reported reasons for not leaving home appeared to be similar. Other reasons as reported in the focus groups (WSDG, 2009) were considering violence as a temporary crisis, feelings of helplessness, shame, and issues regarding children. Differently, the study of Bora & Üstün (2005) found that for women, specifically those who did not receive support from their families, the major reason to submit to violence was that they felt they had no place to go to, even if they were working and earned money.

Stein (2012) calls to attention that even though there really are structural hindrances for women against leaving their partners, such as threats of killing, economical dependence, and the difficulties of child care, it is occasionally difficult for women to leave even in the absence of such conditions. Therefore, developing an understanding of the psychological factors that serve to disempower and entrap women in violent relationship is necessary. This appears to be parallel to the findings worldwide and from Turkish samples as stated above, in that fear of retaliation presented itself not as a reason to stay but as a reason to leave, and that minimizing or normalizing violence, shame regarding abuse, and affection for perpetrator were the most prominent reasons listed for not seeking help. Such findings indicate the importance of considering the psychological consequences of being exposed to long term abuse in an intimate relationship as described earlier, the importance of considering erosion of agency (Stark, 2007), disempowerment (Herman, 1992), traumatic bonding (van der Kolk, 1989; Dutton & Painter, 1993) and normalization of violence (Lundgren, 2004).

Stein (2012) also points out to the role of dissociation resulting from childhood abuse in entering and maintaining abusive relationships in adulthood. Traumatic experiences, due to their overwhelming nature, become dissociated with the

conscious self-states along with associated affects, as described by numerous clinicians and researchers. However Stein differently points out to the impact of the dissociation of specific affects, namely anger, indignation, and contempt. In other words, it is the self states associated with power that are dissociated, and such dissociation hinders the women in asserting herself against invaded boundaries and terminating the relationship. Unable to experience aggression, results in the forfeiture of agency.

Another factor that appears to set a hindrance to leaving violent relationships is feeling that one has lost her identity and self (Crawford et al., 2009). Among a multiplicity of roles, the isolation from environment made their role as a mother and a wife became prominent (Stark, 2007), their identity as a woman defined by the partner (Lundgren, 2004), and their individual identity became fragile, therefore rendering the termination of the relationship almost a threat to the cohesion of their identity (Crawford et al., 2009). Besides, as interviews conducted by Crawford et al. (2009) suggest, women's self-worth and self-esteem were severely undermined by abuse, especially emotional abuse. As their partners called them names, intimidated them, and degraded their abilities, the women came to doubt their own capabilities and thus their decisions. Crawford et al. (2009) explains that such doubt, along with a fragmented sense of self, also enhanced the forfeiting of agency, and prevented the women from leaving the violent relationship. A more detailed inquiry into the impact of violence on the sense of self will be presented in the next section.

## Intimate Partner Violence and Psychological Trauma

Developed following the Vietnam war and relying majorly on work regarding neuroses of war (van der Kolk et al., 2005), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been the major construct used to treat psychological distress as caused by traumatic events (Briere & Jordan, 2004). In its latest version, PTSD encompasses a constellation of symptoms under four clusters, re-experiencing, arousal, negative cognitions and mood, and avoidance (APA, 2013). According to the DSM-V, traumatic events identified as prerequisite for PTSD have been defined as those events that involve “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violation”. Among the symptom clusters, re-experiencing involves flashbacks, recurrent dreams, and intrusive memories of the event; avoidance includes attempts to avoid people, places, thoughts and feelings associated with the event; negative cognitions and mood involve gaps in the significant parts of the memories of the event, a sense of alienation from others, lack of interest in previously interested activities, persistent blame of self or others; and arousal includes hypervigilance, problems with sleep, aggressive or self destructive behaviours.

To date, PTSD has been the most prominently used framework for understanding trauma, both natural/accidental and man-made. However, clinical work and studies conducted with those who have been subjected to long lasting and interpersonal traumas such as domestic violence, childhood abuse, war and captivity has suggested to clinicians that the concept of PTSD is not sufficient to encompass the severity and variety of changes that occur as a result of interpersonal trauma (Herman, 1992; Pelcovitz et al., 1997; Briere & Jordan, 2004; van der Kolk et al.,

2005). The symptomatology presented by rape victims (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1975), battered women (Walker, 1984), abused children (Cole & Putnam, 1992), survivors of concentration camps (Krystal, 1968 as cited in van der Kolk, 2005) have gone beyond the symptomatology described by the PTSD clusters. Besides, the high prevalence of comorbidity of PTSD, in the case of interpersonal trauma, with other disorders such as anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and borderline personality disorders suggest that the sufficiency of the PTSD construct for understanding the impact of lasting, interpersonal traumas is doubtful. Clinical work and studies also imply that the impact of such traumas on the self, self regulatory mechanisms, and relationality is more severe than natural disasters (Cole & Putnam, 1992; Herman, 1992) and that the interpersonal nature of such violence may shatter the survivor's schemas of self and others in a more profound manner (Briere & Jordan, 2004). The fact that violence tends to occur in a repeated and cumulative fashion rather than in a singular act, also renders interpersonal trauma different than those traumas defined by the PTSD construct as singular and unexpected events (Herman, 1992, van der Kolk et al., 2005). Interpersonal dynamics of repeated violence may render psychological symptoms more chronic and less specific (Briere & Jordan, 2004). Various diagnostic concepts have been proposed in order to account for the different phenomenology of interpersonal violence, such as the battered women syndrome (Walker, 1984), rape trauma syndrome (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1975), sexually abused child's disorder (Corwin, 1988, as cited in Finkelhor, 1987). Terr (1991) has suggested that childhood trauma must be conceptualized under two distinct categories; Type 1 traumas refer to singular events that occur suddenly, while Type 2

traumas refer to long lasting cases of abuse (physical or sexual) and results in alterations between denial, dissociation, passivity and anger outbursts. Dutton has outlined the psychological consequences of domestic violence under three categories (Dutton et al., 1996):

- (1) Symptoms of psychological distress and/or dysfunction, including PTSD;
- (2) cognitions, including disrupted cognitive schemata (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; McCann & Pearlman, 1990); perception of few alternatives (Blackman, 1989; Walker 1984); tolerance for cognitive inconsistency (Blackman, 1989); and
- (3) relational disturbances, such as dependence on the perpetrator (Dutton & Painter, 1981; Graham et al., 1988) and difficulty with trust and intimacy within non-abusive relationships.

Eventually, in order to provide a new framework from which to understand the impact of interpersonal traumas without specifying context, Herman and van der Kolk in Boston, and Spitzer, Kaplan, and Pelcovitz in New York together formed a constellation of symptoms under the concept of *complex post-traumatic stress disorder* (CPTSD), also referred to as “disorder of extreme stress not otherwise specified (DESNOS; Roth et al., 1997). According to Herman (1992), exposure to chronic, lasting, interpersonal violence leads to a profound disruption in the basic core of self, resulting in thorough changes in the very character of the survivor. Thus reactions to interpersonal trauma can be best understood as a range of alterations in various domains. Through shattering of the very basic assumptions of safety and trust, how the survivor understands herself, others, and the world changes. The survivor is left with feelings of chronic guilt, shame and doubt on losing her autonomy, of being isolated, estranged and completely different from others in a world of despair, persistently doubts the trustworthiness of others and finds herself repeatedly in vulnerable situations. The traumatic experiences of violence lead her to both avoid

others, and to desperately cling on them. As the belief in a meaningful and secure world develops based on the secure relationship with an other, such beliefs are shattered when one is violated by an intimate figure. Self regulatory mechanisms become disrupted, states of consciousness become altered and psychological distress presents itself in somatic symptoms. While adapting to life of intense fear and helplessness, the survivor may experience periods of dissociation, gaps in her memory, depersonalization and derealization. She may have persistent thoughts of suicide, anger outbursts or inhibition of anger, act in self destructive manners. How the survivor perceives the aggressor is also affected by chronic exposure to violence in their intimate context; the survivor can become preoccupied with the aggressor, idealize or rationalize him, see him as omnipotent and believe in a very special and unique relationship between herself and the aggressor.

Interpersonal violence, specifically when it occurs in the intimate context where the abuser may be a parent or a partner, has a unique impact on the survivor. By using violence, isolation, control and intimidation, alternatively with affection and intimacy, the aggressor creates a context in which the survivor's physical boundaries (whether by physical or sexual assault) and psychical boundaries are repeatedly crossed and gradually transformed as the survivor is chronically exposed to violence and intimidation, enforced to perform unwanted duties, and live by imposed rules, and in which the only figure of comfort and figure for necessary attachment in the case of overwhelming pain is the aggressor himself.

According to Herman (1992) exposure to violence and such invasion of boundaries, isolation and disconnection from others thereby lead to the disruption in

various domains of functioning, leading to disempowerment and collapse of the self and agency. Studies on the complex PTSD construct have revealed that women are more likely to develop complex PTSD when violence is chronic and when sexual abuse accompanies physical abuse. As a matter of fact a woman who has endured both types of abuse is 14.5 times more likely to get a diagnosis of complex PTSD than a woman who has not been subjected to both (Roth et al., 1997). Roth et al. (1997) explain that the profound intrusiveness and boundary violations in sexual abuse may lead to greater distress, along with the shameful and secret nature of sexual abuse embedded in the cultural understandings of sexuality. These findings are in line with the conceptualization of the use of sexual violence along with physical violence to assert masculinity and dominance which cause greater invasion into the autonomy of the woman as described by Lundgren (2004). Studies also show that although physical abuse is more often than not preceded by emotional abuse, the two types of abuse have different impacts (O'Leary, 1999). Both types of abuse have been found to predict depression independently. Moreover, for ex partners physical abuse has been found to predict well-being better than emotional abuse, whereas for current partners emotional abuse predicted well-being better than physical abuse. O'Leary (1999) explain that on termination of the relationship, controlling dimensions of emotional abuse may decrease -or cease- whereas other dimensions of abuse such as ridicule may not have the same impact when the relationship has ended.

Although the impact of interpersonal trauma on the self is defined as an essential feature of complex trauma, not many studies have taken the self as their primary focus. The majority of the studies have either focused on the necessary task

to provide a validity-reliability analysis of the CPTSD construct, while other studies have mostly focused on dissociation, affect regulation, and though more rarely, shame and guilt (see van der Kolk et al., 1996; Dorahy, 2010; Dorahy, 2012). Therefore this study will seek to gain deeper understanding of the alterations in the sense of self that coercive control results in.

### A Diminished Sense of Self

While patients with simple post traumatic stress disorder fear they may be losing their minds, patients with complex post traumatic stress disorder often feel they have lost themselves. (Herman, 1992, p. 158)

As described earlier, an important aspect of complex post traumatic stress disorder which differentiates it from simple post traumatic stress disorder is the disruption of the core self (Herman, 1992; van der Kolk et al., 2005). With their sense of self and personhood invaded, affects dissociated, and consciousness altered, women who have endured chronic coercive control may feel as if their self has collapsed. Several writers have regarded this phenomenon as the invasion of the self and destruction of identity (Herman, 1992), transformation of the boundaries of the self (Lundgren, 2004), undermining of personhood (Stark, 2007), loss of a coherent sense of self (van der Kolk et al., 2005), and collapse of the self (Boulanger, 2002). How various writers understand the alterations in the sense of self will be outlined below.

Herman (1992) describes that the loss of physical integrity in the case of physical or sexual violence and psychic integrity in the case of control leads to the loss of autonomy and agency which erodes the sense of self. On the other hand, the loss of secure dependency on an intimate other also shatters the development of the self which is dependent on the relatedness to close others (Fonagy et al., 2002).

According to Herman (1992), traumatic invasions of the physical boundaries lead to feelings of shame, whereas the loss of autonomy brings with it feelings of self doubt, rendering the person more vulnerable to the imposition of the reality of an other, even if this reality concerns her own self. She is left with feelings of being intensely different from all others. The isolation of the woman from other figures except the aggressor becomes specifically important in this context. According to Stolorow (2010, as cited in Carr, 2011), in the face of overwhelming traumatic experiences, when the person meets with rejection instead of attunement from the environment, she may develop a “sense of singularity and solitude”, a description resembling Herman's depiction of the process.

Boulanger (2002), on describing the impact of adult onset trauma, refers to the “sense of a collapsed self”. Based on the concepts of several psychoanalytical thinkers (such as Stern, Stolorow, Mitchell), Boulanger (2002) describes a sense of self in the convergence of relational psychoanalysis which suggest an understanding of self in its multiplicity with an understanding of a core self: as in “shifting self states embedded within a core self”. In the case of trauma, the core self to which these shifting self states are anchored, has been undermined and collapsed. Regarding the core self, Boulanger refers to Mitchell (1993) who describes the capacity “to take oneself for granted”. With this capacity, one has “a sense of self that is independent of shifts over time, connected with the function of self reflection, providing continuity from one subjective state to the next”. In the case of such trauma, the core self which provides the continuity of subjectivity despite the shifting self states, has collapsed. He also refers to the core self, as defined by Stern (1985), as an “actual, experiential

integration” of the invariants of the self: agency, physical cohesion, continuity, and affectivity. Boulanger (2002) describes that in the case of trauma where the core sense of self has been disrupted, these invariants become disconnected and thereby are shattered themselves: The uncontrollable traumatic events lead to the loss of agency, that is, the loss of “self as subject” with control over the inner and outer world; threatens physical cohesion by which the bodily experience that should serve as a boundary between self and other, and as a container of the affective world becomes fragmented; breaks down continuity of the self which serves as the necessary temporality of experience and makes subjectivity possible; and diminishes affects that renders the person numb.

Stark (2007) similarly describes the loss of agency in the context of coercive control as follows:

Coercive control entails a malevolent course of conduct that subordinates women to an alien will by violating their physical integrity (domestic violence), denying them respect and autonomy (intimidation), depriving them of social connectedness (isolation), and appropriating or denying them access to the resources for personhood and citizenship.

Such a description of the disrupted invariants of self is especially important in understanding the effects of violence where agency, physical cohesion, continuity and affectivity have all been denied by the perpetrator as a means of collapsing the self. This goes hand in hand with the eventual loss described by women of their ability to understand and reflect on their inner and outer world: “with the loss of the self as subject comes the loss of the self as interpreter and conveyor of meaning” (Boulanger, 2002).

In a qualitative study conducted with seven women staying in a shelter in Arizona, the women described two facades of their felt loss of self; loss of (social) identity, and loss of the observing self (Mills, 1985). The “loss of identity” refers to the process by which isolation of the woman from other subjects in her environment renders the husband the only source of validation which is necessary for her in maintaining a sense of identity. Mills uses Travisano's “pervasive identity” (1970) to describe the transformation of women's self perception in various domains as pervaded with the idea of being a battered woman. In time, as being a mother and a wife becomes the only identity available, her sense of self eventually becomes more prominently associated with these identities which are consistently being undermined by the husband. The “loss of the observing self” describes the diminished sense of agency and the transformation of their trust in their own judgments and perceptions as they become more and more doubtful about them. In this respect, confusion of differing measures was found to be an essential element regarding the women's judgments about themselves, their partners, and the violent relationship. Mills emphasizes that the “private” nature of familial affairs consolidates this confusion by rendering all other means by which a woman can use as sources of validation or negation unavailable. The husband thereby becomes the only source with which she can test the judgments that she so doubts.

Accordingly, in a study with 834 women that aimed to understand the impact of psychological abuse, Marshall (1999) found that psychological abuse predicted women's well-being independent of other types of abuse, and almost eliminated their effect in the equation, and that covert forms of psychological abuse, such as

undermining, discounting and isolating, had greater effect on women's well-being than overt forms of abuse. Relying on Trope & Liberman's (1996, as cited in Marshall, 1999) view of the pervasive impact of enhancing uncertainties of a woman's sense of self, and his own findings indicating that undermining a woman's self is an extremely strong predictor of decreased well-being, Marshall (1999) states that the uncertainty created by specifically covert and subtle forms of psychological abuse may break down a woman's sense of self, and lead her to profoundly mistrust and doubt her own perceptions. He also notes that it is important to understand more covert forms of isolation as a core technique, in that it can occur by alienating the woman to others and to her own self. In this case, isolation works by psychologically distancing the woman from others and herself, leading to feelings of intense solitude and difference from others, similar to those described by Herman (1992) and Stolorow (2010, as cited in Carr, 2011). For instance, they may destroy photographs or belongings of those persons to whom the woman feels attached and erode all attachment figures but himself (Herman, 1992).

How violence impacts the sense of self can also be considered from a relational framework. Psychoanalytical studies indicate that the sense of a coherent self is only possible in a relational context; there is the need for the subjectivity of an other (Boulanger, 2002). However, in the case of isolation in a violent relationship, the only other subjectivity available becomes that of the perpetrator. According to Laub & Auerhahn (1989), when there is no mirroring, the person comes to doubt her own humanity. The absence of response from an other, the absence of empathy, renders the survivor incapable of being self-attuned, and therefore they cannot “feel

that they have a self". In order to avoid such a loss of the sense of self, in the absence of any other object, the only object available, despite all its malignancy, will serve the purpose of mirroring to the self.

Studies examining the impact of intimate partner violence on the self have mostly focused on the effect of violence on self-esteem, and though less frequently, on self blame, guilt, and shame (Lynch & Graham-Bermann, 2004; see Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Aguilar & Nightingale, 1994; Dutton & Painter, 1993; Shamai, 2000; Dorahy, 2012). Most studies regarding the relationship between partner abuse and self have been conducted with qualitative methods. For instance, in a study with 22 physically abused women that aimed to analyze women's experiences of battering (WEB) in terms of thematic domains, analysis revealed 6 domains: perceived threat, managing, yearning, altered identity, entrapment, and disempowerment (Smith et al., 1995). Respectively, these domains referred to women's emotional and cognitive responses to potential risks from their environment, women's way of coping via internal or external resources with the perceived threat, ways of seeking intimacy with their partners, alterations in the self concept of the women, feelings regarding being trapped in the relationship, and loss of power as women's ways of being adapted to that of the partner. Smith et al. (1995) describe the alterations in identity as the change in self-concept and loss of identity, and that such transformations occurs by internalizing the negative self images projected unto them by their abusive partners. For instance, one participant described that his partner's negative statements had broken her self-will and that, on believing him and feeling she was "not any good", she had started to demand from him instructions on what to do. Still another

participant in the study by Smith et al. (1995) described that she had no idea about how her own feelings. The negative impact of degradation was also shown by another study in which women, among six types of emotional abuse (threats of abuse, ridicule, jealousy, threats to change marital status, restriction, damage to property), rated ridicule as the worst type of emotional abuse (Follingstad et al., 1990). In a parallel fashion, another study has found that when the relationship between abuse and self-esteem was analyzed by breaking down abuse to clusters of physical abuse, emotional/controlling abuse, sexual/emotional abuse, and miscellaneous abuse, only the emotional/controlling abuse alone predicted lower self-esteem (Aguilar & Nightingale, 1994), indicating the special impact emotional abuse has on the sense of self.

A specific theme in denigration, stupidity, has been studied more extensively (Hydén, 2005; Morrison et al., 2006; Enander, 2010). Calling the women stupid, and insulting her intelligence and capacity of understanding has been accepted as a widely used strategy of emotional abuse (Enander, 2010). Likewise, in a study with African American women survivors of abuse, stupidity emerged as a theme in 14 out of 15 narratives; the women felt that they were perceived as stupid and blamed by their community for having stayed in an abusive relationship (Morrison et al., 2006).

Stating that a similar situation is present in Sweden, Enander (2010) studied the conceptions of stupidity in the narratives of 12 abused women. Even when not prompted, stupidity appeared as a recurrent theme in narrations regarding abuse; for staying in the relationship and allowing violence to continue, for simply having been abused, for 'being blind' -not understanding the relationship was abusive-, for being

fooled and manipulated by the aggressor, for being judged by others for not being able to leave, and for 'giving in', in the sense that they had trusted their partners. Enander (2010) interprets such feelings of stupidity as relating to the internalization of violence as described by Lundgren (2004), stating that women had come to accept and thus internalize men's reasons for violence and demands. Accordingly, she internalizes the way her abusive partner perceives her, 'from the mirror of her abuser' (Cooley, 1992/2005, as cited in Enander, 2010). Earlier work by Hydén (2005) conducted with 10 Swedish survivors of intimate partner violence, had also presented findings regarding women's expressions of self blame as feelings of stupidity; the conceptions of stupidity and feelings of shame appeared specifically in relation to one of the three positions (the wounded, the self-blaming, the bridge building) women took regarding the period of abuse. In the self-blame position, women perceived themselves as a dominant agent both in the period of abuse, and now, they perceived themselves as not having left even though they had the agency to do so. Other themes, along with stupidity that appeared in the bridge building position in which women perceived themselves as the dominant agent then, but not now, were conceptions of being an idiot, and being crazy. As a matter of fact, feeling crazy, or having mistrust in one's own internal states, had been found to appear as an important dimension (under being discredited) of being exposed to emotional abuse (Marshall, 1999).

Dehumanization and estrangement to one's own internal states appeared also as an important theme in other studies. In one qualitative study, the narratives of women showed that they described themselves as numb, as non existent, as “robotic”

referring to the time of the violent relationship (Crawford et al., 2009). Still in another study, in the narratives of women with histories of physical abuse who were at the time in treatment, the “discovery and recognition of the right to be someone with legitimate feelings, thoughts, and desires” appeared as a new experience gained from treatment with a profound impact (Shamai, 2000). Accordingly, feeling like a human being was stated as the main theme related to the impact of treatment. The reason for such change was stated as being given space and time, and the attunement and attentiveness of another. Such a point strikingly resembles Stolorow's (Carr, 2011) proposition that in the case of absence of attunement one develops a sense of singularity and solitude, and Laub & Auerhahn's (1989) point that in the lack of mirroring by another, one comes to doubt one's own humanity. Also by creating a space with firm boundaries, the treatment had overcome the impact of such boundary invasion in the case of abuse (Shamai, 2000). As expressed by Shamai (2000), the women could use the space of treatment for learning to exist and to discover their self. With decreased shame and guilt, they could also inquire into and express their feelings and thoughts more easily.

#### Positionings of the Self

Studies point out to transformations and different positionings in the sense of self. For instance, in the study by Stein (2012), some women, With histories of abusive relationships, had referred to an “old self” regarding the period of abuse, which they did not like. Some had named differently two parts of their selves, the victimized self and the survivor self. Stein describes this tendency to differentiate between the victim (old) self and the survivor (new) self as mildly dissociative. In a similar fashion, in a

study conducted with men with histories of substance abuse and suicidal behaviour, the participants had referred to a shifting sense of self, one regarding their self in the life before their initial suicide attempt; one regarding the self in the period just before their attempt, and one regarding the following life after their attempt (Biong, et al., 2008). These narratives of a shifting self, similar to those in Stein (2012), were closely related to understanding oneself as a victim or as an agent.

As mentioned above, Hydén (2005) presents three positionings from the narratives of the women; the wounded, the self-blaming, and bridge building. In the wounded position, women tend to see the perpetrator as the dominant agent, and not themselves; in the self-blaming position, they see themselves as having been the dominant agent, and in the bridge building position, they see themselves as the dominant agent both then and now. Accordingly, their sense of self blame change depending on to whom they attribute agency. All in all, it can be seen that positionings of the self, along with their sense of self, can change depending on the phase of the violent relationship.

#### Agency and Resistance

Many writers describe the state following trauma in which agency is completely lost. For instance, Boulanger (2002) states that a traumatized person is more of an object than a subject. However, even though a changed sense of self and the relationship dominates the women's perception, this does not necessarily mean that there is no room left for agency, resistance or insight into the situation on part of the woman, or that the self has been inextricably destroyed.

As a matter of fact, the contrast between adaptation and resistance has been a domain of controversy in the literature. Based on the narratives of the women he interviewed, Mills (1985) describes women as having “insights” which, against the partner's imposed perception of the woman and of the relationship, still provide the women with an inner understanding of the situation. Women mostly referred to a particular event after which, finding the violence unacceptable, they re-evaluated their relationship and began to perceive themselves and the relationship from a new perspective, different than that of their partner's. Stark (2007) also mentions “safety zones” to which women retreat to psychologically, if not physically, in order to retain a sense of agency and self, even , though they may be sought and attempted to be destroyed by their partners,.

In a similar fashion, in their research titled “The Warm Family”, Aksu Bora and İlknur Üstün (2005) describe “the capacity for subjectivity”, which they define as the extent to which one can act in and manipulate one's social relations and the social context in which one lives, and state that women's limits to such capacity has been marked with, either explicit or implicit, violence (Bora & Üstün, 2005). Therefore it is important on one hand to identify the restrictive effect of violence on subjectivity, and still on the other not to miss the still maintained spaces of agency and resistance, even though they may not appear at first sight in the narratives regarding their sense of self.

#### Intimate Partner Violence: The Turkish Context

The large scope studies conducted on domestic violence in Turkey include the “Reasons and Consequences of Domestic Violence” study conducted by Prime

Ministry Family Research Institution (1993-1994), the “Violence Against Women in Turkey” study by Ayşegül Altınay and Yeşim Arat (2007) and the study by Women's Status Directorate General (WSDG; 2009). According to the WSDG study (2009), the prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence among women have been reported to be 43%; ranging from 25% to 53% across regions. As a matter of fact, the rates of reported domestic violence show a tendency to increase; according to the reports of the police and gendarme of all 81 cities of Turkey. The number of applications related to domestic violence increased from 48.264 in 2008, to 80.398 in 2011, therefore showing an almost 100% increase (GNAT, 2011).

According to the reports of Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation, among the 1259 women who have sought counseling from the foundation between the years 1990-1996, 68% were victimized by their husbands, 6% were victimized by their partners, %4 were victimized by their fathers, and 2% were victimized by their ex-husbands (Mor Çatı, 1998). Therefore, a high percentage of the women had been abused by their current or ex partners. Such statistics show that violence against women, specifically intimate partner violence, is a serious issue that must be investigated thoroughly. The same report also stated that the prevalence of physical abuse was 83%, emotional abuse was 73%, verbal abuse was 51% , sexual abuse was 32%, and economical abuse was 20%. As an indicator of severe violence, 23% of the women reported being threatened by their husbands with death.

#### The Present Study

From the framework of coercive control theory and complex trauma, this study will attempt to gain an understanding of the transformations of the women's sense of self

in the course of intimate relationships involving coercive control. The first objective will be to understand, with the help of the coercive control theory of Stark (2007) and the normalization process of violence by Lundgren (2004), how, during the structuring of coercive control, the aggressor transforms the physical and psychical boundaries of the woman, and starts to depict for her, not only the world outside, but also her psychic world, her own self, by setting limits, by using intimidation and violence, and by describing herself for her. Accordingly, the second objective will be to understand, specifically based on the complex trauma framework and psychoanalytical understandings of the construction of a sense of self, how the depiction of the self by the perpetrator and the isolation rendering the aggressor as the only other subject, as well as other aspects of the violent relationship that lead to feelings of guilt and doubt -such as the loss of agency and autonomy, transforms women's sense of self; how they construct their own selves, how they mentalize their inner states and behaviours, and how they form their self concepts. All through, the points of resistance to the invasion of the perpetrator will be attempted to be understood.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

A qualitative approach to the research question was preferred for several reasons: (1) scarcity of research and theory regarding the specific question on how the perception of self changes in the context of coercive control; (2) the need to understand *the process* by which such changes occur; (3) the need to make room for ambivalence and conflict; (4) to seek out differences, besides commonalities, in how women experience living with partner violence.

As mentioned earlier, despite the growing literature on the effect of intimate partner violence on self and self perception, there still exist only limited research on the specific mechanisms of change, the specific aspects of self that are subjected to change, and how such changes are experienced. Therefore, qualitative studies aiming to seek out themes that emerge from narratives will especially be useful in order to shed light and gain insight on a less examined subject, therefore paving the way for more focused quantitative studies. Secondly, a qualitative approach makes it possible to describe processes, besides relationships, which is central when the subject under investigation involves a focus on change. Thirdly, qualitative methodology differs from a quantitative methodology in how it makes room for ambivalence and conflict, which is of central importance to the subject under study. Identity or a sense of self, is not experienced as a rational, coherent whole, but is rather a 'partial, fragmentary and somewhat irrational unit' and therefore includes 'conflicting and irrational elements' (Ahlberg, 2000). It is widely acknowledged that interpersonal trauma is characterized by confusion and ambivalence, regarding self, perpetrator and

relationship (Herman, 1992). Therefore, an understanding of ambivalence/conflict and confusion gains specific importance both in terms of understanding the dynamics of interpersonal trauma and in terms of understanding women's experiences of staying in or leaving violent relationships. To date, most research on women's decisions to stay or leave has focused on one of the either side, leaving out the other, and therefore missing points of ambivalence/conflict. Therefore, a qualitative approach was found to be important for the present study for a deeper understanding of the inner fluctuation of women's experience. Lastly, understanding differences in the experiences of violence, and seeking out different tracks was an important aim of the study. Since the critiques of post colonial feminists regarding second wave feminism for the overgeneralization of women's experiences into a monolithic experience of womanhood, more attention has been paid to the diversity of experiences women live through with respect to their ethnicity, class, sexual orientation or religion. Surely, these are not the only factors that lead women to live through different experiences. Therefore, the need to understand how such contextual factors shape different experiences, and how experiences of living with violence converge and diverge was another important factor for preferring a qualitative approach.

#### Participants

The study was conducted with nine women with history of abusive relationships, and in the process of individual therapy. In order to eliminate potential adverse effects of the interviews, and to talk to women in the process of a reflexive understanding of their histories of violence, women in the process of therapy were specifically targeted

for this study. Participants were recruited from women' solidarity centers in two metropolises in Turkey, that work comprehensively with women victims of violence. One pilot interview was conducted with a volunteer (and former applicant) from one of the centers. The participants were not taken to represent any population; however this did not pose a methodological problem, since the study did not aim generalizability. General information about the participants can be found below. For reasons of privacy and security, pseudonyms will be used for the participants.

#### 1. Perihan

Perihan is a half Kurdish, half Turkish woman who has grown up with two younger siblings, in several metropolis both in Eastern and Western Turkey. She has witnessed repeated break ups and reconciliations of her parents, financial up and downs, several illnesses -including mental illness- of her mother, and her mother's eventual death (during her childhood) while Perihan was taking care of her. In order to escape from the distressful atmosphere of the house of her father and his new wife, she got married with a man she did not know, at the age of 15. She was not permitted to continue her education. After surviving intense physical, psychological, and sexual violence, and having two sons, she left her husband towards the 30<sup>th</sup> year of their marriage.

#### 2. Bahar

Bahar is a Kurdish woman who had grown up in a metropolis in a crowded family of middle SES. She left high school in order to work, and joined a political organization. There she met and fell in love with her partner with whom she married after 8 years of romantic involvement. After two years of intense physical and

psychological violence, and one baby, she has recently left her husband upon his sexual assault. She has support from her family.

### 3. İlknur

İlknur has grown up in a middle SES family in a little town, with one younger sister. She left town in order to pursue her high school education in a metropolis, and later went overseas for a higher degree. Upon return, she quickly rose in business, and moved up the social ladder, with an abrupt financial fall following. In that period, she met and fell in love with a man who was “of a different class”, that is, undereducated but rich, and married him so that she could have children, towards the age of 40. They did not have children, and they got divorced after 6 years of intense physical and psychological abuse. Her family supports her and she lives with them at the present time.

### 4. Dilek

Dilek is a Kurdish woman who has grown up in a village at the mountains, and was married to a man at the age of 13 (before her menstruation started, as she remarked) in order to prevent bloodshed, for her older sister -his previous wife- had ran away with another man. Upon her marriage, she had to leave school and move to the village of her husband, which consists of a few houses all occupied by his siblings. After 10 years of severe violence of all forms, she ran away in the middle of the night, by walking barefoot for seven hours, and had to leave her four children with her husband. Her own family and the family of her husband has decided upon her killing.

#### 5. Beyza

Beyza had grown up in a city with her parents of low-middle SES, and is undereducated. In her early 20's she was forced by her family to marry a man she did not know. She remained married for more than 20 years, suffered intense psychological and moderate physical violence. She did not mention sexual violence. She left her husband upon his threats of death, and later got her four children after being placed in the shelter.

#### 6. Helin

Helin has grown up in a metropolis in Eastern Turkey, in a family of high economical status, and witnessed the sudden killing of her father in a blood feud. Upon a sudden financial downfall, she took care of the house and her sister until her mother forcibly married her to a man, at the age of 15. She left her husband after more than 20 years of marriage, and has two grown up children.

#### 7. Ayşe

Ayşe grew up in a metropolis in Western Turkey, with her grandmother. Her father visited her regularly, and she did not know her mother until adolescence when she found and went to live with her. She was thrown out of the house on reporting the abuse of her stepfather, and was placed in a child welfare center. She is undereducated. Ayşe was sexually abused several times during that period, and met her partner with whom she married as soon as she turned 18. She moved in with his family in a small village where she could not adapt, and after physical, psychological and sexual violence, left him, taking their daughter.

#### 8. Şermin

Şermin is a Roman woman who grew up in a metropolis with her low-SES mother, but frequently saw her father who lived away from them. She is uneducated. She met her partner at the age of 19, and was 'lured by him' with promises of marriage into having sexual intercourse, after which he left her. However, they got married after she became pregnant. She suffered from intense psychological and physical abuse when he was using drugs or alcohol. After six years of violence, she left her husband, taking her daughter. When her husband started raiding her home and assaulting her and her family with weapons, she was placed in a shelter.

#### 9. Aslı

Aslı had grown up in a metropolis with her parents of middle SES. She had been raped in high school by her boyfriend, who had continued to torture her for months after the incident. She had been subjected to numerous other incidents of sexual harassment, and defined her major trauma as having to accept abortion by the pressure of her boyfriend's family. She had not married, or lived in cohabitation with a partner, but her relationships had involved severe abuse.

#### Interview and Procedure

A semi structured interview (see Appendix A. & Appendix B) with guiding questions and probe questions regarding the experience of coercive control and the changes in the sense of self was used for this study. The interviews lasted approximately 70 minutes, however ranged in duration from 60 minutes 150 minutes.

Firstly, the inception of control and violence was attempted to be understood, questions regarding how the partner started to set limits were planned to follow.

What the woman could do and could not do, which parts of her life was limited and controlled, and how -if- she was isolated and disconnected from others were asked. Then, how and in what fashion violence started to accompany the controlling behaviours were asked. What the women thought about, and how they responded to the limits set by their partners were investigated. As for the second objective, how the perpetrator started to describe the women was asked, with questions specifying any adjectives or descriptions regarding her personality, her wishes, her feelings, or thoughts. Subsequently, how they felt about the control, their own feelings and behaviours, and the descriptions of the partners were searched for by asking what the women thought of themselves, or felt about themselves, what they thought of their character. Finally, how they perceive themselves, their partners, and the violence were asked. Even though specific questions were prepared beforehand to be asked, it was an important part of the interview to let the women construct their own narrative, and not to subvert their line of thought, in order to gain a better understand of their experience. At this point it is important to remark that for most women, the history of the relationship seemed to comprise of a whole narrative which did not leave much place to intervene; and that at times asking questions seemed not to open up the narratives, but rather block them, and that the women mostly preferred to pursue their own line of thought, in the framework of how they had constructed their history. However specifically during discussing their childhood, their narratives seemed to open up novel places which they felt surprised to be discussing.

While listening, it was important to always keep in mind that the women held insights regarding their situation, and to perceive them as insightful agents of their

stories, not as completely unaware “subjects” of investigation. However this did not mean that there was no place for analyzing more than the content of the narratives, for not the whole experience could be articulated; such inexpressible nature of their experiences were sometimes pointed out by the women themselves. Therefore at times, part of the experience had to be transmitted by sighs, tears, pauses, changes of tone, and mostly, by recreating the ambivalence they had felt, within their narratives.

All interviews were conducted in Turkish. Even though one woman indicated that her native language was Kurdish, she was still interviewed in Turkish as the interviewer did not know Kurdish and the participant was fluent in Turkish. Only verbal consent was taken for reasons of increased need of secrecy. As the majority of the women were shelter residents in risk of being found by their partners or families, in order to maintain trust, written consent was not asked for.

#### Data Analysis

Analysis were conducted on eight of the interviews, leaving out one interview as, contrary to other informants, the history of the ninth informant involved numerous relationships with abusive partners. The interviews were analyzed using grounded theory. Grounded theory is a specific type of qualitative methodology initially conceptualized by Glaser & Strauss in 1965, aiming to reverse the dominant way of using research to validate preconceived theories and instead, use research to formulate theory (Charmaz, 2006). It does not aim to generalize findings to represent a whole population, but rather to gain a deeper understanding into experience by obtaining narrations of participants and constructing categories based on these narrations in order to shed light onto phenomenon that need to be understood further.

In its restructured form by Charmaz (2006), grounded theory does not aim to discover facts; experience is reconstructed, in a more intersubjective manner, during the process.

The methodology of grounded theory involves gathering data based on semi structured interviews, coding of the data, and constructing a theory; however these steps are intertwined (Charmaz, 2006). Coding starts in the process of interviewing, and follows a stepwise procedure: in the initial coding phase, the coder remains open to all theoretical possibilities presented by the data, and generate any themes by repeated reading, comparison, and coding word-by-word, line by line or incident by incident. In the subsequent focused coding phase, the most salient categories are pinpointed and constructed. A process of memo-writing accompanies the process of coding, any category or theme can be noted in the memos in order to provide a background for the coding process. Next, in the axial coding phase, categories are linked with their associated subcategories, usually forming schemas. Lastly, the theoretical coding aims to generate the links between codes and integrate them into a theory.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

Analysis of the narratives revealed two major content areas, childhood, and marriage. Childhood was analyzed under two headings, the childhood context and descriptions of self in the childhood context. The first heading had six subthemes: Growing up with instability, loss, and violence, merging of love and violence, ambivalence towards parental violence and neglect, feeling estranged from the family (with one subtheme, distance with the mother), isolation and restrictions in childhood, and taking over exquisite responsibility; the second heading did not have any subthemes.

Marriage was analyzed under three headings: the marriage context (with two subheadings), a changing self in the context of violence, and a sense of self characterized by shame and doubt. The marriage context was comprised of two subheadings: getting married: obligation and dependency with no subthemes, and being married with two subthemes. Being married was comprised of two subthemes, a) oppression, desolation, and enstrangement with four subthemes (being subdued and forced into a new role: where violence begins, having no space of her own, and desolation: being left all alone with a violent stranger, the husband), b) hopes and expectations: seeking intimacy. The subheadings under the second heading were: forms of violence that comprised of isolation, exploitation of labour, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse. The third heading included no subthemes.

## Section I: Childhood

### The Childhood Context

#### Growing up with Instability, Loss, and Violence

Women described growing up in a context colored with instability, loss, neglect and violence at differing levels, that resulted in feelings of intense loneliness and desolation that would eventually serve as factors increasing vulnerability in later life.

Instability colored the childhood and the early adulthood before marriage for almost all women. During adolescence, Ayşe had fled her home to find her mother who had abandoned her at birth, only to be later renounced by her and her father; she had also fled the child welfare center she was later placed in, several times. Perihan had grown up witnessing the repetitive illnesses and paranoid crisis of her mother and the recurrent break-ups and reconciliations of her parents, each time being sent to another relative unwilling to take care of her and her siblings. İlknur expressed growing up with an affectionate and caring father, but a neglectful and psychologically abusive mother, dealing with her education all by herself, and leaving home at the age of 13 to go to a boarding school whose students differed from her family in terms of cultural background and socioeconomic status, leading her to have social and personal problems throughout her late childhood and onwards. Helin recounted the sudden financial downfall her family had experienced and the dramatic changes they had endured accordingly; the sudden impoverishment and the necessity for her to look after the house and her siblings at a very early age, leading her to “suddenly become an adult woman”.

Early loss was also an important part of instability and another important vulnerability factor. Real or symbolic loss of attachment figures, such as early death of parents or being renounced by them, was described by four of the women, in addition to which severe neglect and disruptive violence was described by three others. Helin reported early loss of her father at an interfamilial conflict and the illness of her mother, Perihan described her mother's chronic illnesses and eventual death at the age of 11, and Ayşe had grown up without her mother, and when she later found her, had been renounced both by her father and her mother on reporting the abuse of her stepfather. For both Helin and Perihan, the illness of their mothers had led to the absence of a mothering figure, for the mothers were most of the time too ill to take care of them. All three women described yearning for their lost parents and seeking to fulfill a place they felt was empty:

There's something about losing him at the age of 13, about longing for him, longing always for a father... Yes, I am the daughter of my father. (Helin)

Well, we grew up without even knowing our mother's name. Then my older sister got married and left the house of my grandmother, and my grandmother was old, and I was in adolescence. I was in a search for something, with no mother, and no father. (Ayşe)

It could be seen in the expression of Perihan the symbolic loss of her parents even before her mother's death, as she described feeling that she had no mother or father:

In an age so young... and until that age, again and again... losing the mother, losing the father, losing the mother, my mother's sicknesses.... (...) Because you know they [the partner's family] were very kind people... they treated me so nice... her daughter, who would become my sister-in-law, their relatives, they were all fabulous people, they acted so, they looked so, the person I call my mother-in-law, was very kind, like a mother to me... Well, more than my future husband, they were appealing to me. (Perihan)

Similarly, although her father was alive, Şermin noted that the divorce of her parents had severely affected her, and referred to it as the 'loss' of her father:

Because I had lost my father at the age of four, you know they got divorced, my mother and father. Because I did not see him much, you know how girls are more into their fathers, I did not want my daughter to go through the same psychology with me. Because I got sick when they got divorced. I was very fond of my father. (Şermin)

Violence and neglect had existed in the childhoods of most women, either towards them or their mothers, and sometimes both; however, while some described the violence as more severe and having great impact over their childhoods, some others did not feel it had impacted them greatly. While Bahar, İlknur, Beyza, and Şermin described more secure childhoods in which they had felt taken care of, experienced closeness, felt connected to other figures such as friends and/or relatives and perceived them as benign figures; Perihan, Dilek, Helin, Ayşe described their childhood contexts as abusive and neglectful in which there were less number of figures (and thus more isolation) -which were perceived mostly as more malignant-, more isolation and almost no affection or caring.

This seemed to be related to the fact that the content and severity of the violence and the presence of affection differed from women to women, ranging from severe psychological and moderate physical violence such as slapping, to severe physical violence such as chaining the child and beating her up with iron sticks. Severe neglect was recounted by all the women in the second group; Helin, Ayşe, Dilek, Perihan, however the other women also described experiencing neglect. All women except İlknur had been undereducated due to the constraints of the family, and İlknur described attaining higher education only by her own efforts and the

support of her teachers. Bahar, İlknur and Beyza did not mention any other signs of neglect. On the other hand Ayşe had been severely neglected; abandoned by her mother and renounced by both of her parents and her grandmother, and had also suffered great neglect at the child welfare center. Perihan had similarly been abandoned by her parents at different times; though she was taken care of by relatives, she depicted them also as extremely neglectful. Besides, the illness of her mother who would at times attack her, and the physical absence of her father had deprived her of any resources of affection or emotional support. Helin recounted being locked in the house all alone by her mother, and feeling severely neglected due to her mother's frequent absences for doctor visits. Lastly, Dilek described that she had never felt loved or valuable in the eyes of her parents, however did not give specific details regarding abuse or neglect.

Moderate physical violence was recited by İlknur, which was committed by her mother, and severe physical abuse was reported only by Helin and Ayşe, which was committed by their fathers, as well as sexual abuse by other relatives (cousin and stepfather, relatively). Reporting sexual abuse had led them to be accused by their mothers for seducing their perpetrators and had created feelings of intense anger and disappointment in their mothers:

Forgive... I do not know when I can forgive, maybe after this therapy, I don't know....Because so much has been lived, I was harassed by my uncle, harassed by my other uncle's son, at the age of six I was harassed and then beaten by my mother: did you want it, too? She would ask. Such a ridiculous way of thinking... (...) I kept saying that I had done nothing, but all there is, is that utterance of hers, and you know, this hazy image before my eyes... I was only 5 or 6. (Helin)

The other women did not recount being exposed to parental physical violence during their childhood, however Beyza and Dilek stated witnessing their fathers' violence against their mothers even though they were unwilling to talk about the subject. Helin, on repeated questions, also mentioned that her father had used physical violence against her mother, but she was also unwilling to reflect on it. In a general sense, it seemed that for the women, it was more difficult to talk about violence against their mothers, and they tended to minimize the violence and focus on the affection between her parents:

Interviewer: Would he ever use violence?

Helin: To me?

Interviewer: To you or to your mother?

Helin: To me, very frequently.

Interviewer: To your mother?

Helin: Because my mother was sick in, he would not interfere with her after some time... she has asthma.

Interviewer: And before that?

Helin: There was always violence before that.

Interviewer: Did you see it?

Helin: Not much... well, two or three times we witnessed it. In some time, when she was 20 and in their fourth year of marriage, because she was sick, he would not use violence so much. In our time, I only saw twice, actually, only once. And I never saw again. I have always witnessed their love instead, but he would use violence against me, yes.

In summary, three of the women described severe violence and/or neglect from both parents, coupled with differing levels of affection and caring, two described only violence from both parents and lack of any affection, and one described violence and neglect from mother and affection and caring from father. In all cases except two

(Bahar and Şermin), as children, they had suffered violence and neglect at the hands of the persons they felt a deep attachment to, and deeply resented their maltreatment.

### Merging of Love and Violence

Merging of love and violence, or of benevolence and malignancy could be tracked down in the childhood stories of the women. Having received violence from those who were supposed to care for them, witnessing the violence of those they were attached to, being prohibited from contacting their loved ones as if they were harmful, being saved from their caretakers, being attacked by their caretakers as if they were strangers, facing abuse at the hands of public institutions of “protection” had given them mixed messages during childhood. For instance Perihan talked about loving her father even though he was a “bad man” and how fond he was of her. In another case, Helin described being severely beaten by her father who would also spoil her at other times:

He would keep spoiling me, he beat me quite severely, but also spoiled me (...) You know we had these radiator pipes in our living room, he would tie me by the foot to that pipe and would drop by to slap me. You know, I only saw violence.(...) And on the other hand, when we sat down for dinner, he would make me sit besides him, there would be four or five types of food (...) At one hand such great love, at the other, beating; yes he loved me, but he beat me too. (Helin)

Ayşe spoke about confiding into her mother about her stepfather's abuse, who would then complain to the police about her seducing her stepfather, as well as being abused at the child “protective” services which was supposed to offer her protection.

Besides, in the narratives of both Ayşe and Helin, it was apparent that though it also involved violence, their fathers' care had been of utmost importance. Helin emphasized the importance of her father's care as opposed to her mother's neglect;

although he did use violence, the care he showed at different times had been of central importance for her:

Helin: When my mother left the house to wander around, girls aren't taken to wandering in our region, so she would lock me in the house.

Interviewer: All on your own?

Helin: Yes. On my own. She would lock me in the bathroom so that I wouldn't make a mess of the house.(...) The small bathroom had this little window, high above of course, I would jump on the sink and then to the window. The coffee shop of my father was near, I would send someone from the shop to get my father, and my father would come and get me out. After that incident, my father started to take me with him, so he wouldn't leave me alone with my mother.

Affection and care did not necessarily exclude violence. Indeed, at times, violence could be perceived as care itself. For instance, while speaking about her father taking care of her, Ayşe gave the example of him beating her up for coming in late, and disobeying his father's rules for that was the only way of getting his attention:

My father would take care of me, that is, we used to live with my grandmother, we grew up really free. Lately, I had been coming home late, staying with my friends outside until it was really late. My grandmother did not really like it, old people can be narrow minded. She did not see it acceptable and complained to my father..... Each time, my father would come and beat me, and then leave. (...) In order to get his attention, I would come home late, and so that he would take me with him. But he would misunderstand and beat me and then leave, he never asked why I was doing this. (Ayşe)

#### Ambivalence Towards Parental Violence and Neglect

The confusion such mixed messages resulted in could be sensed from the narratives of the women in that these narratives were also confusing and ambivalent.

For instance Beyza depicted an idealized family portrait when asked about her childhood eventually revealed her anger, and her narratives would alternate between having been neglected and having been extremely cared for:

Interviewer: How were things between your mother and father back then?

Beyza: Great. I loved my mother and father. And they loved me back...

Because my mother, she would understand all, from my voice, my breath, everything she would understand. You know mothers don't ask, they do not see your mistakes... My father is Circassian, Circassians put great value on their daughters..

(...) But they managed my marriage. (...) It was not my choice, I did not even know it when they gave me away. It was a horrible marriage, horrible... They did not send me to school. My mother, my parents, did nothing for me. Yes they loved me, yes I had a really nice... But they did not consider my future. I cried so hard to go to school, so hard. But they would not send me.

Dilek also had contrasting discourses where she would, sequentially talk resentfully about her parents and then try to understand without blaming them:

First they ruined my life. Now they are doing this to me (...) You sacrifice, and you sacrifice so much, and in return, you get extreme violence. You know my father, he cannot do anything, because it is the East, and the East is very different. (Dilek)

In such narratives, it is not possible to say that women's anger is completely dissociated as sometimes assumed (see Stein, 2012 for a review), as it was revealed further into the interview. However, it is also not invariably present and integrated into the women's world of meaning, thereby leading to drifts from a resentful anger to understanding and idealization. Given the traumatic nature of such abuse and neglect, it is unsuspecting that such narratives carry with them ambiguity and confusion. For instance in the above mentioned quote, Dilek first expressed her anger at their parents for putting her through an unwanted and violent marriage, but subsequently acquitted his father by referring to cultural necessities.

With passing time, such drifts had perhaps become less for Perihan who, 10 years after her divorce, described how resentful she used to feel against her mother, stating that she had come to an understanding of her just recently. However, she still felt much angry with her father whom she had not yet forgiven.

It's so hard for a woman, if she doesn't want to give her children up, why should she? If she does want it, if she feels more powerful that way, she can do it and I would never judge her. But in those years that I was frustrated with my mother, I was too angry to think that she had done so out of despair and I could not see. (Perihan)

The confusion seemed to be greater as the contrast between the messages increased; for instance when the violent parent also showed great affection or love, or when the caring parents failed greatly to care for them (e.g. forced them to leave school or get married). Again such confusion was most apparent in the narratives of Helin who had experienced both severe violence and great affection at different times from her father. While talking about her identification with her father and his values, she drifted from his affectionate to violent qualities abruptly:

Yes I am the daughter of my father, they really say I resemble him much, my way of talking, my manners, my behaviours, my morality... My father was a decent man, he was an edgy man.

(...) I am trying to understand him a bit. Because the personality he imposed on me is not bad, he was affectionate, forgiving, not only towards me. That my father was a good man... He was different from outside, he was generous, the father of the poor. He loved to give away, would be upset if someone had a problem, but he was also very edgy and authoritarian, with some effect of external factors, like my aunt would talk too much... (Helin)

### Feeling Enstranged from the Family

As children, women had mostly withdrawn themselves from their families as a result of neglect and violence; and in the present, while some expressed feelings of disappointment and anger for not being cared for, others chose to minimize the violence they had experienced and idealize their childhood environment. In either case, all women except two (Bahar and Şermin) expressed feelings of being enstranged and distant from their families.

Such feelings appeared to result in feelings of intense loneliness, as well as a great need to emotionally bond with another person. Perihan explained that one of the main reasons for her marriage at an early age (i.e. 15) was the thought that the troubles at her home were caused by her own presence and that they would dissolve at her departure, indicating the desolation she felt at home; and that she had hoped her husband's mother would also be like a mother for her, indicating the need she had felt to bond with another supportive figure:

Thinking to myself, if I leave this house, maybe they will have some peace, and I would be more at ease (...). (Perihan)

Likewise, Helin described feeling so estranged that, as a child, she had begun thinking that she was not the real daughter of her parents, and had hoped that she would somehow meet her 'real parents' and live with them:

Sometimes I would think that I was not their child. Half joking, half seriously my father would also say, Helin we found you from some kindergarten, he would tell my younger sister, we took you from the ironman, the others are our own children. Until one day around age 10 I burst out crying, distressed, "I do not want you, you don't even love me, you beat me too much, I want to know my real mother and father, and I am in for it even if they collect garbage for a life, I don't want to live with you. (Helin)

Most importantly, even though she knew for certain that she was their daughter indeed, Helin pointed out that at times she still reflected on these doubts. Ayşe, who had been abused and abandoned by both of her parents also expressed the need she had felt to fulfill the space left empty by the lack of her parents, and that by marrying, she had sought to find refuge in a man she had not known:

How did I meet him? A time I had fled the shelter, I met him outside. I had known him for 3 days, and my psychology was real bad. How to say, I was in a search, with no love from the mother or father, with no expectations from anyone. I saw him as a refuge, I did not get married out of love. (Ayşe)

Thereby, it appeared that an important result of the enstrangement women felt from their families and the need for a close figure was the search for other figures with which they could form close bonds with. In the case of Perihan it was her mother-in-law, for Ayşe it was her husband, for Helin it was a fantasized family during childhood, and her husband during late childhood. Helin noted that after she had been prohibited from seeing the boy she loved and had married with her husband, she had put in great effort to build a relationship with him:

Our house was in the second floor, and water was downstairs. As a newly wed, I would get up early -I had invested all my hope in him, thinking maybe I would forget and love it, maybe I would forget Mehmet. I would boil the water, take it to him, wash his face and hands, hold his mirror, make his breakfast... (Helin)

Though she did not mention explicitly a relationship between her wish for a child and her feelings of desolation, based on the narratives of other women and her own narratives of desolation, İlknur's intense wish for a child could also be examined in this regard:

And I studied at colleges with scholarships, won the university in first place, studied abroad and came back, worked in three holdings -none of them were small. And a great career, a nice occupation, going from this hotel to the other, in planes, so entertaining, with a lot of money, and a job which pays you to consume. Against all this, my only aim in life was to get married and have children. (İlknur)

Distance with the mother appeared to be of special importance in leading to feelings of enstrangement and longing for closeness: Perihan's mother barely recognized her daughter at times of her recurrent breakdowns and she had grown up longing for closeness with her due to her repetitive abandonments, Helin recalled her mother as always distant and unloving and had questioned whether she was really her child or not, İlknur described her mother as psychologically, and sometimes physically,

abusive and neglectful, Ayşe's mother had abandoned her at birth and later had thrown her out of the house on believing she had seduced her husband. While intense loneliness, longing for closeness and belonging, and feeling the need to hold on to another close figure were themes that appeared on all but one women, these themes were much more salient in the narratives of these four women.

Throughout the interview Dilek pointed out that she was closer with her father, and was almost indifferent to her mother; her understanding was usually directed solely at her father:

Interviewer: Do you still have contact with your mother?

Dilek: It seems to get better now. I wasn't really bad with my mother anyway, but my father... I was really fond of my father, really attached to him. (Dilek)

İlknur, on the other hand described her father as the only source of affection and care, while describing her mother as distant and abusive:

So in those terms, I had this aggressive mother, and really great father, we were so much beaten by my mother, for valid reasons and not. From my father, we never heard one bad word, he would come to set us to sleep, they had exchanged roles in the family. (İlknur)

Helin's discourses regarding her mother also focused solely on her abuse, while describing the father both in a positive and negative light; her description of her relationship with her mother included no expressions of closeness, which, after doubting if she was indeed the child of her family, led her to believe she was her father's daughter, but doubt if her mother was her biological mother:

OK, I really resemble my father, both physically and in terms of attitude, I am his daughter, but I still have doubts about my mother, I am still not sure. But you know my aunt has seen my birth, other relatives, they were all with my mother, but that doubt prevails in my mind. (Helin)

### Isolation and Restrictions in Childhood: Learning to Find Ways Through Obstacles

Such an unstable and violent context also resulted in isolation for the women.

Frequently, isolation had started from an early age; few women had a stable circle of trusted friends or relatives while growing up. Frequent resettlement, constraints of the family, abuse at early childhood resulted in few, if any, contacts. The exceptional cases were Bahar and Beyza who reported growing up with numerous others around them. Frequent resettlement could result from recurrent breaking up of the parents, being thrown out of the house, parting from the family at an early age for education, or other life difficulties such as loss of close ones or economical status. Childhood abuse also could result in disgust from others, specifically males, and a loss of trust in all others, preventing the formation of close bonds with supportive others.

Some of the women also expressed that growing up as a female child meant facing many constraints at different parts of their childhood and adolescence; for instance Perihan recalled having been prohibited from leaving the house under any circumstances during childhood, Ayşe had regularly been beaten up for staying out late, for Helin, prohibitions had started with adolescence as she was now seen as “a woman”. İlknur described finding her way through numerous constraints while trying to go overseas for education:

I fooled them and went abroad, I am saying I was so strong, today any child can do the same, with the internet and the world in his hands, but in that period (...) In such period, I, as a female child, went to a completely unknown country without the notice of my family. (İlknur)

A different case was that of Şermin who noted growing up mostly “within the house”, with only a few figures except her mother and grandmother, and rarely left the house, however, she did not refer to constraints as what had led to her isolation:

Well, I did not go to school, did not grow up in such a large environment. I was always in the house, with my mother and grandmother. (Şermin)

The narratives of the women suggested that growing up as a girl meant having to confront constraints and obstacles at various times and places; and also that girls learned to find their ways through such obstacles while growing up. For instance Ayşe described staying out despite knowing she would be beaten, Helin described finding ways to reach neighbours who would call her father when she would be locked, Perihan recounted a memory in which she had successfully bargained with their maid, giving her her buttons in return for being permitted to secretly see her mother, and İlknur explained how she had deceived her parents to fly overseas. Such narratives suggested that as children, women both learned what would be expected of them and what would be restricted for them, as well as how they could manipulate existing conditions in order to find their way through.

#### Taking Over Exquisite Responsibility

Having to take over exquisite responsibility such as taking care of siblings or mother was mentioned as an important part of their childhood by Helin, Perihan and İlknur. Helin and Perihan described taking care of others, whereas İlknur described taking care of herself. Due to their sudden financial downfall following her father's death, Helin had had to take care of the house and of her siblings while her mother was out working. She described it as an overwhelming responsibility that went beyond her age, leading her to grow up all of a sudden:

So we had a huge financial downfall, we had moved to the house of the doorman. I had never done cleaning until then; I was looking after my nine month old sibling and taking care of the house. (...) After 11, until age 13-15, I looked after them all. Cleaning, everything was in my responsibility, all of a sudden, I had become a grown up woman. (Helin)

Perihan also recounted having to take care of her ill mother and younger sisters all alone in the absence of her father who had been seeking refuge in drinking, and taking great responsibility of her siblings after the death of their mother:

Perihan: I was getting in a fight with anyone who mentioned my siblings. With sister E, with the neighbours, my father; no one can treat my siblings badly. Because I did not have my mother, besides being my siblings, they felt to me like... like....

Interviewer: *Emanet* (something that is entrusted to someone)?

Perihan: *Emanet*.

The case for İlknur was different; she expressed that her family was taking care of her, however, she had had to make efforts on her own to continue her education in a bigger city where she would be later struggling all on her own at a young age. Her narratives showed that she would not share with her family the difficulties she would face in life even when they were overwhelming.

#### Descriptions of the Self in the Childhood Context

Women's descriptions of their childhood self appeared to fall into two main categories: One included narratives of strength and exceptionality, emphasizing features of strength, confidence, beauty, and being cherished; the other, narratives of worthlessness and insignificance. However, they were not mutually exclusive, some women used both narratives to describe their childhood self.

Helin, Perihan, Ayşe, Dilek described feeling desolated and worthless as a result of the violence, neglect and abandonment they had experienced. Perihan expressed that marrying and not being able to return to her father's house was closely related to feeling that there was no place for her, Ayşe described growing up with no love or affection from parents and trying to fill up such lack, Dilek expressed that she had never felt loved or valuable throughout her childhood, and Helin stated that she

had felt so unloved by her parents that she had come to think she was not their child. Thus violence, neglect, and abandonment appeared to lead to a childhood self colored with feelings of worthlessness and being unwanted, which led the women to form a negative self concept that would also render them more vulnerable to internalizing the negative images of themselves as reflected by their future partners. Dilek, though not elaborating on the attitude of her family, described feeling unloved and worthless throughout her childhood:

Dilek: Because I never knew what loving and being loved was like. I have never felt such a thing (...)

Interviewer: How did you feel as a child?

Dilek: I always felt worthless.

Contrasting cases where the descriptions of Beyza, İlknur, Bahar and Şermin: For instance, Beyza described feeling extremely cherished, as well as being frustrated at her family for impeding her education and forcing her to marry, blaming them for not sufficiently considering her interests.

Bahar had no contrasting narratives regarding this issue; she described feeling loved and having a positive self concept throughout childhood and early adulthood:

I really confided in myself, I was a sociable person, I had good relationships with people... I don't know how it sounds to say this, but I am a really loved person in my environment. (Bahar)

Şermin described a similar childhood context in which she felt extremely cherished by her mother who was her only caretaker:

Because I grew up with my mother, I grew up spoiled. A little spoiled, delicate, whatever I wanted was done immediately. (Şermin)

Self attributes of strength and exceptionality were also described by Helin, Beyza, Perihan, İlknur, Bahar, and Şermin; sometimes in ways that contrasted the other

narratives of worthlessness, other times in describing other contexts so that the two narratives did not create a contrast. For instance, İlknur described a caring and affectionate father and feeling “like a princess” in her childhood, as well as dealing with the difficulties regarding education at a small town all on her own, and that she had had to stand all alone at the face of many challenges while growing up.

Throughout the interview she described herself as exceptional for standing out amongst other girls and becoming more successful (such as having higher education and a high-income job) than girls at her hometown usually do:

I am always a thing, even among educated people -I mean I was, now I am a ruin. Everyone would say, we just can't be like you, so sociable, I don't know, I compose, I write my memoirs, I have hobbies, I go to sewing training, I have always been sportive, I had my own house by the sea, all to myself, things that not all women can do. (İlknur)

Bahar also described herself as strong and powerful, with great confidence in herself, and treated such attributes as exceptional in how she constructed her expressions:

I worked, I did have a work life. I worked in textile, but I do not see it as invaluable. I earned good money, and also, well, I claimed my labour, so I trusted myself, there was a Bahar with self confidence. (...) Think, a man of 70, would kneel by me as I was sitting in the sofa, and chat, at my friend's house, while I was sitting, he sat down on the floor and chatted with me. (Bahar)

A similar construction was present also in the narratives of Helin who described herself as different from girls her age, more masculine and more powerful in that she was bold enough to resist her parents even if she got beaten:

I only have one advantage: my father brought me up like a man, he was not educated but had high culture. I could come to this point today because he brought me up so differently. But not all women can be this way there, they can't, they couldn't.

(...) I would have stood on my own two feet, I would have taken good care of them and of myself, and would protect myself well, because I was like a man.

I was never verbally harassed at the street. Was I ugly? No, I was beautiful, they would point out to me in the neighborhood, I had no problems, but those thoughts, those grown ups, those who define life... And I graduated in the first place, as a start student. The principle begged my father to let me study, but they would not. (Helin)

As a different case, Bahar did not mention such a contrast; she described herself as feeling strong and exceptional, and did not mention feelings of worthlessness during her childhood. Still differently, Perihan expressed her strength also in resisting and sometimes putting pressure on his father despite her young age, as well as taking care of her mother and siblings. For her, this did not result in feeling or being treated as exceptional, and thus did not contrast with her feelings of worthlessness.

## Section II: Marriage

Themes regarding marriage will be examined under three headlines: the marriage context, a changing self in the context of coercive control, and a sense of self characterized by shame and doubt.

### The Marriage Context

In the marriage context, themes that emerged as central to depicting women's subjective experiences of marriage were analyzed under two subheadings; getting married and being married.

#### Getting Married: Obligation and Dependency

Most of the women had known their husbands for only a short period of time when they got married. Except from Bahar whose involvement with her husband predated her marriage for about eight years, only Ayşe, Şermin and İlknur had been involved with their husbands for several months, whereas Perihan, Dilek ad Beyza had barely seen theirs.

Women's descriptions of getting married could be categorized under three headings: being forced to marry, being obliged to marry, and marrying willfully. However, these categories were not clearly mutually exclusive; the narratives of some women could be thought of as falling into two categories. In such cases, they were categorized under which the women chose to emphasize.

Dilek, Helin, and Beyza discussed being forced by their families to marry complete strangers. Dilek and Helin had forcibly married when they were still children; Dilek was 13 and Helin was 15. In both cases, forcing their daughters to marry had been obligatory also for the families in order to 'protect their honour'. As her older sister ran away, Dilek had to marry her husband in order to prevent him from killing her father, and Helin was married to the first person who asked for her, as her mother was concerned she would "shame" her family with her love affair:

So my mother had been widowed at the age of 28, so she thought she would give me away before something happens to me, before I flee, before I shame my honour (...) I cried too much, too much the day I got married. I cried too much, it is not possible to tell you exactly how; from the time of henna to the day I got married, I kept crying. (Helin)

Helin vaguely remembered how she reacted to her family, but remembered well crying the whole night she got married, as she had no choice but to obey them. Dilek, on the other hand, was younger and recalled not protesting to her family for she had thought of it as playing "house", and was eager to wear a bride's gown. For Beyza, the process worked differently; she was 21 when her parents had forcibly married her, however did not specify how she had reacted.

However, in contrast to the prevailing assumptions, not all women had been forced by their families to marry, including those who married as children. Ayşe,

Perihan and İlknur remarked that they had been obliged to marry, but not out of familial pressures. Ayşe and Perihan had married for having “no place to go to”. Ayşe, immediately on turning 18, had married a man he had almost just met, in order to find a “refuge” for herself, away from the child welfare center. Perihan, on the other hand, had been seeking a way to flee her home, and when her applications for boarding school was rejected, had seen marriage as her only way out of the house, and as the only way to get her youngest brother out of the child welfare center at which he was placed because their stepmother would only allow two children at the house. She was 15, and had to put great effort in order to persuade her father to give her the necessary legal permission:

It was also an escape, we used to live in this really small, tiny house, and I am struggling for my brother, why aren't we taking him back, we might have given him away, but he does not have to stay there, he just can't manage there, he keeps fleeing.

(...)So thinking to myself, I thought if I leave this house, they might find some peace, and I would be more at ease. Isn't in any way rational, but I found it so, and was convinced. This is also how they tried to convince me. And on the other hand: if I leave, I am thinking, they will be obliged to take my brother back, there will be no more excuses. And likewise, when I am married and have a new house, my siblings can come to visit me, and perhaps one day I can take them altogether. So in this way, I was protective, responsible, thinking I would save both myself and them. (Perihan)

İlknur had a different story; she explained that she could have lived with her boyfriend under different circumstances; however she yearned for a child, and therefore had to marry him. As she had willfully married a man she loved, she also appeared to fall into the third category; however, in her narrative, emphasis was put on the obligation to marry and sustain marriage:

To be really honest. I was 29 years old. I had lost my chances. This was the truth. Why am I stating it so; in terms of having children. There is something called menopause for women, and it can happen anytime after 45, somewhere between 45-50. I was 40, and had five years before me. (İlknur)

On the other hand, Bahar and Şermin remarked that they had married the men they loved and had been involved with for a long time; for Bahar it had been 8 years.

However, although she emphasized having married a man she loved, Şermin's marriage had also been out of necessity; while her boyfriend was not making plans to marry her, she had been feeling the pressure to marry him because they had been sexually involved:

I wasn't pregnant, but because I had been sexually involved with him, in my family, in where we live, such things are really important. If you get involved with someone, you have to take him [as husband]. There is no such thing as being with someone else, or taking someone else. (Şermin)

Obligation and not having the right to make decisions regarding their marriage was a central theme in all of the narratives. Even in the cases of İlknur and Şermin who had married willfully, obligation emerged as an important theme: İlknur felt obliged to marry to have a child, Şermin felt obliged for she was no longer “a girl” (i.e. a virgin). A prevalent emotion accompanying such obligation was dependency, where the women appeared to feel dependent on the wishes and decisions of their husbands, as they were obliged to marry them. Even in the case of Bahar who did not mention feeling obliged, the expressions in her narratives contained feelings of dependency in the sense that she had been waiting for a proposal for 8 years and her partner had “requested” her from her family without taking her opinion:

So when we had money, he decided that we could then construct a life together. He shared this thought with me. Actually, his uncle called me. Bahar, he said, at last we will come, be your guest. We will come to ask for you from your father. (...) He decided, all of a sudden. Believe me, we did not

sit down with him to say, Bahar, it is now time for us to live together, lets have a life together. (...) That way, he just decided, abruptly. He never let me have e say. Never asked me, Bahar, what do you think, this life belongs to both of us, is the timing good? (Bahar)

Such a feeling of dependency seemed to deprive the women of feeling equal with their partners. In a similar vein, most women had been married without a gown or a proper wedding, mostly without attendance or contribution of their husband's family, which had enhanced their feelings of dependency:

H: My marriage also was quite different. There was no wedding. .  
Interviewer: Were you upset?

H: Yes. One can be a widow – I am a widow now (sigh). At our place, widows or those girls who could not get married until 30-35, or those who have committed crimes... that was how I became a bride. My mother paid for everything, even for my gown, for my hair (...) And after that, a poor wedding. With no one, no one from his side, all alone... (Helin)

Ş: For instance, they did not organize a wedding for me, they did not take me into the family.

Interviewer: Were you upset?

Ş: Of course. Every mother would like to see her daughter as a bride, wouldn't I want the same for my daughter?

I- And yourself?

Ş- Sure, my mother and father still cry at each wedding. It is really horrible. (Şermin)

Such feelings of getting married out of obligation and feelings of dependency appeared to be important in how women perceived violence and how they felt about themselves, by making them feel destitute and disempowered, however I will be elaborating on this issue in more detail in the next section.

### Being Married

Themes that fell into the category of being married were analyzed as to fall into two separate subcategories: oppression, desolation, enstrangement, and hopes and

expectations. Four themes comprised the first subcategory: being subdued and forced into a new role, having no space of her own, desolation, and enstrangement.

The second category had no subthemes.

Oppression, Desolation, Enstrangement

Being subdued and forced into a new role emerged as the first subcategory under oppression, desolation, and enstrangement, and appeared as the point in marriage where violence began. As women pointed out, getting engaged meant a great change in their identity and roles. Although they did recall various constraints placed on them while growing up, they had illustrated them in a way that also left room for their own wishes and decisions, for their own agency. Specifically, Şermin, Ayşe, Bahar and İlknur had stated that they had been relatively free, could make their own decisions, and wander around without much constraint from their families.

Before I met my husband, I was a person with too many friends, a really free person. My family was never oppressive. And I never led to a bad reputation for my family. My mother would know I wouldn't do anything. They would say, "We would leave you in the midst of a thousand men, and know my daughter will return just the same". Because they knew me, because my mother trusted me so much, she left me free. I wandered around with friends, had many friends, I was really at ease, with no worries. (Şermin)

İlknur, Bahar, and Şermin who had been already romantically involved with their partners described also that they had been quite free and at ease during dating:

I had my friends. I never saw anything like, 'you can't do this, you can't go there'. I was really at ease in my relationship. It was the same as before, he had no constraints. (Bahar)

Şermin noted how her partner had become increasingly more controlling after their engagement, and described it as the natural course of engagement:

And after that, after I started to get involved [sexually] with my partner, he started to interfere with my life. You know, like claiming me. He told me what to do, and I listened. (Şermin)

Indeed, women described that with marriage, they were expected to be more submissive, and correspondingly, there was no room left for their consent or dissent. The home of marriage was the home of the men, and women were expected to fulfill the responsibilities and roles of a married woman that was culturally inscribed. Helin described how there was no room left for a woman's self in marriage, and how she had to be adjusted into the roles of mother and wife:

You take on a different model when you get married (...) Suddenly, a whole different model, you know that is depicted for you in the East, a good mother, a good housewife, a good woman, there is no 'you'. There can't be. That is it. (Helin)

With engagement, pressures regarding the role of a wife began to be exercised on the women. Any wish, attitude or behaviour that did not fit in the prescribed role were denounced, leaving the women almost no space for her own. Helin described how she could not find any space for self expression:

There is fear, there is oppression, the East is really different. In here, there are many possibilities, at least, how to say, people can express themselves. There, you can't. It is normal; it is normal to be cheated on, it is normal to be beaten. Everything is normal, all that men do are legitimate. You endure, you have your children, and there is no divorce. (Helin)

Until that time, I did nothing for myself. Nothing, until this age... Nothing for us, yes. For myself, I did nothing. I could study. I could find another job, a desk job. But I did nothing for myself. (Beyza)

When the women failed to confirm to the expected roles, violence seemed to serve as the basic force by which they were forced to re-adjust to their given role and be subdued. For instance Bahar, who had earlier explained being much at ease recalled that the first time she had confronted psychological coercion and physical violence

was when her husband had forced her to obey the commands of his older sister; and she had rejected:

When we were engaged... We had this incident, his sister had interfered, a thing about customs (...) They wanted to take me to shopping. But we went to shopping with my husband anyway, we bought all that we needed, all that we would use at our house, we either bought them together, or I did it on my own. (...) And he said, my sister is like my mother, you will do whatever she tells you to. You will go shopping. I did not want to (a short laugh), they came by as guests. Whatever his sister told him, I don't know, she didn't tell me anything of course. The other day, I went to work, we worked until the evening, he was going to drop me about 10-11, he always does that. While walking, before I could understand what happened, he hit me on my back, saying 'you disobeyed my sister'. It was the first...all of a sudden... (Bahar)

Perihan also described how her husband used to insult her when she turned out to be right on matters in which her husband had made the wrong decisions, and how he would tell her, "Your brain works too much, I'll smash it to pieces!" when he started to physically abuse her:

Firstly, he gets -got- angry with me mostly because of this. About my mind working too much. Because I had good foresight. Actually, it was good only for him, they were the things anyone could think of, about life, about the future, about the future of the children... He would see how he lost when he did not make the investments as I suggested, and get really angry. But there was never the need to say 'I told you', after it is over. He would get really angry about such things, and would degrade me about it, would find something to humiliate me with. You have gotten old, he would say, take a look at the mirror! Such humiliations, degradations... Do you find yourself so smart? Or, just the opposite, 'fool'! But when he started with physical violence, he would say the opposite: Your brain works too much, I will smash it to pieces. (Perihan)

Therefore it appeared that women's dissent became more unacceptable with engagement and marriage. It was striking that violence began almost simultaneously with marriage. As explained earlier, most of the women had barely known their husbands before getting married, therefore they had not spend much time in which the presence or absence of violence could be evaluated. Other women reported that

there had been no physical violence, and had not named any behavior of their partners as abusive prior to getting married. The narratives revealed that violence and marriage were intertwined in that violence began as soon as the relationship was institutionalized, first signs became apparent during engagement and full blown violence was initiated with marriage. It was also pervasive in the sense that different forms of violence would be present at different times and in various forms, in a way forming the very fabric of marriage.

Women recounted that psychological violence largely began with their engagement, however, they had not named it as violence. With engagement, their partners began to place constraints, to threaten them with abandonment, and to punish them in various ways. Such a pattern was valid mostly for women who had previously known their husbands; the other women had not yet formed a relationship with their husbands. Even then, several constraints could be applied, for instance, Helin remembered being prohibited from completing her education for a coiffeur's diploma because 'engaged women could not work'.

Physical violence, however, mostly started within the first year of marriage; only Bahar had been previously exposed to physical violence, which was one punch at the back during her engagement and it had increased in severity and frequency soon after her marriage. It appeared that physical violence was mostly used as a tool to ensure dominance and force the women to adjust into their prescribed roles which corresponded to total submission. One significant indicator of such use was that in most of the cases, physical violence had started when the women began to openly reject their husbands, object to them, or resist their demands. For instance, for İlknur

it was the first time she ever replied to her partner's swearing, for Perihan it was the first time she criticized her mother-in-law and objected to their maltreatment, for Bahar it was the time when she bluntly rejected her partners demand that she obey the wishes of his sister.

Sexual violence was of a different nature in that for some of the women, specifically those who had married as children, sexuality was exclusively violent, and it started on “the first night” which they described as extremely traumatic. For other women, it was mentioned as more rare, and occurring later in the marriage, however Bahar had specifically chosen to talk about it, referring to how her husband had used sexual violence as the most severe tool for domination when she was planning to abandon him.

The content of different forms of abuse and their impact on the sense of self will be elaborated on in a more detailed fashion, later in the following chapter.

Having no space of her own

The women reported that they had had almost no right to speak on any subject matter that was of interest for them, starting with the decision to marry. Almost for all informants, the marriage process had been abrupt and fast, without taking into consideration the opinions of the women, even when the women were willing to get married. Putting off women's requests and the given promises were common:

Believe me, I saw the man I would marry for only a few times. Actually, we were supposed to be engaged for a year, how did all these happen, they found some excuses, and I found myself in a fast process. (Perihan)

Bahar also expressed that she had been hoping to marry her boyfriend for 8 years, nevertheless had been shocked on learning her boyfriend's marriage plans on the

night his family visited her family to ask their permission to marry her. Declaring that she had never considered marrying and was looking forward to working and taking care of her family, Helin described how her guidance over her own life had been taken away from her:

Yes I would do my job, I would take real good care of my mother and siblings. I knew I was capable of doing so. Marriage was something I had never thought about, because when you grow up like a male, you just don't think that way. (Helin)

The women had almost no space for their own also within the context of marriage. They had almost no space in which they could decide for themselves, or have the right to speak: what to wear, whether to work, whether to get education, whom to see or not to see, where to live, how to spend the money were all decided solely by the husband. For instance, even though they had promised her not to interfere with her education, after marriage Perihan's husband and his family had prohibited her from leaving the house for school. It was significant that such prohibitions sometimes were announced after marriage. The husbands of Perihan, Beyza, Ayşe, Helin, İlknur had all forbidden their wives to work. They were also mostly not given any share of saying on where to live, or how to manage the budget; while Perihan and Bahar both mentioned that they had insisted for resettlement for a long time, Perihan also emphasized how they had financial problems but she could never know how the money was spent. Having no right to decide on matters that was of interest for both partners made the women feel estranged and confused.

So never did I handle the financial affairs of the house, or did we sit down to discuss things together. We never made plans, thinking, so we have this much money, lets pay these. Rent was being paid, and some other stuff, but for some reason there was no money left after a week.

(...) I never knew how much the income of the house was. And this increased my outbreaks. What kind of a house, what kind of a marriage, what kind of a house, is this? (Perihan)

It is also important to note that such constraints over women's spaces were not always apparent or disturbing for women. For instance Bahar noted that during her relationship with her partner, she had voluntarily given up her own job and started working with her husband, without getting a salary or share. When asked, she laughed and remarked that she had not been disturbed by the fact that she was not getting any share. It was striking that at times she used first person plural while referring to decisions she was not active in -such as deciding to marry-, or spaces that were held by her husband -such as financial resources.

I worked there all the time... I didn't get any salary (laughing). A friend said, you don't pay her any salary, at least make her insurance, so much time has passed and there is still ambiguity in your relationship. But he postponed it anyway. He did not make my insurance, he did not pay any salary. We saved up money. We had a shared account, in his name. A shared account (bursting into laughter), in his name. An account in his name we had. So we saved, and decided to get married, we had our money, we had our jobs. (Bahar)

Strikingly, when asked how she felt “at home”, Şermin noted that she could feel comfortable only when her husband was absent.

Desolation, which meant being left all alone with a violent stranger, the husband emerged as the second subcategory under the category of Oppression, Desolation, and Enstrangement. It appeared as related to cutting ties with family of origin, and perceiving the husband as a complete stranger. For women, marriage meant almost complete cutting off of their ties with their families of origin. At times settling in another city was a main reason for such distancing, at times it was related to the fact that women had married in order to flee their houses, and at times it was

due to the pressures of their husbands and their families. Such distancing was also culturally legitimized such that it was culturally expected for the women to have distance from their families of origin and invest mainly in their new families. Such an understanding was apparent in how, marriage was referred largely as “giving” a girl to someone:

For instance, he would not let my mother into the house. His mother would tell him, and he would tell me she could not come to our house. (...) His mother also told me herself. She said, when a woman gets married, she leaves all ties with her mother behind. (Şermin)

In all cases, abrupt distancing from own family led to increased feelings of loneliness and enstrangement, especially for those women who had married with men whom they had not known before. While talking about the first days of their marriage, they referred to an intense loneliness. For instance, Beyza emphasized that she had only her older sister in town, not mentioning her husband:

I was a bride of three days when I came here.. I had only my sister here. It was hard to get adjusted, I had my sister, but she had a different life. At times it would be really difficult, I would not tell my sister about the fights we had. (Beyza)

Such enstrangement was doubled when women had to marry with men who were complete strangers, the women had married as children and were obliged to live in a foreign place with people who were complete strangers. Women mostly had to move in the house of their partners, at times at a place they did not know, and sometimes with the family of their husbands.

Dilek, who had married at the age of 13 described the difficulties of having to leave the village of her parents in order to join her husband whose town

was completely strange for her. Emphasizing that “no one from her side had gone with her”, she described her disappointment and unease at having been left all alone:

Six days after we wore the rings, they came to get me. The day they took me.... The day I had to stay there, I understood –it was no game, it was real. A place completely unknown, strangers... All strangers.... (...) Nobody from that side came along with me. It was really difficult. (Dilek)

Helin similarly mentioned how difficult it had been to settle all alone in a place she did not know of, and emphasized her strangeness by saying she had not even seen her own house before settling there:

And then they engaged me, I went to a neighborhood I did not know, one like a village. I went as a bride to a single room in K, I did not even see my own house until the night of my marriage. We went together with my uncle’s wife, when I got out of the car I said, I cried so much, the day I got married, I cried so much. (Helin)

Living close or living together with the husband’s family did not appear to decrease isolation and provide support; it rather served to decrease the women's right to speak even more, and enhance their strangeness and intensify the violence. Perihan, for instance, explained how, despite earlier promises, she had been forced to live in the house of her mother-in-law and had been abused by her also:

In the meantime, you have started living together, and there is this mother-in-law, those two brother-in-laws, sister-in-law... You also have to address them, you know, you have to be careful when you step out of the room, you can’t just wander around in the house with your night robe... (Perihan)

Being married to someone they did not know included various difficulties for the women, the most significant appeared to be sexuality. The informants who had been married as children reported many difficulties with sexuality resulting from being forced in having adult sexuality while they were still children, and with a man they did not know or trust.

Perihan also mentioned how sexuality with a man she had just met had been of utmost disturbance for her, emphasizing how much of a stranger her husband had been for her:

But I was ashamed, he used to turn on the lights and say get naked, What? No way! How many times, ‘till this age, did I sit down to have a cup of tea with you so that you would ask me that? (Perihan)

Factors such as increased interference with their lives, almost no space of own to practice agency, little or no ties with their families, and -for some of the women- living with a violent men whom they did not know seemed to be related to feelings of enstrangement. The home of the marriage was the home of the man; women had little or no say about any issue that were of interest for them. In most cases, they were expected to move abruptly to a setting completely unfamiliar (where their husbands lived), live with and according to the rules of their husbands and his family (who were strangers for the women), with only limited space of action, had to adapt to their changing roles. Such changes seemed to result in feeling estranged from themselves and their environment, they became even more emotionally distant with their families of origin, with increased violence became defamiliarized with their husbands, felt out of place where they lived as it did not seem to belong to them, and felt alienated from themselves as they could not find a space for exerting themselves.

Maybe I was really frustrated, maybe I cried too much, or maybe I just kept silent, really silent. I may also have withdrawn. Those days were really hard for me, because, you’re like a man and all of a sudden you become a girl, they put you in the house, and tell you you are this now, you have to take on a new mode, I don’t know how that happens. (Helin)

Dilek, who had married a complete stranger at a early age (13), described feeling “like a thief” in her own house where she lived in constant fear of forced intercourse:

I would wait for him to go to sleep. Think about it. Until very late in the night. I would creep in my bed, as if I was a thief. I would lie in the very edge of the bed, so that he wouldn't wake up... So that he wouldn't wake up and touch me, because I get all creepy when he touches me. (Dilek)

Neglect appeared as another important factor that made the women perceive their husbands "as strangers". In such a context of desolation and loneliness, the partners used withdrawal also as a tool for punishing the unwanted behaviour of their wives, and losing the only other figure appeared destructive for the women who described trying their best for reconciliation. Perihan, for instance, who was completely isolated and living in a foreign house with her mother-in-law, described how her husband had cut off communicating with her as a punishment for her refusal of sexual intercourse:

By that time, after the first seven or ten days, we were not like husband and wife any more, we became estranged.....ihmmm..... (...) he began to act like a stranger and this went on for three years. (Perihan)

Whether they had been married with men they loved, or with men they had not known before, women expected care and affection, and felt all alone when such expectations were not met. The refusal to form any relationship, except service was another issue that the women experienced as destructive. Describing that all her needs had been met by her own mother and that her husband had been completely neglectful, Helin expressed the distance and estrangement she felt from her husband by referring to herself as "the daughter of a stranger" from her husband's viewpoint and declared that they had not become a family:

I remained married for 24 years, and I would, at most, wear one shoe, one coat of his. My mother would send me everything, because she had her own guilt, I guess she felt the need to take care of me and my siblings. My sibling would send me money. We could never become his family; when he started treating the children in the same way, I said, I am the daughter of a stranger,

but these are his own kids, it is normal for someone who treats his own kids this way to treat me in such a way. (Helin)

She also noted how she had tried to get affectionately involved with her husband whom she had met at their wedding, however was invariably rejected by him:

Helin: Well, when I hugged him and called him 'my love', he would push me and say, I dislike such things, don't'.

Interviewer: Was he ever different? .Better?

Helin: No.

In a similar vein, Perihan described being intensely hurt by her husband's indifference towards her and being treated as a "housemaid":

But he would use the house in this way, and this was really hard on me, really painful. He saw me as a maid, he came, put off his clothes, 'these will be washed, cleansed, ironed'. He could go anywhere, I could not ask him a thing like 'where are you', but I did not have such liberty. (Perihan)

Hopes and Expectations: Seeking Intimacy

Listening carefully to the disappointment women expressed at the strangeness and distance of their husbands, it became apparent that even when they had married out of obligation, women did seek and hope for their partner's affection, and were willing to form an intimate relationship with their partners. While some of the women emphasized that they had emotionally invested in the relationship as something to hold on to, some others expressed only their readiness to love and to bond. For instance, Dilek talked about how ready she had been to closely with her husband even though they had not met, however, his maltreatment had precluded this possibility:

But I was a kid. He could train me anyway he wanted. If he wanted to make me love him, he could. And so much...But just on the contrary, and from the very first day, he made me hate him. Hate, hate, hate. (Dilek)

Ayşe described that without any affection from her parents, she had been in a search and had actually loved her husband after sharing her life with him:

How can I tell you, it was a search, with no love from the mother, no love from the father, no expectations from any one. I saw him as a refuge, I did not marry him with love, but now I do love him. After having three kids, of course I do. (Ayşe)

Perihan, on the other hand explained that after all the obstacles she had confronted in early childhood, she was willing to experience intimacy with someone, but had thought of it more as dating:

I had no idea what flirting with a male was like, it never happened. In younger ages, there would be like fancying each other, from a distance, like ‘this one is mine’, ‘that one is mine’, really simple things you could not even call flirting was all I had experienced. And after that, my struggles with life was all there was; my mother’s death, my father... run home, take care of your siblings, I could think about nothing. And so, I was afraid. And I liked the idea of staying engaged for a year, so I would get to know him. And see what it is like to be engaged, to try to be involved with a man, what marriage is like... (Perihan)

Şermin expressed that she had expected nothing from his husband but love and affection, and had been greatly disappointed:

Why would he treat me this way, when I love him, when I wait for him at home with my honour, hoping things will get better. I just sit there, ask for nothing, for no goods, no clothes, I expect no material things from my husband. I just ask for his love, for his affection. For him to care about us, to make us feel he cares, he loves us. But he would not. (Şermin)

In a similar vein, İlknur referred to herself as “hungry for love” and described that all her life she had been hoping to get married and have a child and that that was all she wanted for her life:

I believe in signs, in the horoscope. One had said, these persons were, in their initial lives, married young, had been really happy, had many children and lived a wonderful life. In their second lives, whatever occupation or wealth they have, the only goal they have in life is to find their partners and have children, and be housewives –for women. (...) And

all I ever wanted was to get married and have children, and I had set a date.  
(İlknur)

Şermin also described how she enjoyed having someone that expected love from her, while discussing how having a child had empowered her:

You know there is a little person in front of me who is waiting for a reaction from me, asking for love, who is dependent on me. And I think that is a nice thing. (Şermin)

### A Changing Self in the Context of Violence

As previously mentioned, women described living under a pervasive web of violence starting with marriage. Forms of violence that emerged as central to the experiences of most women were as follows: psychological violence, physical violence, sexual violence, isolation, and exploitation of labour. Psychological abuse emerged as the central form of abuse that was most frequently used, and that directly targeted the undermining of women's self, feelings of self worth, agency, and independence. Isolation and the other forms of violence seemed to entrap the women into the relationship, and enhance the impact of psychological abuse by reinforcing the sense of self projected unto the women by psychological abuse. Physical violence appeared to inflict constant fear upon the women, eroding her sense of power and enhancing feelings of dependency and disempowerment, and when coupled with psychological violence, leading to feelings of shame that prevented the women from seeking help. Sexual violence also seemed to lead to feelings of disgust and shame, though in a different manner. Exploitation of labour also enhanced the impact of psychological abuse by leading to feelings of insufficiency and incompetency, as well as worthlessness. The impact of such forms of violence will be elaborated in more detail in the following section.

## Isolation

Isolation was invariably present in all stories. It began prior to marriage and heightened during marriage; as described in detail in the first section, most of the women grew up in isolation, and/or were in a period of increasing isolation when they had met their husbands. Some of the women also described voluntarily isolating themselves during their relationship, at times for self protection, and at other times for getting more intimate with their partners. Cutting ties with the family of origin (as mentioned in the earlier section) also led to a sudden increase in isolation for the women. Additionally, especially during marriage, all husbands placed constraints and used various strategies for further isolating the women. How such isolation occurred will be discussed in more detail below.

A striking theme that emerged regarding isolation prior to marriage was voluntary isolation. Some of the women remarked that prior to their husband's constraints -which corresponded to the period prior to marriage- they had already been isolating themselves, on their own will. Lack of trust in others was one reason, as expressed by Ayşe, who had grown up in a child welfare center, and had been abused several times:

And you can't choose your friends, people coming there [children's shelter] are already those with problems. Those friendships you like aren't protective, aren't strong. They may lead you to wrong directions. There's nothing left from that shelter, but I have only a few friends here, in this shelter. I can't really get intimate with anyone. I have formed friendships only with a few people, I am not really into friendships because they have been so damaging to me. (Ayşe)

In a different fashion, Bahar and Şermin, two women who had been romantically involved with their partners prior to marriage, pointed out that they had voluntarily

chosen to isolate themselves from their environment in order to spend more time with their partners:

Bahar: Already we were spending all our time together... Besides him.. I didn't really, how can I tell you... My relationships with my friends had become limited. I restricted myself.

Interviewer: How did that happen?

Bahar: (smiling) Instead of seeing my friends, by the way my husband's name is Kemal. I don't want to call him my husband, I want to refer to him by his name... I would say, instead of seeing that friend, I can do that with Kemal. And so, I limited my social environment. I wanted to experience everything with Kemal, I wanted to spend every minute with him. I used to miss him, even when he was besides me.

When I started loving my husband, in the initial phases, because I loved him, his love was more dominant. I wanted to see him all the time. When a person is into another, she wishes to see him in front of her all the time. That's why I thought, I can see my friends anytime. And as it was my first time, I was more into being with him. But I would still see my friends. At first it was once in 10 days, then once in 20 days, then once in a month. Then it happened that I would not see them for a really long time. (Şermin)

The partners' constraints usually began simultaneously with marriage when the women moved in with their husbands, usually to places that they did not know and that were far away from their families. In this respect, the characteristics of the places they had moved into was also important; for instance Bahar remarked that she had moved from an intimate neighborhood to an apartment complex where there were less figures for contact. It seemed that for women who could not leave their neighborhood frequently, living in a familiar place where people knew and supported each other was of significance.

I have seen times when months would pass without going out of the house. I used to live in Z, in the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. I was already isolated, I was not used to living in complexes...

(...) Because I had to leave our neighborhood, I had an extensive social environment there, and I had to leave it for a completely new one, I couldn't form new relationships, I didn't have any friends. (Bahar)

Women's husbands themselves used various strategies in order to isolate the women and deprive them from empowering connections: prohibitions, withdrawal, accusations, interfering with potential spaces of communication, looking down on the women or her loved ones, and manipulating her perception of her loved ones. It appeared that such strategies loaded into two main types of isolation: physical isolation and psychic isolation. However, these can only be thought of as analytical categories, as they could transform into one other; physical isolation could also lead to psychic isolation, and psychic isolation could reinforce physical isolation. In this case, the partner's target will be taken as the base line for such categorization.

Şermin, who had been voluntarily isolating herself from her friends, pointed out that her husband who had not limited her prior to marriage had started to interfere with her life increasingly following marriage:

When we got engaged, my husband put an end to my relationships with all my friends (...) After we began to give a relationship, after we got [sexually] involved, he started to interfere more with my life. You know how it happens, like claiming me. (Şermin)

For most women, marriage meant not only interference to, but open prohibition of connection to others. For instance, Helin pointed out that because of her husband's prohibitions, she had not left their apartment in the 15 years of marriage, it was therefore called, traditionally, “marrying into one room”:

My husband would not let me out. For 15 years, I went as a bride to a single room. A single room, my bedroom, my living room, I watched everything from my television (Helin)

Perihan similarly expressed that she was not let out of the house. She could see her father only by visiting the neighbor to whom his father came for a visit, and she would see her brothers only when they would come to visit her at her house.

Although she had been promised to be permitted to pursue education, it was also prohibited.

Work was also commonly prohibited by the partners; while although they were let out of the house, İlknur and Beyza had both been forced to quit their jobs. İlknur described quitting her job because of her husband's pressures, and Beyza described getting in and out of her various jobs due to her partner's constraints:

I started working after 15 days of marriage. I was always working, I could have been retired if I could sustain my work until now. He made me quit and start again, quit and start again. (Beyza)

The partners also used more subtle strategies such as withdrawing themselves, or preventing the women to talk with others by constantly accompanying her, or by keeping her busy with serving guests so that she cannot talk with them, disregarding her family and friends in order to drive them away.

We [guests and her] couldn't speak a word, because you [her husband] always demand something, bring plates, bring the food, change the glass, bring that, take a look at the children, check the door, the phone is ringing, take the phone, you always demand something. (...) And that was related to this: He doesn't want me to engage in a conversation with anyone (...) He doesn't want me to tell anyone about what is going on inside the house, the violence, the problems... I wouldn't discuss it with anyone anyway, but I think he had this fear, that things about him would be revealed if I talked. (Perihan)

Beyza also expressed that her husband used to “become jealous” of her close ones such as relatives, and picking up fights whenever she saw them:

There is my older sister who brought up my twins. He was jealous, he was always jealous. He wouldn't want me to see her. He would pick up a fight each time I went to see my brother. My aunt-in-law, she is so fond of the twins, she was so helpful. But he would find a problem somewhere, you went there, they did this, they teach you. (Beyza)

Women expressed that their partner's constraints on their communication with others were mostly aimed at preventing the women from sharing the violence with others,

getting support or learning ways to leave their husbands. Similarly, Dilek mentioned that her husband would not let her stay alone with her mother in order to prevent her from sharing the violence with her:

He wouldn't let me speak, he wouldn't let me go visit anyone... 'You talk about what?', he was afraid for himself (...) Because he keeps beating me; they will give advice to you, they will brainwash you, he was always afraid of these. Afraid they would give me advices. Even when I was talking with my mother, he would always be near. (Dilek)

Women mostly expressed compromising with their partner's constraints; isolation and restrictions appeared to be the form of abuse that the women mostly did not resist, and chose to comply, specifically at the first years of marriage. Though not prompted, Helin or Perihan did not mention trying to break through isolation in their first years. Resisting their partners regarding his constraints, or secretly disobeying his rules were mentioned as occurring in the later years of marriage, when they perceived themselves as having become grown ups. Such breaking through isolation could not be possible for Dilek who lived in a village at the mountains consisting of five households. Şermin, as mentioned above, also noted compromising to the demands of her husband. Physical isolation seemed to result in feelings of intense loneliness and asking support. The partners also used various strategies in order to psychologically isolate the women; they deprived them of internal means of support such as religion, or holding onto their inner representations of their loved ones. For instance, Dilek described how without her husband's permission, she used to read the Koran in secret at nights, in order to soothe herself.

Praying, sure, that is something I always do. But let me tell you, even the Qur'an, I read against his wish, at night. In the morning I would always be working anyway, and I would read it in the evenings. Does one read the Qur'an at nights, out of fear? So much fear. I did. (Dilek)

The husbands of the women also aimed to isolate the women by attacking their relationships with their close ones, specifically their families. For instance Bahar remarked that her husband used to tell her that he had shared the violence with her family and close friends, and that all had blamed her for it. Thereby, he both prevented her from sharing the violence, and made her feel more isolated and guilty, as she thought all her loved ones blamed her for the violence, and that she was all alone against such violence. It also seemed to enhance the domination of the point of view of the partner by making it seem like shared with others, and left the woman all alone in her own point of view regarding abuse.

Ayşe's husband, on the other hand, used to tell her that her family did not care for her, and was harmful for her, enhancing the feelings of isolation that she already had due to past abuse she had suffered in the hands of her family and thereby making her feel all alone, and in need of her husband.

Well it happened that we both took major blows from our families; his family didn't accept us, mine didn't...So we saw, what we had no one besides each other. No one can understand us except each other, they wouldn't, already we have been ostracized, both by his family and mine. We have no one except each other, therefore we believe we should protect each other, be understanding towards each other, and give another chance. (Ayşe)

On the other hand, Beyza remarked that by constantly picking up fights, her husband had made her feel alienated from her work and her close ones, and how she used to lose interest in her work:

Beyza: He was jealous of me. He was jealous from the teachers, from the kids... Each day, he would come to my work. I really love children... The kindergarten was a golden opportunity for me.

Interviewer: What did you think about such jealousy?

Beyza: I would be alienated from work. I didn't want to go to work anymore. I would withdraw myself... Looking at myself, I was not happy. An unhappy person... You know, when you take her toy from the child, just like that.

Generally it seemed that the relatives the husband did not decrease isolation or provide support, and at times they would enhance the violence. For instance in the case of Ayşe, who drifted from accusing her partner's family to expressing gratitude to them for helping her; her parents in law had increased her isolation by dictating to her not to leave the house alone, in respect for the traditional character of their town. Dilek also explained that she had moved to a village with only five households that were all occupied by the relatives of her husband, and that therefore she could talk to no one:

I lived for 10 years, in a hamlet of five houses. In the mountain. When I left the village, I was 13, I was just a kid. In there, for 10 years... and they were all siblings, all five of them, you can't even talk to anybody. (Dilek)

In the case of Perihan who had lived with her husband's family for a long time under severe violence, her husband's mother had never supported her or prevented the violence; on the contrary, she had enhanced the violence by psychologically abusing her, and by setting her up (i.e. hiding food and detergents so that she would not be able to complete her housework as her husband demanded, and get insulted for it):

Perihan: My mother-in-law was such an asshole, she would hide everything, from detergent to food. I have never seen such a thing. Only in her. And she did it only to me...

Interviewer: So that you wouldn't use them..?

Perihan: Yes, yes, exactly. For example, he would leave the clothes, and I would have to wash them and iron them until dinner. She would hide the detergent so that I wouldn't be able to wash them, and that he would scream at me when he came. The physical violence had not started yet. But there was all this screaming and yelling, and the insults.

All in all, women described that being isolated enhanced their fear of their partners, doubt of themselves, and helplessness regarding their situation. It therefore appeared that breaking through isolation was a central part of the empowerment and leaving

process. For instance Helin described how breaking through isolation had helped her to overcome her fears and start thinking on her own, without being overwhelmed by the prevailing modes of thought of her husband. It seemed that isolation, by giving her no space of her own, had shut her in a space where the partner's point of view was dominant and therefore fear and doubt prevailed.

Perihan, on the other hand, described how isolation led her to have no source of reference except her husband, and that she had been caught up in the statements of her husband regarding “the women outside” to whom she was constantly compared:

All this time you are in the house, in my case, all this time I am in the house, you live an isolated life, and the children are yet small... His accusations about the presence of an 'other life' outside, about the 'other women' outside who were really different from me, about me not being a woman would all really hurt me and upset me. I was isolated, I didn't have a life outside, but I used to read a lot. And I just couldn't understand these humiliations, I tried to, but couldn't. (Perihan)

Helplessness was also enhanced by isolation, Dilek described coming to the point of committing suicide due to the lack of support, and that growing up in a village of five houses, she felt she did not know the right conduct:

There was always violence. And really severe. I was telling the family about it, they would not care, they did not accept it. I tried to commit suicide, it didn't work. And as I saw that no one would do anything, two years ago, I ran away from home. At 3.30 in the morning. I bore all this, in some mountain, in a hamlet of 5, for 10 years. (...) When I left the village I was only 13, a kid. (...) I'm telling you, I was someone who had never seen society. I did not know anything, I did not know the city life... (Dilek)

It was also important that fear, doubt, and helplessness could also enhance isolation, which seemed to turn into a vicious cycle. While being isolated increased feelings of fear, shame and doubt, and helplessness, such feelings also led the women to get caught up in her isolation and segregate herself from others, which, in turn, enhanced

such feelings. Such a cycle appeared also to increase the violence by minimizing resistance and encouraging the partner. It also appeared to have an important role in preventing discussing the violence with the family, especially for those women who reported that their families would have supported them for leaving their husbands, as in the cases of Bahar, Beyza, İlknur.

For instance Bahar remarked that she had been so caught up in the psychological abuse of her partner which had “completely negated her”, that she had stopped seeing her family in order to hide her bruises, and lied to them while talking over the phone:

Bahar: I drifted apart from my environment, from my family, my friends...

Interviewer: How did that happen?

Bahar: (with eyes filled with tears, in a dull voice). There were always bruises on my body. At first, they were on places that wouldn't be seen, but then he started to hit me in the face, on the head. I got most of the blows on my head, my eyes would become purple, my face, my head...

Interviewer: So to hide these bruises..?

Bahar: I wouldn't see my family. When they called, I would talk to them in a joyful tone, as if everything was OK. When I was really bad, I wouldn't answer the phone, and call back when I could pull myself together, seeming to be OK. We would chat, laugh, talk about this and that. That took away all the energy I had, and when we hung up, I would be shipwrecked.

### Exploitation of Labour

Exploitation of labour is generally not categorized as a form of abuse in the literature, however, it emerged as a form on its own in the narratives of the women. Women described their role in marriage as including the responsibilities and obligations related to constant service. They described having to work on a broad range of tasks from cleaning, cooking, serving to family and friends, and child rearing to making their own food, sometimes referring to themselves as

“housemaids”. Such labour seemed to carry a twofold meaning in the experiences of the women; it was personalized, and women's role in the marriage was reduced to their service. Two subthemes emerged regarding exploitation of labour: the personalization of domestic labour, and disregard for domestic labour (partner's disdain, own disregard and feelings of insignificance and worthlessness).

In the narratives of the women it appeared important that such labour was highly personalized. The women did not only carry out domestic tasks, it was essential that they served to their husbands, as their wives, and accordingly, the criterion for competent service was the contentment of the husband, not the quality of work accomplished.

They would cook food for their husbands, dress them, or wash their faces, serve their friends, so that in a way, the central element was not running necessary tasks for a shared life, but servitude. At times, their service would be praised by the husband in front of his friends, in a way boosting his self esteem.

Those relatives, friends that I did not want, or were invited without asking for my opinion, I was obliged to serve them, and he would brag about my service. (Perihan)

Sexuality also constituted an important part of such personalized service, while describing how she felt almost like a housemaids Perihan noted that she served her husband “24 hours a day, at bed during the night, and at home during the day”, therefore emphasizing that her role in the marriage was reduced to serving, and that such service also included sexual obligations:

Asking for money... I was married for 27 years, and always found it difficult, it would abash me. Why would I need to ask for money, I am a free house maid in this house. That is, I am a housewife, I don't have any working hours, 24 hours, at the house in the mornings, and at the bed at night. (Perihan)

At times, such service was considered as a part of their affection, or as a part of an effort to bond or to get affection from their partners. For instance İlknur described how her husband would wake up and tell her, “Feed me”, and after she would prepare for him breakfast, tell her, “Dress me”, and she would choose for him his clothes. She also recalled staying at home the whole day to do the cleaning and would prepare seven kinds of food for each evening. She explained that she loved him and thus enjoyed such service.

In a similar vein, Helin explained that out of her hope to love her husband and gain his affection, she had served him deliberately, however he had been indifferent to her efforts:

Our house was in the second floor, and water was downstairs. As a newly wed, I would get up early -I had invested all my hope in him, thinking maybe I would forget and love it, maybe I would forget Mehmet. I would boil the water, take it to him, wash his face and hands, hold his mirror, make his breakfast... (Helin)

Bahar also described how she had never felt uncomfortable by the fact that she had been working for her partner (prior to getting married) without getting any income - salary, nor share-, for she had thought of it as a part of her investment in her partner:

Interviewer: So, you were talking about how a friend of yours was telling him to insure you, what did you think about not getting any money from him?  
Bahar: As a matter of fact, I did not need the money with my family, I was comfortable in terms of financial matters...whether I was working or not. And Kemal... Because we had been planning a life together financial matters did not really concern me. Putting in so much labour to that store, to him... Whether there was a repayment or not, I did not really care.(Bahar)

It is important to note that women both identified and disidentified with such role.

Specifically Helin, Perihan, and Ayşe remarked their responsibility of and competency in domestic labour, however at the same time, their narratives included

discourses that disidentified with the role; Ayşe mentioned that she did not carry out the tasks “a bride would”, Perihan announced that she was not a maid and did not have to perform such tasks, and Helin, while talking about her competency in domestic work, stated that being a good person was equally important with being a good mother or wife.

I still had psychological problems when I met my husband, and I continued to use psychiatric pills. And I was kind of addicted, I did not know what I was doing, I would sleep all the time, not talk to anyone, would stay in my room, and do nothing, but what you call a bride would sit down, prepare the meals, cook, I was doing none of that. (Ayşe)

Yes I was a good mother, a good wife, a good person, above all. ( Helin)

We are sitting at the same table, and he would say, Perihan, get that desert, Perihan change the plates. Am I a waitress? If I am the woman you share your life me, just leave it, I would know what to do when, or if you want to warn me, do it in another way, at another place. Many people have left our house because of this. Righteous friends, relatives, would say, what is all this, we see how well your wife is serving. Serving, in quotation marks. (Perihan)

Helin's case was not exceptional: it appeared that the informants' husbands generally were either indifferent to or disdainful of their work. Coupled with such indifference and disdain, the exploitation of labour appeared to make the women feel useless, insignificant and worthless; while disregard of women's work resulted in feelings of uselessness and insignificance, being treated as a housemaid made the women feel worthless. As mentioned earlier, the women experienced their husband's neglect and indifference towards them as raising doubts about their own worth.

Regarding the first case, women described how their partners underestimated and insulted their work, and did not show any signs of gratitude. For instance Dilek, Helin and Beyza noted how their partners would never thank them, and would,

instead constantly criticize and insult them over their work. Beyza expressed that joining the paid labour force had empowered her as at work, her labour was not disregarded as it had been at home:

You are useless, bad, he would always humiliate me, degrade me. I would go to work, and the things they said would make me really happy. I was so happy at work. So happy at work. At times it would be really busy. We worked with the members of the parliament. We would serve, we felt responsible from making them happy. When we served, they were supposed to like it... And they did not, in any way, look down on us. We were just workers there.  
(Beyza)

It seemed that the women did not internalize their partner's disdain, in the sense that they described themselves and their domestic work as competent and sufficient, however the insignificance reflected by their husbands in the form of indifference seemed to be internalized, such that their labour seemed to be insignificant also in the eyes of the women. For instance İlknur who described cooking seven kinds of food each day expressed that her salary from paid work only provided for her personal needs, and she did not contribute to their house in other ways. Similarly, while describing her everyday work at the village which included milking the cows, making bread, butter and cheese, looking after the children Dilek referred to them as 'simple tasks'. Additionally, a striking feature of women's self descriptions was ignorance; as it will be further discussed, women frequently emphasized that they lacked any kind of valuable knowledge or experience. Such discourses implied that the kind of knowledge and experience women accumulated by domestic labour was not perceived as having the necessary qualities for corresponding to or having the authority of 'knowledge'.

Secondly, the women emphasized that being reduced to domestic service and their husband's refusal to form relationships with them that went beyond their service was intensely painful and made the women feel worthless.

For instance Perihan described her first years of marriage as painful, for her husband had treated her like a “housemaid”, and emphasized how worthless she had felt as a result of such treatment:

But he would use the house in this way, and this was really hard on me, really painful. He saw me as a maid, he came, put off his clothes, ‘these will be washed, cleansed, ironed’. He could go anywhere, I could not ask him a thing like ‘where are you’, but I did not have such liberty. (...) So I said, what is this, am I the servant of this family? I have been rejecting all this for so many years, and you don't listen, I have never seen such worthlessness, as in the way you and your sister treat me. (Perihan)

### Physical Violence

Women reported that physical violence usually began within the first months of marriage. For some, it started quite early such as at the first few days of the engagement or the wedding (e.g. for Bahar it had started upon their engagement, for Dilek it had started on the third day of her marriage), for others, psychological abuse had started as early as the initial days of marriage, to be followed by physical violence in the following months. For instance for Helin it had started on the seventh, for İlknur it had started on the eighth month.

For most of the cases, it seemed that the physical violence mainly served to draw boundaries for the women when other forms of oppression ceased to ensure domination. It mostly began when the women showed resistance and refused to comply with the demands of the husband.

But as I said, having a child led me to be more demanding, and of course, subsequently, more fights. And actually, the first slaps were when I was pregnant, I had this first real slap, when I rejected something again, while standing up for myself. And after that you know how it happens, it begins like once in three or five years and gets more frequent. Once in three or five months, once in a month and so on... So it happened. As I started to speak up, the violence also increased in severity. (Perihan)

Two aspects regarding women's responses to physical violence seemed to be of great importance. Firstly, as different from psychological abuse, physical violence seemed to induce overt and intense anger and repulsion. It was far less internalized as ordinary or acceptable, none of the women -except where at one point Helin noted having found the violence as normal- remarked finding physical violence as acceptable, even when they felt shameful or guilty about it. Women's responses to physical violence involved more resistance than their responses to sexual or psychological violence. While psychological violence induced intense doubt, shame, and guilt, and sexual violence induced much shame, and was much harder to resist especially when the women were younger (i.e. when they were children) physical violence appeared to cause more anger at the partner, and less doubt.

Secondly, it was striking that women's responses to physical violence seemed to go through a transformation with time and with increased violence. It was remarkable that women's first reactions to physical violence were usually straightforward and determined: they found the violence unacceptable and thought of or attempted to leave their partners. Upon the first incident of physical violence, Bahar told her partner that she would not marry him, Ayşe filed official complaint against her husband, Perihan left her husband and went back to her father's house, Helin told her mother that she wanted to leave her husband, İlknur hit her husband

back. It seemed that although male violence is assumed to be largely seen as ordinary and acceptable, it was not how the women perceived violence when exposed to it (surely it is necessary at this point to remark that the participants of the present study were women who had eventually left their husbands).

Nevertheless, the women either left and turned back, or could not leave, for various reasons. Perihan had been threatened with her child, Ayşe had nowhere to go and withdrew her complaint, Bahar was convinced that her partner was truly sorry, Helin's mother made her go back, and Dilek's family remained indifferent to abuse, leaving her with no option of escape.

Perihan: And so after my child was born, twice I decided to separate. Once I left with my son, he was about three months old. My husband had a gun. He came by with his gun, said 'You can't take my child with you', and took him and left. I couldn't bear that yearning, so I went back.

Interviewer: Where had you gone?

Perihan: To my father's. He told me, they all did. You don't have to stay there, if you want to get divorced, lets do it, right away. You can finish school, work, whatever you want. The first time I got out, I got out with my child, and when I went back, things did not change. After four or five months, I was really severely beaten... It was nothing like some few slaps I would have once in a while.

As they could not leave, women expressed that resisting physical violence led only to a rise in the violence. Specifically when the women attempted to leave, or left and turned back, or responded to insults or hit back, or disobeyed the rules of the husband, the violence would be most severe. Therefore, the women were gradually obliged to comply with their demands, and not respond to physical violence.

I would say that I deserved it. I won't do it again. Because there is no stop to that, no stop to that violence...He would beat me until I fainted. Yes, I would accept it in order to prevent that beating, to avoid coming to that point...  
(Bahar)

Similar to Bahar, İlknur who had been physically abused for the first time on responding to such insults, remarked that she had given up responding, because such responses only led to more physical violence:

I would never reply to him as he called me whore, or unhonourable. Because I was 100 feet before him, and I knew perfectly well that responding to him would not result in anything but domestic violence. (İlknur)

It seemed that with time, and nonresistance, the accompanying psychological and sexual violence resulted in diminished anger and, along with the diminishing of anger, increased shame where the disgust for the partner was displaced by disgust of self. The narratives of the women suggested that what changed how the women perceived themselves was not being beaten per se, but giving up resistance to physical violence. İlknur, for instance, while talking about hitting back her husband when he had hit her for the first time, referred to herself as “the old İlknur”, referring to her perception of herself prior to marriage, as overly strong:

I was exposed to violence in the 8<sup>th</sup> month, although I was working. But at that incident, I hit him too. Perhaps I was still the old İlknur back then, or the current İlknur. (İlknur)

Additionally, the increase in the severity of physical violence induced intense fear, and as the women had to comply in order to decrease the violence, the resulting feelings of helplessness and despair resulted in feeling destitute in general, and increased shame. At such times, the role of physical violence in disempowering the women appeared to be mostly, in a sense, validation of the partner's insults and humiliation. For instance, most of the husbands emphasized the 'dependency' of their wives, that they were powerless, desperate and dependent on them. The powerlessness women felt related to being physically abused appeared to reinforce

such image and lead to intense shame. 'Like a child' was a striking common metaphor that the women used and found intensely degrading:

And after beating me, he would tell me, as if I'm a child, you will not cry, I won't hear a voice. In the house. He would not let me out, to catch my breath. I am a person, flesh and bone. (...) It is so hurtful. You just can't put up with it. And you torture me. I would tell him that I was out of breath, he won't let me even in front of the door, to catch my breath, to have some air. To pull myself together. (...) As if I'm a child. You know how you beat a little child and lock it somewhere. Just like that, 'you will not cry, I will not hear your voice'. Locking the door and going to sleep. Meaning, I don't care about you. (Şermin)

The only thing that makes me cry is the İlknur back then. And I can't describe it. That İlknur that I was. Think about this [crying], 24 hours a day. I would cry at anything, when someone asked me how I was, nobody could ask me how I was. I would cry when someone hugged me. It was like that, I was so scared. Like one day, I hid behind the kitchen door, so he wouldn't beat me. Think of it. And that day I said to myself, that day I decided to get divorced. I said, İlknur, are you this five year old child hiding behind the door from her stepfather? How is this possible.... (İlknur)

Similarly, Bahar, who had attempted to leave her partner, had started to perceive herself as weak and destitute after months of giving up resistance to physical violence, and psychological violence. In the quote below, she described how she thought her son would perceive herself if she had not left her husband, in a way also describing how she perceived herself while she was married, for 'surrendering to' her husband and not being able to resist against his violence:

If I had surrendered to this... If I had become, under the eyes of my son a battered mother, he would have, a weak, incapable, characterless mother (speaking slowly with disgust), but I am putting up a fight, yes, I definitely do not accept this, as a person, I do not accept violence. (Bahar)

It seemed that such perception of the self as "weak and destitute" led to such shame that even Bahar whose family supported her when she decided to leave her husband, remarked that she had stopped going out and seeing her family so that they would not

see her bruised, and did not ask for support until her husband's sexual assault. As a matter of fact, women whose families were supportive and who had accepted apologies (such as Bahar, İlknur, Ayşe) seemed to carry more shame and guilt. Whereas Bahar's narratives were characterized by shame, Ayşe's narratives seemed to be characterized by both shame and guilt. Although she also had filed complaint against her husband at the initial incidence of violence, in time, psychological abuse (which commonly described her as having psychological problems) appeared to lead her to internalize guilt for the abuse, as she had come to believe that her husband was not responsible from the violence, and the reason for the violence was her sharing her problems with her husband.

Ayşe: My husband put up with a lot of things with me, I even remember yelling and screaming in the house. He was always so understanding, but then later he started to pay off.

Interviewer: When did that happen?

Ayşe: When that happened... When I started to live through all these... I believe my husband did not do these on purpose. I shared everything with my husband as if he was a psychologist. And because he could not talk to anyone about it, he endured it all in silence. We couldn't tell anyone else. All these built up and as a matter of fact, I do think I put on him too much load about that. Even if he is my husband, I shouldn't be giving so much to him to carry. Because I did upset his psychology.

On the other hand, women were unsupported or sent back to their families, and had resisted the violence (i.e. pursued their own interest against the will of their husbands) such as Perihan and Helin, seemed to carry more anger and disgust at their husbands and less shame. For these women, physical violence did not necessarily indicate weakness on their part, on the contrary it could be constructed from a framework of strength and agency, by emphasizing that they had persisted on pursuing their own interest -openly or in secret- *despite* the physical violence. In this

case, physical violence served as an evidence of their strength, for they had endured it in order to resist.

So I started with that work. And well, it started to grow and grow... And in that way or another he was blocking me. I was being beaten because of that. You will not work, he would say. And I would do it anyway. He could never stop me. I was beaten, everything happened, but... (Perihan)

It was striking that none of the partners used common beliefs legitimizing or normalizing violence while inflicting violence upon their wives, but they most frequently told their wives that they hated them and wanted to get rid of them, sometimes going as far as trying to convince the woman to commit suicide (such as in the case of Dilek). For instance Bahar's husband had severely beaten her for the first time at the night of their wedding, an incident during which he had kept telling her "I'll kill you, I'll get rid of you".

#### Sexual Violence

Though not prompted, sexual violence was specified by five of the women; İlknur, Beyza, and Şermin did not mention experiencing sexual violence. The prevalent emotions emerging from the narratives were shame, disgust, and guilt; however they varied across women. Ambivalence regarding the blame for abuse was also present, specifically in the narratives of Ayşe and Perihan.

#### Child Brides: Sexuality as Corresponding to Sexual Violence

Major differences emerged between the narratives of the women married as children and women married as adults in terms of how they experienced sexuality and sexual violence. To start with, those women who had married as children remarked that sexual intercourse had begun on the night of their wedding, and it had been intensely traumatic. All three cases (Dilek married at 13, Perihan and Helin married at 15)

were unique in the experience of sexuality and sexual violence, however there seemed to be commonalities such that although they were children, they had to be engaged in adult sexuality with a male far older than themselves, they had little or no knowledge of sexuality prior to marriage, and experienced the first night of their marriage as intensely traumatic. Therefore, as different from the other women, sexuality corresponded exclusively to sexual violence. All three women expressed feeling it was too early for them, specifically Dilek who emphasized marrying before menstruation. Although the literature on child marriages suggests that it is culturally expected for men to wait until menarche to get sexually involved with their wives (UNICEF, 2001), the case of Dilek formed a counter example. While describing the impact of her first night of sexual violence, Dilek also mentioned being beaten for the first time for going out to play with the children, thereby seeming to emphasize how, for herself, she was still a child after play and too young for sexuality.

Dilek: It was so difficult. And I am not even mentioning that [first] night. Because... it is something you know nothing about. And that man is 12-13 years older than me. I cannot tell you how mean he was... All my life, I will never be able to overcome that night, to forget that psychology. And I was beaten when I had been a bride for only three days, and why did I get beaten, because I played outside with the children (silence)

Interviewer: Of course, you were yourself a child... (a long pause)

#### Verbal Forms of Sexual Abuse as More Detrimental to Self

It is also important to note that while women tended to speak about the physical forms of sexual violence with disgust and resentment, other forms such as insulting the women's sexuality appeared to cause less disgust and more shame or guilt.

I was always thinking, what did I do wrong, what did I do wrong, what did I do... I was always turning to myself to find a mistake. He keeps looking down

on you, humiliating you, saying, 'and are you a woman, you are a fridge', this and that. (Helin)

While mentioning such insults, only Bahar's discourses involved disgust; she referred to them as “ugly” each time she described the abuse:

I was left with no confidence in myself... I could not get any joy out of life..... Everything seemed so senseless, meaningless..... Because again and again, such worthlessness..... You are exposed to such attitudes, behaviour that treat you as worthless..... And there was a more ugly aspect to it..... (lowering her voice) sexuality..... All that insults..... humiliations..... (long pause) (... ) He would exhaust all his frustration on me..... he started to swear, really disgusting swearwords with sexual connotations.....(....) and when I heard that ugly, that immoral swearword, I said 'that is you' (... ) When he used such ugly swearwords, I replied..... (Bahar)

#### Internalization and Externalization of Sexual Abuse

Indeed, the first night of our marriage was problematic, indeed he was something like an animal, and living through all this in marriage, I didn't want him to even touch me, and after all those harassments, all those things, you hate men anyway, and it is disgusting that the man you are with is also a person like that. (Helin)

While Helin and Dilek expressed disgust and referred to their husbands as 'merciless' and 'like animals', thereby overtly blaming them for the violence and expressing their anger and resentment, Perihan was more ambivalent in blaming her husband. Her narrative did not include the disgust expressed by Helin and Dilek. Instead, she drifted between referring to herself as 'unprepared' and her husband as 'the most understanding person possible', to referring to her husband as an 'ox' but keeping her opinion that he was as understanding as he possibly could be. It is important to note here that while Dilek and Helin did not mention any interest in sexuality, Perihan expressed having “sexual feelings” and curiosity into the matter, however sexuality was not what she had expected.

You know, I... sexuality, sexual urges and all that.... I had all that, of course, I was in adolescence, I was young, it is not possible to be curious about all that, not to feel all that... But, nevertheless, sexuality was really hard on me, it was like nothing I expected.... (a long pause). Perhaps he was the most understanding person possible, but I was really unprepared (...) That first night was really hard on me..... And I started to avoid him. I was wishing for the night not to come, I did not want to go in the bedroom.... Perhaps he was kind of an asshole, and I am calling him understanding, but, as much as possible.... anyway, he had lived his young days abroad, and had his flirting, his lovers, and all that..... perhaps I will say that he was the most understanding person possible at that time. (Perihan)

Both Dilek and Helin noted that early abuse and forced sexuality led them to feel disgust for all men; and all four women -Dilek, Helin, Perihan, and Ayşe mentioned avoiding their partners.

I was so disgusted that I would wait for him to go to bed. Think about it. Until very late in the night. I would creep in my bed, as if I was a thief. I would lie in the very edge of the bed, so that he wouldn't wake up... So that he wouldn't wake up and touch me, because I get all creepy when he touches me. (Dilek)

Upon avoidance, the husbands started to use more verbal sexual abuse like insulting women's femininity and sexuality, which the women described as intensely hurtful.

Yes, being a child really effected all that... And as I pushed him away, he started to accuse me. Telling me why I would avoid him. (...) And after like a week or ten days, we were no longer like husband and wife, we had drifted apart.....and.....he would tell me I was a cold woman, and that whenever he wanted.....well.....this is indeed sexual violence against me. Because I did not do whatever he wanted, he would tell me that I was a cold woman and not appropriate.... (Perihan)

He wouldn't have me [sexually] by force, by will, but he was just using violence, "you are no woman, you do not act as I wish, what kind of marriage is that, we are like friends', he would use psychological violence, and I would feel really bad, and think he doesn't understand. I can say that I blamed myself more than I blamed him. (Ayşe)

## Ambivalence Regarding Sexual Abuse

It appeared that ambivalence was an important part of sexual abuse. Its indicators appeared in most narratives, but specifically in the narratives of Ayşe and Perihan.

Perihan drifted between calling herself unprepared and her partner understanding, to calling him an animal:

Perhaps he was the most understanding person possible, but I was really unprepared (...) That first night was really hard on me..... And I started to avoid him. I was wishing for the night not to come, I did not want to go in the bedroom.... Perhaps he was kind of an asshole, and I am calling him understanding, but, as much as possible..(..)..... Perhaps I will say that he was the most understanding person possible at that time. (Perihan)

Ayşe, on the other hand, named her partner's behaviours as “sexual abuse” and “psychological abuse” but also tended to blame herself for “having problems” that had been leading to abuse:

Psychological violence was like this in the beginning, it was related to sexuality. In terms of sexuality, he was really putting me under pressure, he knew I had my problems, most of the time I couldn't have intercourse with my husband because I kept thinking about all those things [rape] I had gone through. My psychological state was really different, lets say it was a really ordinary day, really good, but in the evening while watching TV and I remember those moments... I can say that my husband really pushed me to have intercourse with him... And I told him I had psychological problems, telling him I couldn't help it. (Ayşe)

## Abuse as Reminding of Past Abuse

Both Ayşe and Helin, who had been abused during childhood remarked that their partner's sexual abuse reminded them of their past abuse, and was therefore more detrimental. However the impact seemed to differ; while Helin related both abuses to manhood and mentioned feeling even more disgust, as in the above mentioned quote, Ayşe mentioned blaming herself for she thought such previous

abuse caused her 'inability' to get sexually involved with his husband, which then led to abuse.

#### Disgust as Protective Against Guilt

It seemed that while Ayşe and Perihan who did not describe the violence with feelings of disgust expressed more guilt in that they blamed themselves for how they experienced sexuality, Helin, Dilek and Bahar whose narratives were characterized by disgust did not include explicit self blame or guilt, however they did seem to include shame in that such disgust seemed to be oriented towards both their husbands and themselves. For these women disgust and resentment (or anger) seemed to be protective against guilt, but not shame. While talking about sexual abuse, disgust was apparent both in the narratives of the women, and in their voices; their voices carried repulsion that emerged only while talking about sexual abuse. However, it seemed that such disgust was not aimed only at their partners, but was also aimed at themselves. While talking about sexual abuse, Bahar lowered her voice and spoke slowly and hardly, with long pauses and disgust in her voice:

What I want to say is this.... I did not leave the house because I was battered for 2 years. I couldn't put up with this ugliness anymore, he humiliated me so much, it was so that, I felt so bad that I wanted to kill myself. And I can't ascribe this to myself. And I loved him so much... Look at what he has put me through. He was trying to end me like that. He was trying to destruct me, my psychology. I did not leave the house because I was being beaten (crying). If I could prove it, I would sue him for rape..... I cannot find the strength in me right now..... But I will do it when I feel stronger. I will not let him get away with what he has done to me. Even if I can't prove anything, I will sue him..... (Bahar)

#### Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse mostly began with engagement, and abruptly increased in severity following marriage. Most women reported that psychological abuse

continued even after leaving their husbands. During marriage, it was reported to be frequent, accompanying often physical violence, and could be used in overt or covert forms.

#### Difficulty in Naming Abuse

It seemed that although psychological abuse was present mostly after engagement, and continued throughout marriage, it was not easily named as violence, in contrast to physical violence which was perceived more easily as 'violence'. Indeed some women noted that they had started to perceive specific behaviours as psychological violence only after having contacted a women's shelter, and the narratives were still characterized greatly by ambivalence. It appeared that psychological abuse was perceived mostly as either the partner's habit, or as a shared problem. For instance İlknur called her husband's withdrawal which he used as a punishment mechanism, “*küsmе*” (sulking), and in the interview she drifted between “violence” and “sulking” and at times, “psychopathy”:

İlknur: It is really curious that, during those 5 months of living together, I witnessed nothing except his habit of sulking. He would sulk and quit talking to me, but after two days... He would stop talking and I would think our relationship was over, and cry and so on, and then he would come back.

Interviewer: Upon what would he do this?

İlknur: Well, those days... this was my mistake. I did not understand what he did as a habit of sulking. And then, I learn from my psychologist that there is no such thing as a habit of sulking and quitting to talk. That this is a kind of punishment, and I thought of it as sulking... For instance, regarding the size of my skirt, or like when you can see my waist, I had an accident, or he thought that my skirt was too short.

(...) And after seven days, he begs me to divorce him. Such a psycho. There is nothing to do.

(...) Let's not say every day, but in his times of crisis. And I call it a crisis, but there is no such thing, everything is so out of place now, all my thoughts, all those years. And it turns out that he was an ordinary man of domestic

violence, he was ordinary, I learned that 70% of Turkey is like that and I happened to come across one of them, and that is it. (İlknur)

I had so many problems with my husband because of that, so many fights. Our fights, my complaints. My husband is a person who uses alcohol, someone who loses himself when he drinks too much. And I was exposed to so much violence about that. I had even filed a complaint but then I withdrew it, when we made peace, so I can say that I was subjected to so much violence because of my mother. (Ayşe)

Other statements used while describing abuse can be exemplified as: “when he lost himself” (Ayşe), “when he had his crisis” (İlknur), “our fights” (Ayşe, Şermin), “we did not use to have problems before” (Bahar), “we were not a good match” (Helin). It can thereby be seen that the violence (those statements were used generally while describing psychological violence) was attributed either to the partner's mood (or characteristic) or to the relationship, as something experienced and generated in partnership. Accordingly, discourses regarding the ending of marriage also had similar implications; women talked of “not being able to work their marriage out”, assuming violence to be a shared problem.

The reason for such attribution seemed to be twofold; the internalization of blame and the difficulty of blaming the partner in the context of severe psychological abuse, and rendering agency possible. In such context of domination, rejecting any share in how they experienced marriage seems to be perceived as corresponding to disclaiming any agency, which also disempowers women while living through and reconstructing their experiences.

#### Minimization of Abuse

It also appeared that the first indicators of violence, (i.e. psychological abuse) (as examined by O'Leary, 1999) were mostly minimized and normalized, and insight into

abuse was warded off. For instance while Şermin described increasing interference to her life by her partner as normal for a married couple, and that she had thought that the scorns of her partner would pass in time:

I said to myself, he will get better this day or that. Surely, each house will have its fight. No house can be without its fights. (Şermin)

İlknur noted that she had hoped her partner would change, that she had repressed her insight regarding the abuse, and had tried getting herself on medication in order to deal with the distress her partner caused her:

Before getting married, I took him to a psychiatrist. We were engaged, with 1.5 months to engagement, and he quit talking for 1.5 months. A few days left to the wedding, I took him to a psychiatrist.(...) So the psychiatrist met with him, for 55 minutes, and I am still angry with him. If that day, he had directed me in the right way, I would have left him long ago, without going through all this suffering, and living through all this. So the psychiatrist took me in and talked with me for 5 minutes. He told me not to marry him, and I said, how is that possible, separation is a decision I can take really easy, I did not need to come to you for that. But then, I thought I knew psychology really well, not I see better after my psychologist, after all those therapies. Now when I see on television women saying 'my husband is doing that, but I love him', I say to myself, leave him, there is no end to this. Now I understand that psychiatrist, but I had been really frustrated back then. And I told him, I came to you to make this work, I could manage not making it work myself. But then, that was the answer (...) So he started me on Prozac. I used Prozac to get through that period. (...) And with the effects of that medication, I began to be more understanding towards him, whatever he did, now I wish I hadn't been on medication, maybe we would have fought, and not got married. (İlknur)

### Forms of Psychological Abuse

The women's husbands used numerous strategies for psychologically abusing their partners. The women described being blamed, insulted, degraded, humiliated in public and in private; their loved ones also insulted. Covert forms of abuse were also used frequently, the partners withdrew themselves as punishment, withheld their reasons for punishment, confused the women with the cycle of violence and

disempowered the women in covert ways (such as blaming them in a positive and helping manner), and manipulated their representations of their relationships with other loved ones.

In all cases, one commonality seemed to be that psychological abuse was most often used to shape and project a self matching with the role prescribed for women in marriage. It also seems that women's perceived strength areas was parallel with their husband's targets for abuse. For instance insults targeting womanhood and sexuality were most salient in the cases of Helin and Perihan, who described their youth as beautiful and attractive, the husband of Beyza who was most proud of her work, emphasized her “uselessness”, and the husband of Bahar who described her youth as social, strong and beloved repetitively told her she was dependent on him, and that her family and friends all blamed her.

Forms of psychological abuse will be examined using six themes that emerged from the narratives: insults, scolding, and humiliation, degrading womanhood and sexuality, undermining independence and constraint surveillance, blaming the woman for the abuse, manipulating representations of loved ones, and 'good days' and the intermittency of abuse.

All women remarked that insults, humiliation and scolding formed a recurrent pattern of psychological abuse throughout marriage. The insults mainly targeted women's responsibilities and competencies regarding their roles as mother and wife. As the women pointed out, these were experienced as the most vulnerable self aspects, and deeply offended the women. Their competencies as mothers were insulted, at times by way of directly degrading the women's abilities

or deeds, and at other times in a more indirect fashion, by insulting the children in order to offend the women.

It was so hard. It was all so bad. Well, after a time, I learned not to hear anything he said, but it would still hurt, it would still hurt me and make me upset. He would humiliate me about the children, he knew how fond I was of them. (Perihan)

He would push me from my motherhood, it is my most vulnerable point, and he knows it. He pushes me from there, criticizing it. And I said, I am not going to leave them to you, I am going to take them. (Dilek)

The partners also frequently scolded the women; they degraded all the acts of the women, and humiliated them in public.

Interviewer: And did you ever compare yourself with others?

Dilek: That's how he would hit me all the time, hit me, look she is like that, she is like this, why aren't you? Like comparing to the children of his uncle there... She does this, she does that, why don't you? (...) He would keep talking about the food.... About things not being done at the right time...

Degrading of womanhood and sexuality was another common form of psychological abuse that appeared to be twofold: the husbands either belittled the women as insufficient in terms of femininity, or accused them of shaming their honour. It is striking how, although the two types of accusations (or discourses) appear to be contradictory as one claims hypersexuality/hyperfemininity and the other unqualified sexuality/femininity, they nevertheless are present together. Such integrality of two seemingly contradictory accusations becomes intelligible especially when considering how oppositional discourses can exist in parallel fashion without dismantling each other (see Parla, 2001 for an example of the contradictory discourses of the state on women, virginity, and the 'honour of the state').

Belittling womanhood and sexuality appeared as one of the most common forms of psychological abuse aiming to make the woman feel guilty. In such cases,

the insulted womanhood was almost exclusively a sexualized womanhood, in that the insults usually had connotations regarding the sexuality of the woman. The women were insulted on how they looked, or acted, or in terms of their sexuality. They were compared with 'other women', which at times seemed to be the imaginary construction of 'the woman outside' who were sufficiently sexualized, and were found ugly, insufficient, and at times, even as 'not women'. Therefore such psychological violence was not exactly separable from sexual violence, and the two seemed to be intermingled. For instance, Helin described how her husband used to compare her to bears, to fridges, implying ugliness and sexual distance, and told her she would not count as a woman:

Saying, are you a human, swearing, saying things I cannot even say, and I used to hear it all the time: You look like bears, are you human, look at yourself, I don't know, many things... (...) Are you a woman, you are a fridge... (Helin)

Perihan also described how her husband used to compare her with the women outside (which, she stated, was not intelligible for her as she was extremely isolated and tried hard to imagine what was 'outside' her house), and tell her that she was no woman:

You have grown old, he would say, just take a look at the mirror, humiliations, degradations like that (...) If you are talking about insults, he had many hurtful insults, that I don't remember right now. 'Do you think you are a woman?' [That was] his favourite one. What women there are, outside, and you think you are a woman. (Perihan)

Degrading of honour complemented belittling of sexuality and womanhood. It appeared to be of specific importance and perceived as deeply offensive. Calling the woman a "whore" was the most common reported insult, and which deeply offended women. It was not used only for the women, but also for their families, implying honour to be not only a personal matter, but a matter of family. For instance, Dilek

remarked how her husband used to accuse not only her but her whole family as dishonourable:

He would swear so much, hitting me from my family, my sister. You are all like that, like this. Disgusting things like that. (Dilek)

Such insults served as more than insults, the partners could watch each move of the women with judgment, stalk them, listen to conversations, and accused them in a repetitive manner with things they had not done, projecting unto them desires or personal characteristics; and thereby justifying surveillance. At times, such insults could be in forms of accusing the woman of not being able to control themselves or their sexuality.

My husband would always search for my mistakes...If I had been to the hairdresser, he would find something. If I had been to my brother, he would search for something beneath. (...)He would always stalk me, see someone next to me, saying, there is someone next to this [her]...I will find someone next to you. I had no idea, he kept coming to my work with someone with him. With his friends. Then one day, an older friend we have told me, that he had stalked me for three days (...) He [the husband] would say, you have a friend [as in lover]with you. You are so weak towards men. He was like, don't sit next to a man on the bus...'you are a whore' (lowering her voice), he would tell me. What could be more...A whore, he would say. Asking my friends, if I was with somebody... (Beyza)

Another target area was women's independence which posed a threat to the domination of their partners. The women were repetitively insulted about their competencies, told they were useless, unwanted, and therefore dependent on their husbands. It was important that the husbands used psychological abuse not to make the women feel solely dependent and incapable, but feel dependent specifically on their partners. Bahar recounted that her partner would repeatedly tell her how she was dependent on him, and would force her to repeat it after him out loud:

[He used to tell me] You are nothing without me (...) Without me, you cannot breath... You can't do anything without me. (Bahar)

Such attacks on competency were also enhanced by abuse in other domains. For instance, constant domestic labour without any positive feedback, and, on the contrary, with humiliation, appeared to enhance feelings of incompetency by disregarding one of the central (and at times, the only) domain of activity and production of the women.

As mentioned before, women's obligation to marry and the resulting dependency also seemed to enhance the impact of such pressure. Obligation had appeared as a significant theme in how the women had got married, it seemed that in most cases the women had felt that they were obliged to marry their husbands, it could be as an escape from their families, as a way to have a child, as the only option due to unwarranted pregnancy. Such a history of obligation could also reappear in the discourses of the husband, or in the women's own feelings, and enhance the feelings of being obliged to, or dependent on, the partner. For instance, Beyza had been repeatedly told by her partner that she was dependent on him for no one else 'would take her', and felt the need to rationalize for herself how his statements were not true.

(Mimicing her husband) "If it wasn't for me, nobody would have taken you [as their wife]. They told me what you have done. You are bad [dishonourable]. If it wasn't for me, you would still be alone in your mother's house, nobody would have taken you". (Beyza)

Although all women suffered from insults, humiliation, scorning, degrading of womanhood, and undermining of dependency, blaming the women for the abuse was not mentioned by all women. It was most prevalent in the narratives of Ayşe and Bahar who had married with their husbands on their own decision,

and described a bond of love with their husbands, as well as the presence of good times.

Their partners appeared to blame the women in both overt and covert fashion, however covert forms seemed to prevail. Bahar recounted that her husband used to beg for her forgiveness after beating her, and made her repeat that she was sick, being beaten was her fault, and that he was helping her get treated.

He would tell me... That I was aggressive, and that he was beating to tame me.... he told me so... (...) He would say that I had insulted him, swore at him, and that was why he was beating me (...) While beating, he would always blame me...up to this day, always blamed me... when beating me, he would always say he was right.  
(...)I will never do it again, he would say.... I promise, I will never do it again... I will never hit you, he would say (with a more serious tone, mimicing him), but you you should accept it that you deserved it. You pushed me into this. (...) He was trying to make me accept... (...) that I had deserved it... Pushed him... 'look, you are so aggressive, so edgy, you are depressed, you did this, and that... but don't worry my love, I am going to make you better, I will have you treated. (laughing). (Bahar)

The husbands of Ayşe, Bahar, and Dilek appeared also to manipulate how the women sensed they were perceived by their loved ones, such as family and friends, by convincing them that they were not supported or loved. In the case of Bahar, the partner lied to her about telling their friends and her family about the abuse, making her feel unsupported and blamed even by her family, thereby strengthening his point of view. The partner of Dilek started to use such form of abuse after separation, telling her that he would bring up their children in such a way that they would hate her, leading her to feel hated even by her children, and doubting whether or not her parents hated her. .

At first, he was really at ease because I wouldn't share [the violence] with anyone. But then, when I told him I would speak with my family, he would say... I will tell them all, and they will find that I am right. (...) I will tell your

family, he would say, and they will think that I am right. Don't you worry, I already told our friends. I would tell him that I would tell our closest friends [about the violence]. (...) and he would say, don't worry, I told our friends, and they thought I was right. (Bahar)

Ayşe's husband, on the other hand, used more subtle forms of abuse; as recounted by Ayşe, he used a “help” framework by which he tried to convince her not to see her family “for her own sake”, telling her they did not cherish her. In time he had made her feel that she was someone whose own family would not want, and therefore unloveable and unwanted, thereby enhancing a negative sense of self, and enhancing her negative internal representations of her family whose affection was still important for her. In such way, it seemed that she was not only physically isolated (for she would give up her intention to see them), but also psychically isolated for there remained few positive figures (if any) for her at all.

Psychological violence, in the sense that... as I said, my husband put much pressure on me. Because I did not see my family, and because he knew about it; when I told him that I would like to see them and make peace with them, he would use psychological violence as in saying, “they don't want you anyway, why would you see them, I don't want you to see them. You haven't had a family for so long, what good will they be after now?”(...) “You will not see them, they can hurt you again, break your heart, your father may not accept you or treat you bad. After all you have been through, I don't want you to see your mother, she may do the same things again. ( Ayşe)

The cycle of violence, which describes violence as being comprised of several phases including a violent phase and the 'honeymoon' phase, is a widely referred phenomenon while discussing domestic violence (see Walker, 1984). However, the informants of the present study did not exactly define such a sequential process, most mentioned having 'good days' and 'violent days' separately, without necessarily following each other. It is important to note that Helin, Dilek, and Şermin remarked that they never had good days, with Helin and Dilek living under constant severe

physical violence. Helin and Dilek were also those women without any kind of support, and who faced threats of death from their families in case of divorce.

On the other hand, Bahar, İlknur and Perihan who had support from their families, expressed the prevalence of good days, only in the case of Perihan, they had started later in the marriage. They expressed being utterly confused and how such confusion had also kept them in the relationship.

I was so confused, at times we would share such nice things, and at others, everything was so ugly... (Bahar)

Greatly confused about her husband's intermittent love and violence, İlknur noted believing that he was mentally ill, and feeling responsible to take care of him:

'I love you so much', after that [violent] period, he would say, 'Thank God I married you'. But just two days ago you begged me to get divorced, what if I had accepted it? I wouldn't have let you go, he says. But he says, when I am cross with you, I see the head of a pig instead of your head. Upon this, I couldn't have taken him to a doctor. I thought to myself, either he is mentally sick, or we have been cursed, there are no other ways. Because not everyday does he say that he doesn't want me. (...) During those 6 years, I thought my husband was mad, and I said to myself, if he had been a cancer patient, would you be able to just leave him? He needs you now. (İlknur)

Perihan specifically noted that in time, both the severity of violence and the intensity of love and affection had increased, and she had become pregnant willfully on the good times, hoping to bring up a baby with him in a context of shared affection, only to have an abortion when he turned violent. This had been repeated for three times, suggesting that she had been greatly confused for a long period of time by the cycle of good and violent times.

Affection... and love, I thought I felt for him, but I confused reality with what I thought it was..... There would be times when we would be intimate, we would chat.... As we got older, things changed, we started to live the through both simultaneously. If there was violence, it was really severe... If it was intimacy... it was also...I wasn't used to it. It was also really profuse. (Perihan)

## The Impact of Psychological Abuse: Internalization, Disidentification, Ambivalence

The literature on psychological abuse suggests that psychological abuse can be at least as detrimental as physical abuse (Lazenbatt et al., 2010). While analyzing women's narratives of psychological abuse, both the content and form of the discourses were examined in order to understand how the women experienced and constructed the abuse.

Specifically when recounting psychological abuse, narratives focused on identification and disidentification with the projected self, with blame regarding abuse; and were coloured by great ambivalence. Intense doubt prevailed all aspects of self, including one's characteristics, competencies, morality, perceptions and reactions. However they varied significantly across women. Regarding the impact of psychological abuse, two themes emerged as central; generalized doubt, and internalization of guilt. The two processes were not mutually exclusive, they were rather chronological, but could also transform to each other.

Firstly, it important to distinguish between the internalization of the necessity for competency, and the internalization of doubt regarding competency at target areas such as honour, womanhood and motherhood. The discourses of the women suggested that meeting the demands of the prescribed role for being a sufficient woman and mother, and protecting one's honour were internalized as important aspects of one's self. Little or no resistance was present regarding the necessity or appropriateness of such expectations; resistance or externalization of blame and insults were present mostly on whether or not the women met the demands.

As a matter of fact, I did not know what I was doing, I would sleep all the time, not talk to anyone, would stay in my room, and do nothing, but what

you call a bride would sit down, prepare the meals, cook, I was doing none of that. (Ayşe)

Yes, I was a good mother, a good wife, a good person, above all. (Helin)

The women also emphasized that they had protected their honour, as opposed to their partner's insults.

I used to look for what was wrong with myself, and now I know it was him. (...) [because] I am not a bad person, I wish for good for everyone, I wish to help everyone, I never disregarded his commands, I never disobeyed him. I did not do anything wrong that would shame his honour, his dignity. (Helin)

Why would he treat me like this, I love him, I wait for him at my house with all my honour, waiting for things to get better. (...) Even now, I cannot put up with insults, with malignancy. I am only 24, why would anyone insult me, degrade me. Why would anyone tell my daughter, 'they say this and that [dishonourable things] for your mother? Is she like that?' They blame me for things I have not done. As long as I sit here with my honour, why would my mom be 'a whore'?

(...) My husband's family continued with their stubbornness, they did not want me. As if I had done something wrong. But they knew about me, that he had taken me as a [virgin] girl, that I had never been with anyone else. (Şermin)

Only Perihan, who was the only informant not in a transitional phase, remarked that it had taken her a long time to feel not as responsible of housework:

After the divorce, it was difficult to accept myself and to make my kids accept this new life, those new feelings, desires... For a long time I could not get away from that routine anyway, I kept thinking it was my duty to run home and do the cooking and cleaning. (Perihan)

### *Generalized Doubt*

Constant humiliation, degrading, and blame, coupled with undermining of independence and isolation appeared to lead the women to doubt many areas of self and experience: women doubted their competencies, their ability to judge right from wrong, their role in the abuse, the validity of their perceptions and reactions to abuse, their basic self and self worth.

Repetitive judgment, coupled with isolation which deprived the women of other sources of reference, had led most women to a state of constant self-examination. As mentioned earlier, most women remarked that their husbands constantly judged them, insulting their morality and their attitudes. In time, the women appeared to start examining themselves, constantly keeping an eye on their attitudes and behaviour, and expressed having difficulty in judging right from wrong.

I was always trying to understand what was wrong with me. I said to myself, my husband accuses me so much, is there someone next to me, did I do something wrong? But I was looking and searching and no, there was nothing, but he was always saying that I was with someone. (...) My friends would say... they would see that I was not happy... I would ask them, am I doing something wrong, he keeps blaming me... He kept coming to my work, he kept coming... I was always examining myself... (Beyza)

It was especially striking that it seemed as though identifying a “right” and “wrong” had become almost impossible for the women. As their husbands judged all of their behaviours, mostly without pointing out any reason or by pointing out reasons that made no sense to the women, there seemed to be no ground left for judging the rightness of their behaviours, and without such ground, it seemed almost impossible for the women to have confidence in their ability to judge right from wrong.

You even fear talking to someone, thinking, is there something wrong in my sentences, will he be mad? I would have to look him in the eye as I spoke, to see if I was saying anything wrong... (Dilek)

Dilek also expressed that while praying, she would beg God not to let her do “anything wrong”, in a way that it seemed as if she could not define the wrong act itself, but could only wish not to do *anything* that is wrong.

I pray. I keep praying. Begging God not to let me do anything wrong. When necessary, I would perform *namaz* (salaat). Or read the Qur'an. (Dilek)

Beyza also expressed that she “put herself under examination” each night, questioning to herself where she had done wrong, and how detrimental the accusations had been for her could be seen in her narrative where she remarked, “You should in no way blame a women”.

I was always..... with things I did not deserve.....a woman.... if a woman does something, you should in no way blame her. Because.... My head, my mind... so much... I examine myself all the time... When I go to bed... What have I done today...: What have I done today.... Where did I go and where did I do wrong? That thing I did today, is it right? (Beyza)

In her narrative, it was especially striking how she did not 'examine' whether or not she had done something 'wrong', but she asked herself what was it, that day, that she had done wrong, taking it as a given.

Such intense doubt seemed to lead the women into a state where they could no longer account for themselves, therefore increasing the need for the references of others, for which, in increased isolation, the partner was the only option. The need for referring to others' account to describe and judge self was evident in the narratives of the women who showed others as witnesses.

Yes I was a good mother, a good wife, a good person above all, because I have my friends, friends of 15, 18 years, and I have never heard from anyone... They all say you are so naïve, you are so benevolent, things like that, yes I am a good person. He had the mistakes, not me. (Helin)

My work was my second home... my work was my second home... I wish my manager there...my beloved manager... I wish you could meet them, and they would tell you about me. Not me, but them. There were these engineers, they loved me so... (...) They know that I did not do anything wrong... And I wouldn't because, if I had done wrong and taken my kids with me.... (Beyza)

It seemed that the need for other sources of reference was valid not only for judging the women, but also for describing them; intense and constant doubt appeared to have such impact on the self that the women believed they could be better described

by others. İlknur similarly expressed that she could not describe her self in the context of violence, and that her psychologist would be better able to describe her:

I'm telling you, because you did not see that period, I cannot describe it to you. Maybe my psychologist could. (İlknur)

Therefore it appeared that the feedback of others had played a crucial role in breaking through the internalization of the husband's description of self. For instance, when asked how she had disentangled from the relationship, Beyza described “growing up” at work where her coworkers had provided her another framework from which to see and feel herself.

Beyza: Me... I... worked with beautiful people, beautiful people like you, beautiful officers... my managers... they would always tell me what kind of a person I was.

Interviewer: How was that?

Beyza: My husband would always look for my mistakes. You are useless, you are bad, he would always look down on me, humiliate me, always... Then I would go to work and the things they said would make me really happy.  
(Beyza)

Such humiliation, degrading and attacks to independence also appeared to lead to intense doubt regarding own competencies, leaving the women more vulnerable to the husband's domination. As previously mentioned, the husbands frequently attacked the independence of their wives, by telling them they were no use, that they could not survive without them, or they were in great need of them. Several factors seemed to enhance the doubt caused by such abuse; such as, as described in the earlier sections, getting married out of obligation and the resulting feelings of being desperate and dependent, living in isolation which deprived the women of any support or bonding to meet emotional needs. As the only point of reference was in most cases the partner, the women started to doubt their competencies while their

partners insulted their housework and child rearing, which were basically what they were allowed to do. It therefore seemed that starting to work outside the house empowered the women by observing their accomplishments, and gaining confidence in their competencies. External factors also appeared to enhance feelings of dependency, the difficulty and stigmatization of being a single mother, the stigmatization of being a divorcée for women, the obstacles of bringing up children alone, and threats from the families.

Such erosion of competencies also led the women to begin doubting their worth as a person; as in the aforementioned quote, Beyza expressed how she had started to feel valuable again, while working. In the next quote, Bahar describes how, in time, the imposed dependence, in addition to degrading, led her to feel also worthlessness, like a “no-thing”.

Bahar: I had come to a point where he had completely negated me,...that I was a very insignificant person...When, for a moment, I pulled myself together, I realized where I had come to.

Interviewer: Negated..?

Bahar: Yes. He kept telling me, 'You are no-thing'. Without me, you are nothing. Without me you cannot breathe. Without me you cannot live. You cannot do anything without me. You are nothing, nothing...

Interviewer: And how did you feel, hearing all this?

Bahar: Yes, I heard all this so much that... I felt worthless, like nothing. I drifted away from my family, from my friends....

(...) He repeated this so much that it had been imposed in my mind.... Even when he was absent, I would repeat it to myself. Repeat, in my mind.

(looking a bit surprised), Yes, Bahar, you are nothing. Yes Bahar, you are like that. You are worthless Bahar. I cannot tell you those moments...

In addition, constant humiliation and degradation, led the women in doubt to start examining themselves as the reason for abuse. Such inhumane treatment led them to doubt their own worth as human beings.

You keep being scorned at, and are beaten, and all that violence, and you keep being insulted, even you hate yourself, am I such an ugly, such a disgusting creature? Why am I even alive? You yourself see yourself so worthless... (Dilek)

I kept trying to understand what was wrong with me, thinking what may I be doing to make him so edgy towards me, what may I be doing so that he hates me this much? What may I have done? What may I have done, I would think, because you would need to kill a beloved person of his, only your enemy could do things like that to you. What did I do, what did I do, what did I do; I kept looking for what was wrong with me, so that he keeps looking down on you, humiliating you. (Helin)

At this point it is important to note that such self-examination does not exactly correspond to guilt or internalization of blame as projected by the partner. It is not necessarily the blame for their behaviours as dictated by the partner (such as unsatisfactory cooking, child rearing or sexuality) that is internalized as guilt; the women rather started thinking that they were defected in some way and therefore deserved inhumane treatment. They started to question whether it was their worthlessness that led their partners to treat them in a violent and indifferent manner. Feelings of dependency enhanced such worthlessness and deprived them of their ability to account for their own worth. As a result, such doubt then rendered them more vulnerable to internalizing blame and guilt regarding abuse.

#### *Internalization of Shame and Guilt: Narratives of Ambivalence*

Before examining the narratives of the women in terms of how they were internalized or disidentified, it appeared important, during the process of analysis, to distinguish between two frequently confused 'self-conscious emotions', shame and guilt. In the present study, such distinction between the two emotions also led at times to great confusion, and at times, they appeared inseparable. For clarification, the framework of Tangney was used to have a more clear understanding of the traces

of such emotions in the narratives. Following Helen Block Lewis (1971), Tangney and Dearing argue that while guilt is concerned with negative evaluations of specific behaviours, shame is concerned with negative evaluations of the self in its totality (2004). Lewis describes that the difference between the two emotions is related to how the role of self is experienced; whereas guilt the focus of evaluation is the thing done and is expected not to have a great impact on the identity, in shame it is on the self that has accomplished a negative deed. For her, shame is “an acutely painful emotion that is typically accompanied by a sense of shrinking or of 'being small' and by a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness... Although shame doesn't necessarily involve an actual observing audience that is present to witness one's shortcomings, there is often the imagery of how one's defective self would appear to others.” (Tangney & Dearing, p.18).

At various stages of the interview, women used discourses that suggested they perceived themselves from the eyes of their husbands. At such times they described themselves feeling invaluable, incompetent, defected, and destitute, seeming to internalize shame and guilt as projected by their husbands. However throughout the interviews the women drifted between such internalization and disidentification, which characterized their resistance to and rejection of the self depicted or forced unto them. Besides feeling guilty, feeling shame for their perceived deficiency, and powerlessness for perceived dependence, they also refused the self as depicted by their partners and rejected the blame for abuse. It is disputable whether such rejections can be considered as insights. At times, such refusals and claims having kept one's own views seemed defensive, like pseudo-insights, that appeared more to

be constructed in the narratives as extreme compensations of the powerlessness they felt. Other times, they seemed to be insights into the abuse and sense of self, though they were blurry. At this point it is important to consider that all the informants of this study were women who had separated from their abusive husbands (except from İlknur whose husband had decided to separate), thus it can be expected that the women had spaces of insight regarding the abuse.

Therefore, it is not possible to say that the women had no truth of themselves, that they relied solely on truth as described by their husbands, and completely lost their independent view and agency. However, it can be said that in such a context of isolation and abuse, it became intensely difficult for the women to stay anchored to their own truth. With such abuse, doubt prevailed over their truth and the women drifted between internalizing of and disidentification with the projected sense of self and abuse. One striking indicator of such drifts was the ambivalence that characterized the narratives. The women drifted between their point of view and their partner's point of view during the interviews.

As a result of internalizing incompetence and worthlessness, the narratives contained discourses coloured with a defected sense of self, and therefore shame regarding self. In the quotation below, Dilek remarked that as a result of severe physical and psychological abuse, she had begun to perceive herself as invaluable and as excessive:

That completely destructs a person... One hates oneself.... It makes one go mad and wish to kill herself... I see myself as something that does not fit in, like an excess..... (Dilek)

As mentioned earlier, such internalization of worthlessness did not only stem from being degraded, but from a combination of verbal and physical abuse that led the women to feel that her deficiency was the reason for the abuse. In a striking example, Ayşe's narrative set forth how, when scolded in public, her anger and resentment towards her partner transformed into shame:

I get really furious when he starts shouting at me... (...) Even if I am the victim there, and I see myself so meek and oppressed.

I: Meek?

A: As in seeing myself as belittled. Like everyone will look at me thinking something different. Like I committed a crime, like I am the guilty one, and that is why my husband is scorning me. Actually he is the guilty one, but you cannot just tell others, it is so difficult. (Ayşe)

The case of Ayşe was important in showing how the “eyes of others” could lead to feelings of shame even in the rejection of blame. Accordingly, areas such as femininity, sexuality, honour, and motherhood which culturally are under constant surveillance by the “eyes of others” seemed to be most easily internalized as areas of incompetence, with intense feelings of shame and doubt.

For instance, Perihan described how her husband's insults regarding her femininity and sexuality had led her to feel incompetent, and that being severely isolated had enhanced her feelings by constructing an inconceivable image of the “women outside”.

Interviewer: As he insulted you, saying things like 'are you a woman', did it ever happen that you believed him?

Perihan: Believed what he said? Sure, sure. It is something that I suffered from psychologically, in my 30's. Especially when younger, in my 20's.... (...) You spend so much time at home, I spend so much time at home, I am speaking for myself, you live such an isolated life, and the kids are yet small. His accusations about the presence of an other life outside, telling me that the women outside were different, and I was no woman would really upset me and hurt me.

In a similar vein, Beyza expressed questioning her competence as a mother, after describing her partner's insults regarding her honour. For her, having left her husband also contributed to her shame, as culturally, getting divorced as a woman is perceived as immoral.

I wonder what good of a mother can I be for my children, what can I do for their future..? (...)

(...) My husband... would tell me I was a whore.... I was also thinking back then, but I started to think more after coming here. Can I be a healthy mother for my children? (Beyza)

At this point it is also important to consider the construction of femininity in the Turkish context. As it will be further discussed in the last section, women are widely perceived as falling into two mutually exclusive categories; they are either perceived as honourable mothers, or as disgraceful women (widely regarded as 'whore') (see Abiral, 2014). Accordingly, it appeared in the narratives that their partners' insults on their honour led the women also to question their motherhood. One example could be found in the above mentioned quote of Beyza, and another was implied in the narrative of Şermin. Şermin expressed that after leaving her husband whom, during and after their partnership, constantly accused her of being dishonorable, she had started to restrain herself in order to prevent possible insults at her daughter.

I myself also limit by own behaviour. Like what? Like when I go out, or in terms of how I dress, in terms of work, for instance when I think about applying for a job, and there is a new social environment...things like that. I told my psychologist about this, I don't know what other mothers think, but for myself, whatever I do, whatever steps I take now, I don't want them to effect my daughter in the future. Don't want people to say, "her mother did this or that," her mother went the wrong way". I don't want this you know, whatever I do, I do it with my daughter in mind. (Şermin)

Shame regarding incompetency in the eyes of the others was also apparent in women's discourses of “ignorance.” Women frequently defined themselves as ignorant, as not knowing the 'right' way of doing things, or not having the good manners. The latent meaning of such identification seemed to be twofold. On one hand, it seemed that being ignorant could sometime serve as an excuse for not leaving the violent situation, for the women 'did not know better', as she was not educated. In a parallel fashion, the only participant who had obtained a higher degree expressed how she had been subjected to violence and stayed, despite her education and work history, also expressing curiosity and concern about how 'uneducated women' could ever leave.

In the other case, it seemed that the eye of the husband who insulted the women with being useless or at times, stupid, coupled with 'eyes of the others'; the hegemonic view of the Western, educated, urban woman appeared to prevail in the minds of the women as of higher status, and free of violence. For instance Beyza remarked that she had not known how to talk or walk, perhaps implying “good manners”, and that she had educated herself at work.

Beyza: Decent people, like you, us, I used to tell those officers, with them, I educated myself.

Interviewer: Educated, how?

Beyza: With them... I was so different when I started working. With them, I learned how to talk, with them I learned how to walk. I improved myself.

Dilek, a Kurdish woman who had spent her life until separation in a village, defined herself as someone who 'did not know how to talk', as someone who had 'never seen society'. In the case of Dilek, being the member of an oppressed and disrespected ethnic group enhanced her feelings of incompetence as her mother tongue did not

count as decent language neither in the eyes of the hegemonic discourse, nor - perhaps consequently- herself.

Dilek: When I left home, I did not even know how to talk.

Interviewer: In what sense?

Dilek: Our mother tongue is Kurdish there.

Interviewer: Oh, your mother tongue is Kurdish.

Dilek: Yes, yes. I was someone who had never seen a community.... I'm telling you, for 10 years I lived upon that mountain, in a hamlet of 5 houses.(...) I did not know anything, I did not know life in the city....

Similarly, Şermin described herself as ignorant and as someone who “doesn't know how to behave”, in contrast to her husband who had been educated until 6<sup>th</sup> grade, with a family who “knew everything”:

I didn't go to school, not even to primary school. I myself don't know how to do anything. My husband is, normally, a mister who has been to grade 3. His family know everything, his father watches the news on the tv. He is a person who knows what happens where, what one does, how one lives. (Şermin)

There seemed to be a binary construction of women; while educated women were independent and free of partner violence, partner violence was attributed to uneducated or undereducated women. For instance İlknur, who had a higher degree in education, emphasized that the violence had started when she was still working, and expressed that she had great difficulty in naming the abuse, and also in perceiving herself as an abused woman. Beyza, on the other hand, attributed not leaving her husband for a long time to her “ignorance”, and Şermin mentioned that her husband's family had “taken advantage of her ignorance”.

Now, I have left home, with four children. Perhaps I was ignorant back then, I was different, not like how I am now. Today, with all my four children, I believe I can take care of them. (Beyza)

Though she did not explicitly mention “ignorance” Ayşe frequently emphasized that she lacked the necessary manners, and the knowledge of such manners, therefore

needed guidance, and that she was grateful to her husband and his family for guiding her:

He was right in the sense that... I didn't grow up in a family environment, I don't know exactly what is good and what is not. Because I grew up really different in environments, in different ways, I don't know how to talk about things, how to behave in a family environment, for instance I would address my husband's siblings by their name, but they were older than me and I should have called them brother. (Ayşe)

The case of Ayşe was a striking example for her husband did not only insult her, but also “helped her learn to distinguish right from wrong” in a didactic and “helpful” manner. Such covert abuse seemed to have a greater impact on doubt than overt forms of abuse such as insults.

It also seemed possible that the positioning of the interviewer had a role in reinforcing the construction of ignorance; women mostly perceived the interviewer as a white, educated and Western woman, and therefore constructing their narratives from a framework of “us” and “you” (except for İlknur who used “us” to include both herself and the interviewer). Such construction also included the assumption that the interviewer was not familiar with the experience of partner violence, and the narratives were constructed in a way that would make empathizing possible, such as using the second singular pronoun, specifically when describing the impact of abuse, or poverty.

You keep being scorned at, and are beaten, and all that violence, and you keep being insulted, even you hate yourself, am I such an ugly, such a disgusting creature? Why am I even alive? You yourself see yourself so worthless... (Dilek)

You don't even have 50 cents in your pockets to get your daughter some chips. (Ayşe)

Just talking is a reason for battering, you can be battered for that. (Helin)

It appeared that although ambivalence was present in both cases, narratives of guilt were coloured with ambivalence more frequently than narratives of shame. Guilt was most apparent in the narratives of Ayşe and Bahar whose partners specifically used to blame the women for the abuse: while Bahar's partner tried to convince her that she was depressed and aggressive, and that he was treating her with his violence, Ayşe's partner emphasized her psychological problems as a reason for abuse.

When I say I'm not guilty, I mean....It's kind of because of all the things I have lived through, I would think of all the things I lived through before meeting my husband, and blame myself. Things like, I had done this in the past, like I told you, I used to come home late to get the attention of my father, so that he would take me with him, but he misunderstood and came to beat me and then leave. He would not ask why I was doing that. I keep asking myself: Why did I have to come home so late, or I couldn't choose good friends for myself, why did I run away from home, it wouldn't have been like this if I hadn't, or if I had listened to my father, to my grandmother, I wouldn't have to go through all this, I wouldn't be like this if I had not gone to stay with my mother, I wouldn't live all this or go to the child welfare center. I always think in terms of myself, with my husband, too. Upon the least important thing he says, I start thinking, I made this mistake, it wouldn't have been like this if I hadn't.  
(Ayşe)

Surely, such narratives of guilt were also frequently combined with shame, as proposed by Tangney and Dearing (2004). In such narratives, it appeared quite difficult to distinguish guilt from shame, as shame would prevail also in narratives of guilt. For instance, in the quote above, while Ayşe blamed herself and felt guilty for her acts, and for the accusations of her husband, she also generalized such guilt to her whole self, perceived herself as defected and felt shameful. Ayşe also expressed guilt for filing legal complaint when her husband threatened to kill her:

Because my husband usually threatens me with death, I would file complaints about him, but I knew it was just a temporary thing. I knew he wouldn't do what he was threatening to, but I was in such a bad psychological state that I would think about what I had gone through before, and think, what if he kills me, what if my children lose their

parents, or become people like me, and then file complaints against him.  
(Ayşe)

Similarly Bahar whose husband used to tell her that he was “treating” her aggression by beating her, seemed to partially internalize such blame for abuse as guilt, as when asked whether she used to believe such accusations of her husband, answered, “Of course I would get angry, I’m a human too”:

Bahar: He would tell me that I was aggressive and that he was making me calmer by beating me...

Interviewer: That he was doing it for your own good?

Bahar: Yes.

Interviewer: What did you think about it then?

Bahar: When the violence was really severe, I wouldn't be able to talk....to say anything..... He would tell me that I had insulted him, that I had sworn at him, and that was why he was beating me.....

Interviewer: Did you ever happen to think to yourself, maybe I am aggressive?

Bahar: Of course I would get aggressive, I am a human too.... I couldn't accept all those things I had to go through.... Those things he was doing to me.....

As mentioned earlier, most narratives involving guilt were coloured with ambivalence. For instance İlknur, on being asked whether she doubted if she was at fault, replied first that she had never doubted herself, and subsequently described asking her psychologist if she was at fault; then expressed she had not doubted herself for she “knew her superiority”, and in a little while expressed her relief on learning she had no fault in the abuse:

İlknur: I didn't doubt myself. For instance when he insulted me and I kept quiet, he would say, sure you, just like a psychologist, like someone who knows everything, are trying to oppress me by keeping quiet.

(...) so I asked my psychologist, am I the faulty one? (...) because I always questioned that. I am doing everything just right, I prepare meals, I wash and iron and align his clothes according to their colours, his underwear, his socks are all aligned according to their colours, I am honourable; and he would say

to me, someone like me, 'what you say is always so stupid'. A primary school graduate storekeeper. And I would tell him, sure, I am a woman, and women are stupid, what about it (in a flirtatious tone)? I could have as well said, you are the idiot.

Interviewer: And besides, you didn't think so?

İlknur: Of course, that was the worst part. I knew my superiority [to him]. Many friends have told me, you are so different, so smart. And yet, he would call me stupid, 'you talk nonsense'. I used to listen to jazz before I met him, and I saw him listening to traditional Turkish music, which I did not like, so I started to listen to something we both could like. Because I told myself not to surrender to him, not to listen to that music, but I was as well conscious enough to know I could not make him listen to jazz music. In that sense, I adjusted myself, I completely changed my closet, my way of dressing. I did. I did. I did everything possible. And it didn't happen. Then I learned why it didn't happen, in the shelter. I learned that it couldn't then, because if there is nothing wrong with you, then there is no fault to make up to, therefore there is nothing that can be done. After that, I said OK. This marriage is not one that can be changed with my efforts.

In the case of this quote, it is also important to consider that due to her higher education, it seemed more difficult for İlknur to describe believing in her partner, as she thought believing in her husband was being deceived and therefore showed her weaknesses.

In the following quote, Ayşe describes confronting the constraints of the village she moved in with marriage. In the chosen quote, she drifted between blaming herself for not meeting the expectations from a bride and wanting to wander around all the time, to expressing that she resisted the customs of the village which criticized women's attendance to occasions outside the house. Such ambivalence in narratives seems to reflect the women's inner ambivalence caused by partial internalization of blame, and the drifts between internalization and disidentification.

Ayşe: I did not know what I was doing, I would sleep all the time, not talk to anyone, would stay in my room, and do nothing, but what you call a bride would sit down, prepare the meals, cook, I was doing none of that. (...) I just wanted to wander around. And well, there it is different, women do not wander

around there, they would say. But I always wanted to go out, to wander around, with my husband. They said it is inappropriate to wander around with your husband (...) Inappropriate to wander around with your husband, to hold hands, make jokes.. It was really different.

Interviewer: And how did it feel to try to adjust to such a place?

Ayşe: How did it feel? Let me tell you, it took me much time to get used to that. And I did make many mistakes. But I just couldn't blame myself, because where I had grown up was so different. It was so free, where I could come and go as I wished, and there were these restrictions there, and though I attempted to get past them, I couldn't. And I tried to adjust myself, because as I couldn't get past them, there would be some reactions when I spoke up... Reactions, like this, in here we don't do this, they would say, and when I replied saying no, I do this, because I learned something different. But that is a different place, and in here it is different, here, there will be too much gossip, they would say. But no, I want to go out with my husband. Well, I was kind of stubborn in that way. Like, I do what I want.

A striking example to ambivalence regarding both descriptions of oneself, and the past reactions and thoughts regarding abuse, was the case of Bahar. Throughout the interview, Bahar drifted abruptly between stating she believed her husband about being worthless and having deserved the abuse, and stating she never believed her husband and always knew he was the one who was responsible for the abuse:

Bahar: Slowly, slowly... he made me feel that I was worthless.....  
but.....I..... I was also trying to understand him, his behaviour, his attitude towards me.....and whatever he said.... I could still see that the problem was in his personality.....

Interviewer: And would you remind this to yourself? I am curious about how you could hold on to this. It can be really difficult at times, to hold on to such a view under such pressure.

Bahar: I... I had already accepted it.

Interviewer: Accepted what?

Bahar: Yes Bahar you are a nothing. He would tell me so, and so much, that it had been carved into my mind. ...Even if he was not there, I would repeat to myself. Repeat in my mind (seeming surprised), Yes Bahar, you are nothing. Yes Bahar you are like that. You are worthless Bahar. And I cannot tell you that moment.... (...) I will not hit you again, he would say (getting serious, mimicing him), But you should also accept that you deserved it. You pushed me.

Interviewer: And as I understand, there were times that you believed him? Did you get confused?

Bahar: Of course I did. He had upset me.

Interviewer: How was that?

Bahar: When violent, he was so different. His eyes would be filled with blood. When hitting me, he was so out of control....but then.....when it was over.....like nothing had happened.....he would try to talk to me, try to make me accept...

(...) that I had deserved it. That I had pushed him... 'look, you are so aggressive, so edgy, you are depressed, you did this, and that... but don't worry my love, I am going to make you better, I will have you treated. (laughing).

Interviewer: In this, way, he tried to make you feel you were sick?

Bahar: Believe me, at one point, even I believed this. (...). Because he would repeat this so often.... No, no, not that I believed it, I misused the word, I didn't believe him, but I would still accept it.

(...) When he was oriented towards me like that... yes.... when he said don't worry my love, I will make you OK.... No I don't believe this. If there is something wrong, if there is someone wrong, it is not me. Kemal is the faulty one. Because he is the one using violence.... But he would force me to accept it... And I would say with words, that I accepted it... because.... he would apologize. He would apologize for what he had done, and then interfere with me again because I would not accept it... and be violent, until I did.

### Strategies for Dealing with Violence

Women's ways of dealing with violence appeared as an important aspect of their experience of violence and self in the context of violence. The narratives did not only describe the behaviours of their partners, such descriptions were almost always followed by statements describing how the women had reacted to violence, and such reactions appeared to have an impact on how the women perceived themselves.

Firstly, women's ways of reacting to violence could be categorized under four themes: resistance, compliance, manipulation of circumstances, and endurance. Such categories were described based not on the objective behaviours, but rather on women's own constructions of their reactions. Therefore, for instance, the same act could be constructed as resistance for one woman, and as endurance or compliance for another. It is important to note that women generally used all or most of the strategies at differing periods, alternately.

Resistance was the only overt strategy of dealing with the violence and it was comprised of the acts aimed directly at challenging the partner by the rejection of his demands. It could include physical acts such as hitting back, verbal acts such as shouting or fighting back, or active rejection of obedience to demands. One striking example was that of Perihan who constructed continuing her work despite her partner's demands as resistance for it included not giving in to physical violence and fitting in the prescribed roles:

And well, then of course that work become more wide scale.... And he was blocking me in some ways. I was being beaten because of that. You will not work, he would say. And yet I would do it. He could never make me stop. Yes, I was beaten, everything happened. (Perihan)

In such narratives, it appeared that being exposed to violence did not always correspond to feelings of disempowerment; if the women felt that they could respond (verbally or physically) or that they did not give in, then resistance characterized predominantly their perceptions of their reactions. At various parts of the interview, women emphasized that they were not only and completely passive in the face of violence; for instance İlknur recounted how she had hit back her husband, and Beyza assertively described how she used to verbally fight back when her husband insulted her. Ayşe also mentioned resisting to the constraints placed upon her, describing how she had insisted on her right to wander around with her husband even though it was received as inappropriate by her husband's family. However, resistance proved to increase especially physical violence, and women described shifting to other strategies when resistance became too risky and threatening.

On occasions where the women did not have the conditions for resistance (for instance when physical violence was extremely threatening) but were also not willing to compliance, they frequently started to manipulate the circumstances in ways that would allow them a space of action, but without actively challenging their partners. Such acts seemed as 'passive' strategies of resisting the total domination of their partners, and could include lying, appearing to comply but managing to keep own decisions, or concealing the prohibited acts.

For instance Perihan described how, when her husband's physical violence increased especially regarding her work outside, she had started to conceal her work from her husband, and had sought help from neighbours and friends. Although she did not openly challenge the partner, her narrative still had traces of a feeling of resisting, as continuing work meant not giving in to the partner's demands:

He started to block it. One day, he even found some other excuse to throw my packages of goods from the window, from the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. And I said to myself, I cannot keep these in this house anymore. And then I had my new friends in that neighborhood... A friend who was selling some clothes, a pharmacist, a friend with a store... women friends with saloons.. I started to take the goods to their stores. (Perihan)

Ayşe also recalled how she had shifted her strategy from openly challenging her partner by refusing his demands to secretly doing what she wanted while seemingly obeying to him:

And after giving birth, I started to have my own order in the house (...) How did that happen? By listening to my husband's family, instead of being stubborn, I managed to say no and do whatever I wished to do anyway. (Ayşe)

However, such rejection of domination was not always possible. At times, women themselves started to internalize the perception of their husbands, and thereby followed the demands of their partner or complied to other forms of domination. This could also result from women's wish to relate with their partners, where compromising with his demands and wishes seemed to consist the only way of relating to him.

I used to listen to jazz before I met him, and I saw him listening to traditional Turkish music, which I did not like, so I started to listen to something we both could like. Because I told myself not to surrender to him, not to listen to that music, but I was as well conscious enough to know I could not make him listen to jazz music. In that sense, I adjusted myself, I completely changed my closet, my way of dressing. I did. I did. I did everything possible.  
(İlknur)

It could also be the case that prescribed roles for women were mostly internalized by the women and the demands had become their own demands, as in the case of especially domestic work, where women tried hard to be flawless in their work and were less critical.

At other times, compliance was crucial in halting physical violence -the husbands could utilize violence until women complied. In such cases, resistance was not among possible reactions; compliance was the only way to end physical violence.

I deserved it, I would say. I will not do it again. Because there is no end to that... No end to that violence... He would beat me until I fainted... So in order not to come to that point, to be less beaten, yes I would accept it.  
(Bahar)

Endurance appeared as an important theme that seemed to partly load into the other three categories, and at the same time differed from them. It was related to bearing,

patience, and waiting, in a form that reminded of duty. It seemed to be an affective mode of being in the violence, rather than 'doing' -such as reacting to violence. It did not mean that women justified violence; only one woman stated that 'each house would have its fights' and therefore she patiently waited.

Of course, everyone would have fights at home. No house can be without fights. But after a period, it starts to be too much. I was 19 years old, now I am 25. So I endured for a year, endured for two years, endured for three years. (Şermin)

For the others, such endurance at times involved hope for change, and other times it did not, it rather seemed as if it was their duty to endure, and to wait:

I was patient for so long, I should have left when there was just one girl, we fought so much. (Beyza)

But then I heard this for eight months. I reacted for the first time after 8 months, and I heard it every day. (İlknur)

As mentioned above, it appeared that women shifted from one strategy to the other in their narratives. Such shifts should be understood not only as shifting strategies of reacting to violence in a particular time of the relationship, but are also narrative shifts in that the reactions to violence are being constructed throughout the narratives, retrospectively. However, in line with the methodology of the study, only the historical shifts were analyzed. According to the narratives, the women seemed first to engage in resistance strategies, and engage in manipulating circumstances or compliance when physical violence became an intense threat. In terms of the target of this study, one important point that appeared in the narratives was that the strategy used seemed to have a great impact on women's sense of self. It appeared that, resistance, even in the presence of severe violence, enhanced a stronger and

empowered sense of self, and less shame, than compliance. Even if violence was present, identifying oneself as a battered woman, as indicated in the passive use of the term, appeared to leave the women feeling more passive, powerless, desolate.

Strikingly, while describing how she had hit back her husband, İlknur stated that she 'was perhaps the old İlknur, then', defining her old self in terms of resistance while her new self was a woman who did not resist and felt disempowered. Bahar, on the other hand, while describing how content she was that her son would not know her as 'someone who is battered', described that otherwise her son would have thought of her as weak and desolate. Therefore it can be seen that defining oneself as being battered seemed to have a significant negative impact on women's sense of self. However it seemed that defining oneself as a woman that struggles despite or against battering enhanced rather a strong sense of self, thereby showing the important function of women's ways of understanding their responses to and agency in violence.

### Section III: A Sense of Self Characterized by Shame and Doubt

As opposed to what was expected prior to conducting the interviews, the informants did not describe the change in their sense of self as a fragmented change, as depicted in the study of Stein (2012). Except for İlknur who talked about the "old İlknur", the women did not appear to perceive fragmentation in their sense of self, or a complete change of self. They seemed to construct their sense of self throughout their childhood and marriage within a framework of continuity.

Regarding how they felt during their marriage, the women described increased feelings of powerlessness, shame, doubt and guilt, and accordingly a self concept with focus on weakness, destitute, ignorance, deficiency, naivete, *and* compassion, and at times, strength. However, such descriptions varied across women and there also seemed to variations among women according to their sense of self in the childhood context. For İlknur, Bahar, Şermin, and Beyza who had described growing up in a more secure environment, with little or no violence, and at least one supporting, loving figure the change seemed to be more great, from a sense of self characterized by strength and feeling valued, to a sense of self characterized by feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness. In the case of Ayşe, Dilek, Helin, and Perihan the change did not seem to be an absolute change, but rather a consolidation of their feelings of worthlessness. However, it appeared that while Helin, Ayşe and Perihan described their childhood as coloured more with strength, disempowerment seemed to be new for them too. Surely, worthlessness and disempowerment were not the only aspects of self concept that had changed, but appeared to be the most central.

In either way, it appeared that the changes in the sense of self of the women during marriage could be conceptualized as falling into one broad category of shame and doubt: doubt regarding one's own worth; doubt regarding one's strength, accomplishments and independence; and doubt regarding one's decency and competency. Feelings of worthlessness appeared to fall into the first category, feelings of weakness, perceiving self as destitute, useless, and dependent on the partner seemed to fall into the second category, and perceiving self as defected and

incompetent; an “unhealthy” mother, an insufficient wife, or as having psychological problems and being much different than others appeared to fall into the third category. Surely, all three categories were not strictly distinguished from one another as feeling destitute also induced feelings of worthlessness, or feeling useless induced feelings of deficiency.

As described in the first section, women experienced marriage as a period of intense loneliness and enstrangement, with no space provided to exercise agency, and confronting repetitive rejections of their expectations of intimacy and closeness with their husbands. As some noted, no place was left for their “self”, which was forced to fit solely in the roles of mother and wife (Helin), the women had to do all for others, and could do nothing for themselves (Beyza), and had no share in the decision making processes (Perihan). They had been isolated from their close ones, whom in half of the cases, had been the ones making the women feel cherished and supported. They had been prohibited from work which (before or later in the marriage) had served as a central force for empowerment by making the women feel skilled, valued, and independent, and by creating a space of her own outside the house, independent of her husband. Instead, they had been busy with endless housework which was exclusively insulted. All of their self aspects, but specifically the most culturally vulnerable aspects of their self, that is their motherhood and sexuality, were constantly degraded by insults, by verbal sexual abuse, by comparison with other women, by humiliation of their children. Additionally, it appeared that the insults' and judgments' excessive focus on motherhood and sexuality seemed to increase their salience as a central part of their self, and coupled with their prescribed

roles as wife and mother, seemed to subtly diminish the salience of other possible self aspects. Psychological abuse also targeted the independence, agency and basic self descriptions of the women. The partner, in overt or covert fashion, made the women feel incapable, useless, ignorant, as lacking of necessary resources, and unable to do things on their own, even unable to judge right from wrong on their own. Two of the women (Bahar and Ayşe) had started to describe themselves as having psychological problems, while Bahar seemed to disidentify with such descriptions after leaving her husband, Ayşe still described herself as having severe psychological problems leading to abuse. Such a sense of self seemed to lead to both shame and guilt, in that feelings of shame was induced by perceiving self as defected, and feelings of guilt arose from perceiving self as leading the husband to inflict violence.

Additionally, sexual abuse appeared to lead to feelings of disgust towards the partner and the self, and involved shame specifically for the early married women who were also frequently degraded and humiliated and had a hard time resisting due to their young age. They also seemed more vulnerable against both verbal and physical sexual violence for they had little or no knowledge of sexuality, or “femininity” and were therefore affected more by comparison and insults. For the women married older, sexual violence was easier to identify and induced less shame or guilt, and more anger at the partner, which at times was the reason for separation.

Physical violence also compounded the impact of psychological violence in that in all cases it induced feelings of worthlessness and deficiency for being treated in an inhumane manner by the person they were seeking intimacy with. Such a

feeling of betrayal was most apparent in the narratives of the women who had trouble while referring to their ex husbands; some mentioned preferring to use his name in order not to say “husband”, some referred to their ex husbands as “the father of” their children; and strikingly, “my husband” was used when the narratives were coloured by feelings of betrayal. Another important aspect of physical violence appeared to be its validation, in the eyes of the women, of their dependency and powerlessness as described by the partner, specifically when they ceased to put up resistance. After giving up resistance hoping not to compound physical violence, it seemed that women's feelings of being weak and destitute increased, they began seeing themselves like “a child”, and were more likely to internalize the self as described by their partners.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

It has been suggested in the literature that intimate partner violence leads to severe transformations in women's sense of self (Pealman & Courtois, 2005; Herman, 1992; Stein, 2012; Crawford et al., 2009), such as decreased self esteem or more qualitative changes, such as in the case of an 'optimistic and adventurous' woman becoming extremely socially withdrawn (Yoshihama, 2002). The present study aimed to gain an understanding of women's subjective experiences with violent partners, focusing specifically on how violence and control is structured, how women stay and adapt or resist to violence, how their sense of self changes in the context of violence, how they come to leave, and how, during all these processes, a transformation takes place in their sense of self.

Earlier studies, though not elaborating in detail on the mechanisms of change or the characteristics of the changed self, have mostly described such change as rupture; as transformation from one self state to a completely different other (Mills, 1985; Stein, 2012; Smith et al., 1995). Among the women in the present study, the experience of such transformation seemed to differ; while for two women the transformation was experienced as a rupture in their self, as a complete change of self, for others their self was experienced as continuous. Such difference became more understandable especially when their childhood environment characterized by neglect and abuse was considered. Most women described that they had never felt valuable, strong, or independent, and some had married at such a young age that a comparison of self prior to and post marriage corresponded to a comparison of

childhood self and adult self which has different implications than comparing two self perceptions in adulthood, as in the case of almost all studies. Studies and theoretical approaches on intimate partner violence generally take as their base marriages that have occurred during adulthood, and those on childhood abuse generally take as their base forms of abuse by family members that are not their partners. As the present study was situated in a country where marriage during childhood or adolescence has a high rate, although the participant profile was not aimed at women married at childhood, 3 women had married before 18 and one had married as soon as turning 18.

Therefore, to start with, a distinction must be made between women married as adults and women married as children. Though central characteristics of the experiences of both groups of women appear to be alike, women married as children describe experiences specific to their conditions, and which must be attended to separately. Their experiences showed how the combination of intimate partner violence and childhood abuse yielded a somewhat different profile than IPV alone. Therefore in this section their cases will be examined initially, and then the common themes to both groups will be discussed.

#### Child Marriages

Literature supports that the risk of domestic violence is higher for women married young, or women involved in arranged marriages (Lutz, 2005; UNICEF, 2005). However it is not only the case that women married young face higher risks of domestic violence, their experiences with domestic violence carry its own specific qualities. Despite all efforts, forced child marriages are still common over the world

(UNICEF, 2001; Quattara et al., 1998) and in Turkey. According to the report by ISRO (2011), one in three women in Turkey get married before the age of 18. Although the present study did not aim to focus on the experiences of women married as children, among the randomly selected women who had been involved in abusive relationships, three of the women had been married as children and one had married at the age of 18. Although marriage before the age of 17 is illegal in Turkey, the issue remains overlooked by forces of government, leading it to be still a frequent matter of concern.

In the present study, women who had married as children described how, for them, sexuality corresponded to sexual violence and was experienced as intensely painful and traumatic, and how they had felt it was too early for them to get sexually involved with someone. Such experiences confirm Quattara et al.'s (1998) conviction that child marriage is 'the socially legitimate institutionalisation of marital rape'. Although some said they had felt sexual urges, they explained how it was different than adult sexuality, and that adult sexuality had come as a shock for it was not something they had expected while getting married. At this point, Quattara et al. (1998) also take notice of how the sexual taboo restricts girls' access to information regarding sexuality, and thus how it leaves girls psychologically unprepared for the early sexual encounters of marriage. In the present study, the women described similarly how unprepared they had found themselves to be, how such early encounters had been painful, and for some, the lack of knowledge had left them feeling confused about what should be expected of them. Such early encounter was extremely traumatic for specifically one women who had been forcefully married

before menstruation, also in line with Quattara et al.'s (1998) point that sexual abstinence until menstruation for child marriages is a myth and that children are forced to intercourse before menstruation if they are married.

Although sexual violence is one of the central aspects in literature regarding child marriages, in the present study it appeared that women married as children had also different problems of great severity, as compared with abused women married as adults. Related both to their young age and early abuse and/or neglect, they felt a strong need for care and nourishment, and getting married took away completely what little resources they had for these needs. Marriage meant an almost total break away from their families, women either had to move away from their families with their husbands, and/or they were not allowed to sustain contact with them. Early abuse and neglect, abstinence from basic needs of care and support, and losing contact with family at an early age, appeared to result in a complex picture of an abusive marriage. Although they were forced to get married, women also hoped to find some kind of care and affection in their husbands, one that they needed in the physical and symbolic absence of their caregivers. Such a case has also been described by other women, for instance in a newspaper article in *Hurriyet* (Kurt, 2014), S.A. who had been forcefully married at the age of 12 describes how she used to cry when her husband would not buy her the toys she wanted. Such need for care and attachment and seeking it in the relationship appeared to increase women's attachment to their partners and make it more difficult to end the relationship.

## Living with Violence: The Mechanisms of Change

The present study aimed at, whether in cases of a change involving rupture, or involving the enhancement of a sense of self characterized by negative attributes, gaining an understanding of the mechanisms leading to a negative sense of self in women subjected to intimate partner violence.

It has been widely suggested especially in feminist literature regarding intimate partner violence against women, that men use violence primarily as a means to exert, sustain, or redeploy dominance over women. In especially qualitative studies women and men have mentioned the domination aspect of violence frequently and with strong emphasis (Bora & İlknur, 2005). Similarly in the present study, women frequently described the violence of their husbands as being intimately connected to issues of control and domination. They described how their husbands had sought totalitarian control, how they had devoted themselves completely to their families at the expense of their own needs, how they had had little (if any) space of action, and how they had been forced into specific roles and modes of being by the partners.

The narratives of the women indicated the central importance of isolation, psychological abuse, and physical abuse in leading to the prevalence of negative attributes regarding self, and how shame and guilt become pervasive in how women experience themselves. In line with the literature (Garcia-Moreno, 2012; NISVIS 2011; O'Leary, 1999), informants in the present study exclusively described the combination of various forms of violence, however the ways in which violence occurred seemed to diverge at several points. For instance, it has been generally

suggested that psychological violence precedes physical violence (Lazenbatt et al., 2010) and that men deploy physical violence when they lack other resources of control -or such resources cease to function (Goode, 1971). The experiences of the women in the present study pointed to two different trajectories: for women who had married willfully and during adulthood (after age 18) it indeed appeared to be the case that their husbands isolated them first, used psychological violence for domination, and started to use physical violence when other forms of violence ceased to sufficiently ensure domination -that is mostly, when women started to defy their domination. Sexual violence was either not mentioned, or was mentioned as a form of violence that occurred only later in the marriage. For women who had married as children, physical violence started much more early, in the initial period of marriage; it seemed that their husbands relied on physical violence as much as psychological violence as the first resource through which to sustain domination.

Isolation is commonly regarded as a key factor paving the way to severe abuse, and also as a form of abuse in itself (Herman, 1992), sometimes categorized under psychological abuse. Studies have suggested that running away in order to get marry, or getting married without getting the consent of the family, or having been abused during childhood were important factors that isolated the women and prevented them from seeking help from their families (Altınay & Arat, 2008; Bora & Üstün, 2005). The participants of the present study also described the central role of isolation: the physical distance with their families (due to moving out of the town with the husband), breaking the ties with their families (as they were forbidden to keep contact), losing connections to friends due to prohibitions had isolated the

women and left them alone with their partners. At times, their partners also forbid them from going out of the house alone, even if they stayed in the neighbourhood, or going to work or socializing which deeply effected the women and made them more vulnerable to psychological abuse and the impact of physical abuse by diminishing sources of comfort and support.

However, it appeared that their husbands frequently isolated the women not only by banishing them from seeing their friends or relatives, but also by psychically isolating them. Herman (1992) discusses how, in order to render the women completely dependent -physically and emotionally- on himself, partners may destroy belongings of women that are memoirs of her loved ones, in order to shatter all her ties with others. In the present study, one strategy partners used for such purpose appeared to be the manipulation of women's representations of or inner relations to their loved ones by attempting to convince them that they were not loved or supported by them. Living under conditions of physical isolation appeared to make it more likely for women to internalize such claims, and to feel more distant towards their close ones, as well as more worthless as they felt unloveable not only by their partners but also by their other close ones. It has been suggested in the literature that although the actual support network may not differ among battered and non-battered women, women's perception of availability of support may differ: in one study it was found that as the severity of abuse increased, women's felt absence of support also increased (Kocot & Goodman, 2003). In line with such findings, the impact of abuse on the women's perception of support emerges as an important issue; the present study also showed that even if the family was supportive in the leaving process,

women could have waited for a long time before telling them about the abuse, finding it difficult to trust in the supportiveness of their families. Such findings imply the detrimental impact of psychological abuse which undermines women's trust in other loved ones and manipulates their relationships with others. It also indicates the importance of an objective assessment of potential mechanisms of emotional support by the close ones which may be difficult for the women to make after going through intense psychological abuse.

The literature also mentions the role of self-isolation but mostly as a result of fear of increased violence (Goetting, 1991; Yoshihama, 2002). The women in the present study have also described voluntarily isolating themselves (besides partner's demands) for several reasons such as being in love and wanting to see only the partner, not trusting others except the partner, or feeling ashamed of the violence and isolating oneself in order to hide bruises. Most women had already isolated themselves when violence started. The fact that voluntary isolation was high implies how important it is for women to keep ties with their close ones when involved in an intimate relationship and the potential risks of being entrapped in a violent relationship with no social support. The present study also suggests the importance of not only physical but psychic isolation; that estrangement and emotional distance (including especially unresolved family conflicts and anger and resentment towards parents) from the family can, even in the lack of severe abuse from or dissent of the family, both prevent the women from seeking help, and lead the women to seek further intimacy with the abusive partner. Some of the women articulated how their anger at their families for their neglect or abuse (psychological or physical, but with

emphasis on the psychological) had kept them from seeking help even if they did not assume they would be denied help.

Living with the family of the partner did not seem to decrease isolation and provide support (for all women except one), on the contrary, it appeared to enhance violence by doubling oppression or leading to physical violence by the partner. It has been suggested that cohabitation with the husband's kin may lead to increased disempowerment on the part of women by limiting her space of power (Warner, et al., 1986). In societies such as Turkey where traditional patriarchy resides, when the women live with their husband's kin, their domestic labour is appropriated not only by the husband, but also by his family. She is also not supported by her mother-in-law, but is rather oppressed by her; it has been theorized that according to what has been termed the 'patriarchal bargaining', young women endure such oppression by the husband and his kin only to gain power in her elderly years and exert it this time on her bride (Kandiyoti, 1988). Such 'cyclical nature of women's power' reproduce male domination with adding the oppression of the mother-in-law, and thereby prevent any form of female solidarity in the household. Similarly in the present study, women living with their husband's family have described how, far from being provided with support from their mother-in-laws, their presence had compounded their oppression and enhanced violence, and also how they have been further isolated by the lack of any social support. Therefore, although it is sometimes assumed that living close to the husband's family may decrease isolation and provide support, such presence of family members may even enhance violence. However, it is also important not to generalize; the women's experiences in the present study has shown

that the attitude of the mother-in-laws may at times be ambivalent; the mothers of the husbands, although exerting psychological violence and at times encouraging physical violence, may also be perceived as supporting especially in specific areas such as child care.

Charmaz (1983) describes self concept as 'the organization of attributes that have become consistent over time'; such organization is dependent on specific processes of empirical validation in everyday life, especially on validation by intimate others. Relying on a symbolic interactionist perspective, she describes the self as essentially social, stating that it is 'developed and maintained through social relations'. From such perspective, the central role of isolation and discreditation becomes apparent. The partners' descriptions of the women appeared as significant in how women started to perceive themselves in the context of the violent relationship. According to the narratives of the participants, it appeared that their abusive husbands mostly relied on ridicule, humiliation, discrediting and emphasizing women's dependency on themselves. Women were ridiculed and humiliated in any area of competency, and their perspectives were discredited. They mostly remembered such descriptions quite vividly, and at times referred to themselves using similar words with their partners. In her qualitative study regarding the impact of chronic illness on self, Charmaz (1983) refers to the impact of discrediting of intimates. In her study, Charmaz makes an important point that discrediting definition of self become effective under three conditions, which are, feeling vulnerable, identification with the discrediting person, and when discrediting "validates a hidden fear". In the present study, it seemed similarly important that

discrediting was most effective when the women felt more disempowered and vulnerable, when they still invested in the relationship and held emotional ties with their partners, and when they could not overtly resist physical violence and felt even more powerless -which, in this case, led discrediting to 'validate a hidden fear' of being powerless which emerged from being subjected to physical violence. It appeared that for women, their inability to resist physical violence came to validate their perception of the despair and weakness they felt. Accordingly, women appeared to discount their partners' discrediting remarks when they felt more empowered (such as starting to work, or breaking through isolation) and when they gave up their expectations from their husbands and broke away from their husbands (even prior to separation).

Charmaz (1983) also points out to the central role of dependence and diminished control in the transformation of the sense of self. Similarly, such feelings of dependence and diminished control (in a context where the partners had become the sole agent of control) appeared to have an important role in women's sense of self. The emphasis on women's dependence appeared as a central aspect of psychological abuse. In an already isolated context, their partner's undermining of dependence by restrictions, prohibitions and humiliations, led the women to doubt their competencies, own perspectives, and thereby their capacities to be and act alone. At times, the conditions that made the women obliged to get married also led the women feel obliged to and dependent on their partners. For some women, marriage had been perceived as an escape or as a protective shield from abuse of other persons, but had led abuse in any case (see Quattaro et al., 1998 for a similar picture). At times, this

led to feelings of dependence and powerlessness, and at times, feelings of gratitude accompanied such disempowerment, complicating the picture.

Feelings of dependency and powerlessness appeared to greatly impact especially the women who had been used to defining themselves as strong and independent prior to their marriage. Feeling incompetent in managing abuse was also found to enhance feelings of shame and guilt, though not frequently mentioned. Other studies have had similar findings; for instance Lazenbatt et al. (2010) concluded that describing self as “a strong person” was indeed a factor that made sharing the abuse with the family more difficult. A similar obstacle was also mentioned by women in the present study, especially those women who had grown up with taking over exquisite responsibility (such as living alone at a young age, taking care of siblings or parents) appeared to define themselves especially as strong, which then had prevented them from seeking help from their families or sharing the violence with anyone else. Feelings of dependency also lead to feelings of being destitute. Women described themselves in a state of intense self doubt, with feeling powerless, worthless, dependent, destitute and impotent. The presence of physical violence, according to their perspectives, seemed to add to such feelings as they perceived it as validating their worthlessness, and finding it difficult to resist the violence led to feelings of powerlessness.

Such feeling states, combined with the humiliation of their traits -and specifically their womanhood- led to feelings of indecency and being excluded from normacy. With a prevailing sense of self doubt and shame, women came to perceive themselves as incapable, insufficient, as not good enough mothers, as stupid or

ignorant, as unworthy and indecent – at times, even crazy. At this point, two related aspects of psychological abuse appeared central in leading to women's internalizations of their partners' descriptions of themselves, and therefore to a change in their sense of self, which were covert or subtle psychological violence and the presence of 'good days' -partners' positive attitudes towards the women. It has been suggested in the literature that among the forms of psychological abuse, subtle or covert forms may be the most detrimental (Marshall, 1994, 1996 as cited in Marshall, 1999; Follingstad et al., 1990; Tolman & Bhosley, 1991 as cited in Sackett & Saunders, 1999). In the present study, the experiences as narrated by the women also suggested that while it may be difficult to compare the impact of different forms of abuse in terms of severity, it appears that subtle forms of abuse risk greater internalization of blame and negative characteristics as projected by the partner. While overt forms of psychological abuse appeared as intensely hurtful, it seemed that when they were coupled with more subtle forms of psychological abuse (domination and violence in the form of 'help', isolation 'for the sake of the woman', and the like) women could also feel gratitude towards their partners, or confusion. When insults were formulated in a helpful manner, it seemed to be easier for the women to internalize blame. For instance one woman described how she had been refusing the oppression of her husband when he forbid her from doing things, however, when he posed his demands in an helpful manner (for instance, 'I do not want you to see your family because they have hurt you', 'I do not want you to go out alone because you do not know the right manners') she mostly believed him and complied. In this case, it also appeared to be of higher chance that she internalized a

sense of self that was not loved or wanted by the parents -and was therefore unworthy- or that did not know the right manners, and was therefore dependent on the husband. In another case, another woman described how her husband's insults had been effective especially when he told her that she was too aggressive and had psychological problems, and he was beating her to treat her, to make her well.

The second important factor as mentioned above was the presence of good times and partner' positive and loving attitudes towards the woman. This is also in line with Walker's (1984) conceptualization of the cycle of violence in which she describes how the honeymoon phase -where the partner apologizes and flatters the woman- confuses women, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will not leave. As described by Tolman (1992), the presence of good times are also detrimental in that they generate feelings of betrayal and confusion (as cited in Ellington & Marshall, 1997). One striking aspect in the narratives of women was that they refrained from calling their ex-husbands as such, most of them either used the name, or at times called him 'the father' of the child, emphasizing that they did not want to address him as husband or ex husband. In her own study with battered women in Japan, Yoshihama (2002) describes how one women had used to say that her partner was an alien, thereby putting him at a distance, in order to explain his betrayal. In the present study, one of the women who refrained from calling her ex-partner as such only mentioned him once as 'my husband', and it was only at that point that a feeling of betrayal revealed itself: 'my very husband is doing this to me'. A less mentioned emotion, gratitude towards the partner, also appeared as important in the present study. The presence of good times, especially if the partner had married the woman

to help her escape (her family or another source of abuse), generated feelings of gratitude in the woman, which could decrease anger and lead to a higher likelihood of the internalization of blame.

In contrast to such cases, it appeared that, the absence of any form of affectionate behaviour on the part of the husband generated more intense feelings of anger, and almost no sympathy. When there were no 'good days' or when the abuse was exclusively overt (physical violence, sexual violence, overt psychological violence), anger seemed to prevail, with no feelings of gratitude or sympathy, and blame was less internalized. This did not mean that such abuse was not detrimental to self, or did not enhance a negative sense of self; women could still feel worthless, desolate, disempowered. However, in such cases it appeared that the assumed reason for abuse was externalized, the partner was held mostly responsible, and blame was not internalized. Therefore it seemed that the presence of good days and covert psychological abuse functioned to increase internalization of blame for the abuse.

#### A Changed Self: Ignorance, indecency, worthlessness, and not-enough-womanhood

Earlier studies had suggested stupidity to be the most common self attribute of women with histories of partner abuse (Hydén, 2005; Morrison et al., 2006; Enander, 2010). According to these studies, having stayed in the relationship led to intense shame in women who referred to themselves as “stupid” for not being able to end the relationship sooner. In the present study, stupidity was mentioned only by one informant who was significantly more educated than the other women (she held a higher education degree, and the other women were either under or uneducated). However, a similar theme, ignorance, was commonly mentioned by the other

women. Women mostly referred to themselves as ignorant, as not knowing how to behave, which enhanced their feelings of incompetency and worthlessness; the knowledge they had did not account to being referred to as knowledge, the ways they knew were constantly insulted (such as housework or peasantry). Such discourses seemed to have a double function. On one hand, at times they served to explain why the women could not leave, serving as a kind of excuse, and thereby elevating possible internal and external accusations towards women for not leaving earlier. Other times however, they seemed to form yet another type of accusation, by placing the responsibility in the women's ignorance, the husband's behaviour was explained by a characteristic of the woman.

Besides, in all cases, such internalized notions of ignorance appeared to damage women's sense of self even further by enhancing a sense of a dependent, insufficient self. Perceiving themselves as ignorant led the women to feel even more dependent on their husbands, as commonly the husbands had been educated and appeared to know better how to behave.

Such expressions can be better understood by the prevailing internalized relationship in Turkey between education, knowledge, and violence. The modernization project of Turkey has brought about an image of the woman as the educated, Western woman/mother (Saluk, 2009). Such an image is based on the dichotomy between the ignorant, rural woman and the educated, urban woman, the second category forming the ideal Turkish woman which all must seek. Saluk demonstrates how such discourses shift the focus from war, poverty, and insufficient policies to illiteracy by targeting education as a means to increase life quality of

women and children. In a similar vein, the women in the present study had deeply internalized such dichotomy, especially in the narratives of the rural women -but specifically in the narratives of the two women who were Kurdish and Roman-ignorance held a central role. Violence could easily be attributed to ignorance, thereby shifting the focus from poverty, male domination, insufficient legal and social policies to education. Lack of education could explain battering, inability to escape battering, or compliance; thereby gender inequality becomes a matter of illiteracy, uneducation, traditions, and a problem of rural areas, mystifying the relationship between violence, honour, and structural social inequalities (Koğacıoğlu, 2009). Considered together with the collective nature of shame, which indicates that the humiliating person comes to embody a whole collective who negatively evaluates, such findings suggest that it is not only the eyes of their husbands that are judging the women, but that they are also “under Western eyes” that promote the worth of education and a specific kind of knowledge, and refer to undereducation or other types of knowledge as 'ignorance' and as unworthy. The internalization of such a perspective appears to be an important issue to consider as it seems to have a profoundly detrimental impact on the women's sense of self by compounding their disempowerment and sense of incompetency.

A central impact of psychological violence on their sense of self was related to their 'womanhood', that is their qualities as a mother and wife. Such impact appeared to be two fold: at one hand, women came to greatly doubt their motherhood and womanhood which was of central importance to them and to their self esteem; and at the other, they defined themselves by relying prominently on what are called

'feminine' characteristics. Firstly, women described how they had come to doubt their competencies as a mother, and how they doubted their sufficiencies as a woman. As comparing of the women with other women especially in terms of beauty and sexuality was frequent, women also came to compare themselves with other women on criterias that, most of the time, were not even known to them. They could come to imagine other women as more attractive, and at times, came to think that other women were not beaten -a thought that could be related to imagining others as not beaten for being sufficient. At this point, it is also important to understand that although women appeared not to accept their partner's humiliations on the discursive level, such humiliations still had a great impact on how they experienced themselves affectively, effecting greatly especially their inner sense of decency, and accordingly, shame. Ahlberg (2000) describes in her work with Kurdish women how people's inner sense of 'badness' or 'madness' is effected by the cultural norms, whether or not they choose to live according to them.

Gagnon and Simon (1973) refer to 'sexual scripts' which are defined as discourses regarding sexuality that mediate the relationships and sexual interactions of people, and that are grounded in hegemonic notions of male centered sexuality (Hlavka, 2014). The discrepancy between such scripts -and the idealized images provided by the scripts- and women's own experiences lead women to feel ostracized, isolated, and disappointed, and create shame (Lutz, 2005), as well as generating an inner sense of indecency.

Secondly, it was striking how women defined themselves in prominently feminine terms, emphasizing self aspects that were mostly related with womanhood

-such as domestic work, mothering, or being honourable. In their study with abused women, Ellington & Marshall (1997) also found that women involved in relationships differing in severity rated themselves most highly on traditionally feminine -and positive- traits. Similarly in the present study, among their positive self attributes, women mostly mentioned their benevolence, cleanliness, orderliness, their qualities as a mother and housewife, and as different from them, their strength. It seemed that the reliance on such aspects could be explained by two intertwined mechanisms. It has been suggested that psychological violence is likely to target prescribed roles for women, that is, degrading characteristics associated with womanhood, such as sexuality and domestic work (Yoshihama, 2002). Women in the present study also described a similar focus on themes related to femininity. It appeared that therefore issues related to femininity became a central area which was primed by the partners and therefore which became the area of focus also for the women. The prominence of hegemonic scripts related to femininity -of wifehood and motherhood- and the restriction of self to being a wife and mother seemed to provide a ground for such focus (Stark, 2007). In the Turkish context where traditional patriarchy is at work, the only legitimate mode of being allowed for women is that of motherhood and wifehood (Saluk, 2009). This does not only precludes possibilities of leaving and divorce (Sen, 1999) but also has a great impact on how women perceive and define themselves. Women in the present study exhaustively discussed being restricted to being a wife and a mother, with no space left for themselves to flourish. Such restriction appeared to lead to the prominence of descriptions of the self almost exclusively in terms of feminine attributes. Charmaz (1983) describes

that in a restricted life (which is the restricted life of a person chronically ill in her study) the only areas available become 'the area [in which former] values are played out'. The participant women mostly lived an isolated and restricted life, in their own words, a life in which a self was not allowed for women apart from their roles as wife and mother. Accordingly, it seemed that in such a restricted life, the area in which values (that are central to self esteem) were played out had become womanhood. All positive attributes to self had become related to womanhood, and values such as honour, decency, sufficiency were all expressed in relation to feminine roles of motherhood and wifeness.

#### The Centrality of Shame

The prevalence of shame in colouring women's sense of self appeared to indicate the centrality of shame in interpersonal violence, and validate the definition of complex trauma as a 'shame disorder' (Herman, 1992). Shame appeared to be profoundly more salient than guilt, even where guilt could be expected to prevail. Guilt and shame have been considered as important factors in the traumatic responses to violence (APA, 2013; Kubany et al., 1996). Guilt is considered to be central in traumatic stress, and there has been a focus on the attribution of blame for violence in the cases of abuse (Dutton et al., 1996; Kubany et al., 1996). For instance Kubany et al. (1996) have proposed that abused women frequently feel guilty about their own behaviour and perceive themselves as having a role in the violence by not behaving in the right way. However, Street & Arias (2001) remark how in the work of Kubany et al. (1996), trauma related guilt is highly correlated with measures of guilt *and shame*, indicating a combination. It has also been suggested by Tangney and Dearing (2004)

in their refined analysis, that its combination with shame might be an overlooked factor in the studies of guilt). According to Tangney and Dearing, (2004), the construct of guilt in the literature frequently involves a combination of guilt and shame.

In the present study, the narratives of the women seemed mostly to imply such a combination, instead of shame or guilt alone. When women attributed blame for the violence to themselves, they did not attribute it to a specific behaviour or quality of themselves (as it was described by the partner), instead they appeared to find the blame in their very being; in their worthlessness, lack of decency, dependency, powerlessness, or at times, immorality. Therefore it seemed that a sense of self characterized by such negative qualities was perceived as the reason for violence. They did not internalize the exact reasons put forth by the husband; they did not seem to think that it was something wrong they did that caused the violence, but rather found the reason in the way they were. For instance, one woman stated, 'am I such a disgusting creature? [to deserve such violence]', indicating how she found the reason for violence not in her behaviour, but in her very being.

Accordingly, following Helen Block Lewis, Tangney (1996) proposes that guilt involves attribution of blame to a specific behaviour, but does not involve a general negative evaluation of self. In this case however, the totality of self was degraded and negatively evaluated. Sackett & Saunders (1999) make a distinction between the impacts of being criticized for specific behaviours and being ridiculed for traits, stating that while the first may lead women to attempt to change themselves, the second is more likely to diminish their self perception. Accordingly, they found that

ridiculing of personal traits to be a more severe form of abuse than criticizing specific behaviours. Tangney (1996) propose that shame is more detrimental to self than guilt as it involves the negative evaluation of not only specific behaviours but of the self in its totality. In line with this view, a quantitative study by Street & Arias (2001) has found that in 63 battered women, shame, but not guilt, was significantly correlated with psychological abuse, and with PTSD. Their results also showed that the relationship between emotional/verbal psychological abuse and PTSD was fully accounted by shame, thereby indicating the centrality of shame in traumatic stress. Such characteristization of the narratives more by shame than guilt can also be thought of in terms of cultural factors. Ahlberg (2000) who has worked extensively with Kurdish women refugees suggest that following interpersonal trauma, while guilt could be expected to be more salient in Western cultures, shame appeared to be more salient in the Kurdish areas, which share many common cultural characteristics with Turkey.

It is important to understand the mechanisms that lead to such shame. In a previous study aiming to explore the relationship between different forms of abuse and shame and guilt, verbal/emotional abuse was found to independently predict shame, but domination/isolation did not (Street & Arias, 2001). Such findings indicated that although domination/isolation and physical abuse was important in generating shame or leading to PTSD symptomatology, they did not have an effect independent of verbal/emotional abuse, but only in combination with it. In the present study, domination/isolation seemed to function in two ways: first by entrapping the woman and thereby paving the way to physical abuse and

emotional/verbal abuse; and second by enhancing the impact of verbal/emotional abuse by validating the claims of the husband. In the same study, it was also found that physical abuse was did not independently predict PTSD, psychological abuse did (Street & Arias, 2001). Similarly, it appeared that physical violence did not have the same detrimental impact as long as the women's sense of self was not eroded by emotional/verbal abuse.

Physical violence, as compared to psychological violence in general, appeared to lead to greater anger and therefore resulted in less self-blame. Likewise, it has been suggested in the literature that psychological abuse may be more detrimental to the self than physical abuse (Follingstad et al., 1990; Walker, 1984; Street & Arias, 2001; Lazenbatt et al., 2010; Marshall, 1999), and that it is the main reason for psychological distress in abusive relationships (Marshall, 1999; Street & Arias, 2001). The narratives of the women in the present study did not directly suggest if one was more detrimental than the other. However one important theme that emerged was that physical violence generated increased anger and was therefore associated with more resistance (physical or psychological), whereas psychological violence was more confusing and more internalized, and therefore did not lead to the same anger. Besides, women appeared to leave not when psychological violence was at its peak, but when physical violence was at its peak. Therefore, similar to the effect of covert psychological violence, it appears that physical violence could be understood as less detrimental not because it is less hurtful, but because it is less internalized due to the anger it generated, and can be more easily resisted. This may also not enhance a negative sense of self as much as psychological violence. This suggestions paralel

Stein's (2012) notion of the dissociation of anger as the reason for the forfeiture of agency in abused women, and the importance of supporting women in feeling such anger to empower them into leaving violent relationships.

The narratives in the present study also suggests that psychological violence is more central, as it appears that physical violence was interpreted in line with psychological violence in the later stages of marriage: while in the initial stages of marriage physical violence was greatly attributed to the abuser, in the later stages of marriage, women seem to be more likely to interpret physical violence as resulting from or as being related to their own characteristics -the characteristics that had especially been emphasized by the partner. Physical violence thereby becomes an evidence of the negative self that has been described by the partner.

In a similar vein, sexual violence appeared as more unacceptable for women than psychological violence. Especially when it relied on physical coercion, sexual violence became a matter of disgust towards the partner, which again led to feelings of anger, and though it could couple with shame, internalization did not seem to be at work as in the case of psychological violence. One important implication of such a theme is the impact of physical and/or sexual violence on leaving, and the importance of assessing and resisting violence when physical and/or sexual violence is absent. Literature on the impact of psychological and physical abuse on leaving has generated contrasting findings; for instance the study by Jacobson & Gottman (1996, as cited in Karakurt & Silver, 2013) has suggested that emotional violence has a higher predictive value for leaving, while the study by Gelles & Strauss (as cited by Ellington & Marshall, 1997) suggests that the likelihood of leaving increases when

physical violence increases. In the present study, women have mostly mentioned the impact of increased physical (or sexual) violence in their decision to leave, while psychological violence seems less likely to change throughout the years. Such indications become significant when we consider women who is in psychologically and sexually abusive (without physical coercion) relationships and who do not experience physical violence. In such cases, internalization of blame and resulting shame might be increased, leading to decreased anger and increased difficulty in assessing and fighting with abuse. In a similar vein, it has been suggested that in relationships with minor physical violence, women's emotional ties were more relevant in terms of their felt dependency, where objective conditions of dependency became more important in relationships including severe violence. Therefore, women seem to be more likely to feel less emotionally dependent if there is increased physical violence, supporting the findings of the present study (Kalmuss & Straus, 1990 as cited in Ellington & Marshall, 1997).

All in all, physical violence alone did not appear to lead to feelings of intense shame. On the contrary, it seemed that when the women could cling to their sense of self and protect themselves from the degrading of psychological abuse, they could even perceive themselves as resistant figures in the face of physical violence, and thus such violence did not effect their sense of self. However, when the women could not physically or psychologically resist, and their sense of self was eroded by the emotional/verbal abuse (and/or sexual abuse) physical violence appeared to become extremely detrimental as it was perceived by the women as validating a sense of disempowered, indecent, worthless self. Therefore it seemed that

psychological violence was more central to shame, and that physical violence led to feelings of intense shame only when a sense of self as imposed by verbal/emotional abuse was internalized.

It is also important to consider that such shame and guilt frequently have a personal history in the lives of the women; that it does not start with marriage. For many women, childhood had also been a period characterized by shame. As young girls or women, they had been frequently 'shamed' by their families -especially their mothers- for various reasons, such as reporting abuse or for being involved with boys.

#### Internalization of Abuse: Normalization versus Strategies of Resistance

An important suggestion that women's narratives put forth was the distinctions between normalization of violence, self-blame regarding violence, and feelings of shame and guilt regarding violence. Firstly, the participant women did not mention anywhere that they found the violence normal or acceptable, nor did they talk about their roles in violence, as in self-blame. Contrary to expectations, it was important to see that these women rejected any part in the violence, they did not explain the violence in terms of their own behaviours. However, such refusal of one's own part did not diminish all agency, and they constructed agency in different ways; at time in taking an active part in violence (but not in the sense of causing violence) at other times in choosing between different strategies of reacting to violence. Besides, it is also important to see that the rejection of blame did not diminish shame and guilt. Therefore it appeared that there was a difference between the apprehension of violence in the cognitive level and the apprehension of violence in the affective level.

There is a tendency in the literature regarding violence against women to discuss women's staying in the violent relationship in terms of the normalization, or rationalization of violence (see Lundgren, 2004), and to accept that male violence is largely perceived as acceptable by women (Hlavka, 2014; Loseke, 1987). Accordingly, various wide scale studies have found how high percentages of women do not seek help because they see violence as acceptable behaviour or as a trivial issue. It has been suggested likewise that at the beginning of the violence, women are 'unaware of the problematic behaviour or its consequences' (Becho et al., 2013). In the present study, none of the women appeared to normalize, trivialize, or refer to the violence as ordinary, insignificant, or tolerable the violence at the present time. Nor did they describe their initial reactions to violence as accepting or normalizing. On the contrary, their first reactions to violence involved strict and determined defiance. Women mostly expressed that they had felt shocked, and had found the violence unacceptable and thought of, or attempted to, leave their partners. Most had attempted to leave their partners, but could not due to various reasons. Even when the women felt guilty about the abuse, or blamed themselves, they still did not appear to find violence acceptable. Lundgren (2004) suggests that violence is normalized by the gradual changing of perception regarding which acts can be accepted and which acts correspond to severe violence. In the present study, however, violence mostly was not gradually structured, physical violence, once began, quickly increased in severity. Women's perceptions, accordingly, did not seem to regard violence as normal, as they attempted to resist until fear and shame prevailed. However, a process of rationalization did seem to occur in that although it did not justify violence for them,

the women attributed the violence to other sources such as the family of the husband, his “mental illness”, his habits, alcohol, and drugs. Consequently, for some women, perceiving that the violence would not end had been a turning point.

However, it is important to note that, although women described the violence mostly as unacceptable and not normal, their narratives were characterized by great ambivalence regarding how they felt during the period of abuse. Intense self-doubt and shame appeared to lead the women to doubt their part in violence especially during the relationship and violent episodes, whereas the narratives of strength and empowerment appeared to result in a total rejection of internalization of any blame, leading to ambivalence in the narratives. Such ambivalence also seemed to show the great confusion women had endured during the relationship; they shifted from doubting themselves and their actions, to clinging to the insight they had regarding their partners' responsibility of the violence. In his discussion of the psychic domination of violent husbands, Stark (2007) mentions 'safety zones' in which women can retreat and hold on to their own points of view, however, in this case such zones did not seem stable, but seemed rather to be infiltrated by the views of the partner every now and then, until women could get hold of their views again, only to lose in again in a repeated cycle.

Importantly, the initial reactions to violence was characterized by much more resistance than the later reactions (except the reactions towards the end of the relationship), and this might lead to two significant implications. One is the need to support women in their initial reactions to violence from their intimate partners, instead of questioning their credibility, or discouraging resistance by minimizing

their reactions. Secondly, such an inference suggests that not resisting violence, for these participants, did not seem to result directly from their early experiences or justifications of violence, but rather appeared as a result of the process of violence. Although the social learning hypotheses commonly suggest that the reason behind women's reluctance to leave violent relationships is the internalization and justification of violence due to early learning, the experiences of the women as recounted by them suggest that such reluctance increases through the process of living in a violent relationship, and may not be exhaustively present in the initial period. Therefore such an understanding of women's reactions would lead policies to consider the centrality of supporting women's insights into violence and their reactions, especially in the initial period of violence. Loseke (1987) explains how the 'subjective' quality of what counts as violence and what does not risks the social invalidation of women's identification of certain acts as violence, and how many abused women must face such invalidation by others who judge the behaviours of their partners as not-violence. Considered together with the previous point that women are most likely to resist violence in the early stages of the relationship and more likely to internalize violence in later. Importantly, the initial reactions to violence was characterized by much more resistance than the later reactions (except the reactions towards the end of the relationship), and this might lead to two significant implications. One is the need to support women in their initial reactions to violence from their intimate partners, instead of questioning their credibility, or discouraging resistance by minimizing their reactions. Secondly, such an inference suggests that not resisting violence, for these participants, did not seem to result

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Such suggestions also have important implications in terms of how women name (or do not name) abuse. The narratives of the participant women suggested that sexual and physical abuse could be defined as abuse much more easier than psychological abuse, and was therefore resisted and not normalized. Accordingly, women mostly left when physical or sexual abuse was at its peak. This also suggests the importance of understanding the experiences of women who suffer from psychological abuse only, and the probable difficulties of naming abuse under such conditions. This brings forth the question of how women react to violence if they do not normalize or trivialize it, but at the same time, do not terminate their relationships. Accordingly, first the reasons of not leaving the relationship will be discussed, followed by women's reactions to violence.

#### Finding Agency Beyond the Dichotomy of Resistance versus Compliance

There exists a tendency in the literature to categorize women's reactions to violence from the framework of a simple dichotomy of resistance and compliance. When women do not actively resist, they are thought of as either having 'false consciousness' (i.e. that they do not realize their oppression and completely internalize domination) or complete powerlessness (Sunder, 2000). The narratives of the women in the present study suggest that first, this is not the case, and second how women themselves conceptualize their reactions have a significant role in the impact of violence, especially on their sense of self. In the first vein, the women did not construct themselves as only passive recipients of violence; at times they felt disempowered and passive in the face of violence, at other times they constructed themselves as more agentic and expressed how they chose and shifted between

strategies of dealing with violence -resisting, manipulating circumstances, enduring, or complying.

Charmaz (1983) notes that even among the scarcity of choices while living a restricted life, the feeling of exercising choice serves as a protective factor against suffering and the feeling of losing one's self. Accordingly, the construction of agency was an integral part of the narratives. At times it comprised of active resistance against the husband, at other times of manipulating the given circumstances, and sometimes only by choosing to endure; but agency was mostly present. The widely critiqued Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 2007) presumes and claims a symmetry between men and women in terms of intimate partner violence, as some studies have found that women also use violent behaviours against their violent husbands.

In the present study, a striking finding was that women did perceive themselves as also violent, for at times, they resisted their husbands, responded to their insults, or hit back. However, the intensity and frequency difference between their acts and the acts of their husbands was profound, and their acts were exclusively performed as a response to the abuse of their partners. In a similar fashion, women in the present study frequently used words assuming partnership while referring to abuse such as “our fights” or “our problems”. Considering these points, it is likely that in a context of profound perceived weakness and dependency, the construction of agency was of significance for the women to narrate their stories from an empowered perspective. The narratives of the women showed that they did not simply be subjected to violence as passive victims, they used various strategies, be it active resistance or not, and responded to the violence in ways feasible.

Sunder (2000) has proposed that it is necessary to go beyond such dichotomy of resistance and compliance, and reflect beyond the conceptualization of the absence of overt resistance as complete passivity. She suggests that women's consent must be understood as 'real alternatives to resistance available to women in negotiating a better deal for themselves in an objectively real situation of disempowerment'. She also proposes that under such circumstances of real threat, resistance is to be found in its most minimal and subtle forms. James Scott (2008) had previously investigated in a similar vein what he calls 'the everyday forms of resistance' in the lives of peasants, and proposed that in the face of threat, people must shift their strategies of resistance from more active, overt, and challenging forms to more covert forms, and has thereby included in his understanding of resistance subtle acts (such as gossip, slander, rejecting demeaning labels) that do not challenge the very structure but all the while manipulate and disobey it. He calls such acts 'ideological' or 'symbolic' resistance, and claims that they have a central role when overt forms of resistance are unavailable. Accordingly, a qualitative study conducted with battered women in Japan has suggested that women's reactions to violence changed depending on the situational context; while some women openly reacted to their husbands, others chose to react in more symbolic ways that were more subtle (Yoshihama, 2002).

Similarly in a qualitative study conducted with battered women in Pakistan, it has been suggested that women's strategies were obliged to be targeted at minimizing violence, and that by the strategies they used they also tried to minimize the psychological damage for themselves, thereby following both ends while choosing

strategies (Zakar et al., 2012). Zakar et al. (2012) have similarly described how, when fighting back is not possible as it is too dangerous, women use more subtle strategies of challenging the domination of their husbands, especially emotion focused strategies, such as avoiding contact or getting support from religion. However such strategies carried with them the risk of being maladaptive for the women, as in cases where women started to deny abuse or blame themselves. They importantly point out that in the absence of social and legal support, as well as in a cultural context where active challenging of the husband by the women cannot be accepted, such subtle strategies may be the only forms of reactions possible. They emphasized that there could be no clear distinction between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping mechanisms as emotion-focused mechanisms could be productive and 'active' as they sometimes consisted the only realistic mechanism allowed. In such cases they described subtle strategies that women used that were not overtly challenging but was also not compliant under the coined term, 'active strategies in waiting'. Such a construct seems also to describe well a coping mechanism described by the women in this study, which has been termed as 'manipulation of circumstances'.

In this regard, women's constructions of their selves as agents and different strategies as active and resisting -although in a covert manner- can be understood as the only form of activity possible under conditions of domination and physical threat. In this respect, although the other categories may be distinguished from resistance, they seem to comprise for the women (at various points of the interview-not exclusively) agency in how they include conscious choice of strategies without total

internalization of domination. Especially manipulating circumstances appear to emerge as the only way of refusing demands in many cases where overt resistance results in physical violence. However, it has also been seen that even compliance can be understood as agentic and involving disidentification with partner's impositions when it is chosen in face of threat, although the demands are not fully internalized. Therefore, it appears that considering covert forms of resisting demands or attempts of psychological domination becomes significant when physical violence leaves no room for overt resistance. The main reason why such consideration is important lies in the narratives of the women that suggest that covert forms of resisting, whether it is manipulation of the physical environment or refusal of internalization at the psychic level, can support women's sense of empowerment. It appears that it is at the point of complete compliance, internalization of dominance and partner's penetration into the psychic space of the women that women feel completely disempowered. Although resistance appears as the most empowering strategy of reaction to violence, manipulating circumstances, compliance, and endurance may all serve as working against disempowerment, when the women feel that they have consciously chosen such strategies.

The women in the present study mostly described resistance as their first reaction to violence. However, they described that resistance to the domination or violence of the husband resulted in more severe violence, and in the absence of resources for leaving the husband (most of the women had attempted to leave their husbands upon first incidents of physical violence, but for different reasons, had given up) they had shifted their reaction strategies from resistance to endurance,

compromise, or covertly manipulating circumstances. Therefore more passive strategies had taken the place of active strategies. This finding seemed to contradict earlier studies which suggested endurance came up as a theme in the beginning of the violence and was later abandoned (Lutz, 2005) and that women did not use active strategies in the beginning of the relationship and preferred to wait and see (Zakar et al., 2012). In these studies it appears that women, as expected, are more accepting towards violence and become more resistant in time, however in this study there seemed to be three stages in women's reactions to violence: active challenging, refusal or resistance, more covert and less challenging strategies of dealing with violence as a response to increased threat, and thirdly, more resistant and openly challenging strategies as a result of empowerment.

#### Empowerment: Breaking Through Isolation and Finding Relational Sources of Validation

Women described trying to leave or thinking about leaving from the initial phases of marriage. While only one woman described no good days and a wish for leaving from the first day to the last (she was the youngest married woman), the others described a state of ambivalence regarding leaving. The presence of good days, clinging to the idealized family image, fear, shame, and isolation all appeared as significant obstacles that hindered the women from leaving the relationship.

Left all alone with their perpetrator, women's feelings of dependency, incompetency, being destitute and shame all entrapped the women into the relationship. Most of the women had been isolated from their families affectively as well as physically; anger and disappointment resulting from childhood abuse and

neglect made it almost impossible to open up to their families about abuse. Besides, a childhood context of neglect and abuse that led the women to feeling unloveable and unworthy, as well as indecent for not being worthy of love even by their own families, made the women feel even more dependent on their husbands, as he appeared the only attachment figure, the only figure they could relate to in a world where they would not be valued by their own families. Therefore, a considerable hope was placed upon the marriage and the partner in particular. While isolation and lack of affection from the family made the women vulnerable to feeling dependent on the partner, the partner's psychological abuse enhanced such feelings of dependency by humiliating, degrading and discrediting the woman. Physical violence on the other hand, intensified feelings of helplessness and indecency as well as worthlessness. In such a context, the only source of reference regarding their selves was that of the partner, who perpetually validated such a negative self image. Precluding any other perspectives that may oppose his description of the women, isolation renders the women more vulnerable to introjecting their descriptions of the partners.

As mentioned before, Charmaz (1983) defines the self as social and as being constantly reproduced by repeated validations. Such an approach constructs the self as dynamic and therefore open to change. It thereby becomes a question what happens when validations and invalidations contrast each other. As a matter of fact, the perspectives of others appeared to play an important (but surely not the only) role in the empowerment of women. In the following section, the role of work, children, and religion in empowerment will be discussed.

Literature on the empowerment of women in the context of domestic violence has mostly taken women's participation in the paid labour force as a significant factor for empowerment, on the grounds that it provides women with economic independency which then increases their control over their lives, and subsequently, their process of leaving (Rothman et al., 2007; Sen, 1999). Sen (1999) opposes this common view by proposing that this is not the case in contexts where women can hardly find a space allowed to them outside marriage, and where increased male domination does not allow women the ability to choose even when they have financial resources. In such contexts, the money women earn is still in the authority of their husbands, and the power of choice and control rests still in male authority. This is in line with the experiences of women participating in the present study; women were mostly not allowed to work, when they did it was expected of them to give the money to their husbands, and their financial contribution to the house was overlooked.

How employment leads to heightened feelings of empowerment is a less examined issue. In the present study, financial independence also seemed important for the women, however it did not appear as the central factor leading to empowerment. Rather, what appeared to be empowering was relating to others by way of work, seeing their work as being valued by others (as opposed to the constant humiliation of their domestic work), and having a space not penetrated by the husband, which had made them feel more independent, valuable and empowered. In contrast to their work at home which that was unreciprocated, perceived as unworthy, and commonly insulted, working in the paid labour force seemed to empower the

women both by making them break through their isolation and get verifications from other sources of reference apart from the husband -and that contrasted that of the partner-, and also verify the worth of their labour. According to the narratives of the women in the present study, it seemed that the people they worked with had become of central importance in providing them with another reference point to test the perspective of their husbands. They described how being treated as valuable, not being degraded by others had made them feel more valuable, as opposed to their partner's humiliation of their work at home. The women received positive remarks about their work, were never insulted, and were paid; in a sense, their effort was “worth” something, that is, a price. This is also in line with other qualitative studies that has showed how the perspectives of others play a crucial role in providing perspectives that contradict that of the partner (Yoshihama, 2002). Such findings indicate the important of social support, as well as the importance of supporting women's own perspectives into the abuse, and providing perspectives that contradict that of the husband. Besides, although it was not explicitly mentioned, it can also be worth considering that working meant a shift from unpaid domestic labour to paid work, which may indicate that women's production produces value and is therefore valuable, however there did not appear enough textual evidence to support this notion.

Consequently, women described that work had given them their lost confidence, and competency, leading to increased feelings of being valued. Their work started to appear to themselves as more valuable, leading to feeling more valuable themselves, and the feedbacks of others at workplace provided references

regarding themselves that contradicted those depicted by the husbands, thereby shattering it. Such a space also allowed for independence in that it opened up a possibility for their own dreams, wishes, activities. Although this did not correspond to independence as understood by the above mentioned studies which conceptualize independence as the ability to make choices regarding oneself, it provided the women with a feeling of independent as being not desolate, having an autonomous being with their own wishes, dreams, desires.

Another area that appeared to provide the women with a space of her own not penetrated by the partner, and another source of reference was religion. It appears that religion may serve as a inhibiting or enforcing variable in the process of leaving for abused women. The women in the study of Lutz (2005) described religion as an hindrance in ending their abusive relationships for different reasons – normalizing violence, enforcing the duty to keep the promise of marriage. Though such a case can be expected in Turkey as well due to the religious background that commonly indicates the importance of marriage, the experiences of the participant women were different. For instance one women described becoming disentangled from the degrading perspective of her husband by becoming involved in religious activities, and explained how learning about the value given to women in religion had made her feel valuable in the eyes of god, and had thereby enhanced her self esteem and empowered her. In this case, it seemed that God had become another reference point by which to test her husband's perspective. Another women mentioned reading the Qur'an on her own and soothing herself by talking to God, in which case God appeared to become a relational figure, perhaps the only figure she could converse

with in a 5 housed village. Similarly, in a study with Jewish women who had been abused, women described spirituality as an important source of support and nourishment, some describing how talking, conversing with God helped them for they had no one else they could talk to. Though mentioned less frequently, the present cases also suggest that religion can play an empowering role by providing extremely isolated women with an inner figure to relate with, and a place independent of the partner. In cases of extreme isolation and total domination, and against the lack of any external figures, inner figures such as God may come to play an important role in protecting women's psychic space from being completely dominated by the partner. A similar case appeared to be valid also with children, however having children seemed to be a more complex issue in terms of both empowerment and becoming attached to the relationship, thereby having an ambivalent function.

Literature regarding the role of children in IPV has mostly focused on how having children becomes a motivator for leaving or staying in the relationship, and has suggested that children have an important role in the decision making process of abused women (Zink et al., 2003; Rhodes et al., 2010; Randell et al., 2012). Such studies show that (Zink et al., 2003; Rhodes et al., 2010; Randell et al., 2012) considerations about the negative psychological (or physical) impact of IPV on their children were one of the main external motivators for leaving in the participant women. However participants in the study of Zink et al. (2003), Rhodes et al. (2010), and Loke et al. (2012) also described children as a motivator for staying in the relationship, such that they were concerned as having a male figure in the life of the

child or that he was a good father. In the present study, children did not appear as an motivator for leaving; however it appeared as both a motivator for staying and a factor for empowerment, which eventually lead women to leave. As opposed to the mentioned literature, only one participant in the present study (all but one had children) described being concerned for such negative impact of violence on her child. Other women mostly emphasized instead their concern for the negative impact of the 'lack of a father' on their children. Therefore the women situated the reason for possible psychological problems of their children not in a context of violence, but in a context of growing up without a father. It was also striking to see that for women, divorce meant not that their children would grow up in a separate house from their fathers, but completely without them. It was commonly stated that the women had endured violence 'for the sake of children', thinking that living with the family unit was the most important factor for child development. This also parallels the qualitative study by Lutz (2005), in which the social importance of the partner as a father was essential in women's decisions of not leaving, and led the women to have concerns regarding single parenting. Quite similarly one women participant remarked in the present study that she had married in order to have a child, and that in another country where single parenting of a woman was not a reason for discrimination, she would have done it alone. Such findings also parallel the other studies (such as Zink et al., 2003) which suggest that while in the abusive relationship women may have little insight into the negative effects of violence on their children. Such findings may indicate that informing abused mothers about the potential negative effects of witnessing IPV on children can serve as a protective

factor for both women and children. One important aspect regarding children that appears in the Turkish context in the present study, but do not appear as an issue in other contexts, is that for women, leaving the relationship sometimes also means leaving the children. Most of the women in the study mentioned either their fears regarding the ambiguity of their children's custody, or guilt for having to leave their children behind. The severe conditions of shelters in Turkey also seems to make it difficult for the women to take their children with them (and male children over 14 are not allowed in the shelters), together with the economical hindrances women face in the common absence of state support.

However, although children appeared to be a motivator for staying in the relationship, they also appeared to have an important role in the empowerment and gradual leaving process of the women. Although literature regarding the impact of having children on empowerment in the context of violence is scarce, research has suggested that among women exposed to IPV, those with children reported lower levels of PTSD symptomatology than those without children, indicating that having children may serve as a protective factor against trauma symptoms (Street et al., 2001). Lutz (2005) describes that having children first intensifies women's hope for the future of their family, but eventually leads women to regard their husbands as less important due to the adverse effects of his violence on the family, and start to prioritize themselves and their children. The narratives of the women in the present study did not indicate exactly a prioritization in terms of weighing the risks of the violence for the children, however, it appeared that a new attachment figure became important for women, and displaced the partner who had rendered himself the only

figure of attachment. Women frequently described how the absence of an affective tie with their families, especially in the context of extreme isolation, had led them to seek intimacy and affection with their husbands, and how such a search was an important factor that tied them to their husbands. It seemed that having children, by providing such a figure, rendered the child as the figure with a priority of attachment, thereby decreasing the felt need for the husband. Besides, it appeared that having children provided the women with more space of agency and increased rights in the family, as they could decide on subjects regarding their children. Such increase in their right to choose brought with it enhanced feelings of independency and thus power. Additionally, it seemed that their relationship with the children opened up a space for them that was not penetrated by the husband, a relational space apart from the husband. This parallels Stark's (2007) notion of safety zones which are psychic areas that are not penetrated by the husband, and in which women can seek refuge away from the husband. The qualitative study by Shamai (2000) examining the role of therapy in the empowerment of women with histories of abuse suggest that being given the necessary space and time, along with the attentiveness and attunement of another that has the most profound impact on the empowerment of the women. It is possible that the relationship with one's child provided such attentiveness and attunement from a loving figure, in the context of such isolation, for the first time, thereby diminishing the impact of the sense of self as projected by the husband.

One last factor in empowerment that appeared valid for all three conditions - having children, starting to work, and getting engaged in spirituality- seemed to be the mirroring functions of these conditions. It has been described how a coherent sense

of self necessitates the recognition by another subject, the subjectivity of another (Boulanger, 2002). It seems that be it God, children, or coworkers, recognition by another -a not humiliating other- became of central importance in women's regaining of a sense of coherent, valuable self. Especially in the case of children, who showed signs of love for the women, the attunement of the other becomes central. Laub & Auerhahn (1989) describe how, in conditions of isolation, one becomes completely dependent on the mirroring of the whatever available figure, whose mirrorings may be internalized despite all malignancy, in order to avoid a complete loss of self. Under conditions of total isolation, women who had come to utilize only the mirroring of a malignant figure, appeared to start to utilize the mirroring function of their own children, which provided a more emphatic attunement and benevolent mirroring. Besides a change in figure of attachment, a change in figure of mirroring therefore seemed important.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (TURKISH)

- Kendinizden biraz bahseder misiniz?
- Beraberliğinizden biraz bahseder misiniz? Nasıl başlamıştı, sizin için nasıldı bu ilişki? Nasıl hisleriniz vardı ona dair?
- O dönemde hayatınızda başka kimler vardı? Aile, arkadaşlar, iş, okul...
- Eşiniz dışında kimlerle yaşıyorsunuz? Çocuklar, akrabalar...
- Eşinizin size karşı tavrı nasıldı? Ailenizle görüşmeniz, arkadaşlarınızla görüşmeniz, dışarı çıkmanız, çalışmanız sorun olur muydu? Başka neler sorun olurdu? Onun söylediklerini yapmadığınız zaman ne olurdu?
- Uyguladığı şiddet ile ilgili açıklama yapar mıydı?
- (Şiddet anlatıldığında) Peki bütün bunlar olurken siz ne yaşadınız, içinizden neler geçirdi? Nasıl hissettiniz, ne düşündünüz...
- Sorun yarattığı konular zaman içinde değişti mi? Karıştığı konular değişti mi, nasıl değişti?
- Peki eşinizin size sevgi, ilgi gösterdiği olur muydu? Nasıldı? Nasıl hissettirirdi bu size?
- Eşiniz sizinle ilgili yorumlarda bulunur muydu? Size isim takar mıydı? Sizinle dalga geçer miydi? Kendinizi kötü hissettirecek neler söylerdi?
- Ne istediğinize, nasıl hissettiğinize dair bir şeyler söyler miydi? Şiddetle ilgili, ilişkinizle ilgili ne söylerdi?
- Nasıl hissederdiniz bunları duyarken? Neler yapmak isterdiniz, ne tepki verirdiniz? Aklınız karışır mıydı? Siz ne istediğinizi düşünürdünüz, nasıl biri

olduğunuzu düşünürdünüz, ne hissettiğinizi düşünürdünüz?

- (Şiddetin ardından) rahatlamak için ne yaptınız? Ne iyi gelirdi?
- Kendinizi nasıl biri gibi görüyordunuz? Bu ilişkiniz süresince (öncesinde ve sırasında) değişti mi?
- Ayrılık nasıl oldu? Sizin için ne ifade ediyordu?
- (kendi ayrılmadıysa) Ayrılmayı düşündüğünüz olur muydu? Ne düşünürdünüz ayrılmakla ilgili, ne hissederdiniz? İlişkiye devam etmekle ilgili ne hissederdiniz, ne düşünürdünüz?
- Şimdi biraz duralım, genç kızlığınıza gönelim. Nasıl biriydiniz, o zamanki X. nasıldı? Zaman içinde ne oldu X.'e, neler değişti içinde?
- Son olarak, ne zamandır terapiye gidiyorsunuz? Tüm bu olanlar arasında terapinin sizin için nasıl bir yeri oldu? Olanları anlamlandırmanızda nasıl bir etkisi oldu? İlaç kullandığınız oldu mu?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ENGLISH)

- What would you like to tell me about yourself?
- How did your relationship begin? How did you feel about him?
- Who else was in your life during that period of your life? With whom did you live with, besides your husband? Children, relatives...?
- How would your husband treat you? Would he interfere when you wanted to see your family, your friends? Would it be a problem when you went out, if you wanted to work? What would happen when you would not do as he asked you to?
- Would he put forth excuses as to why he was using violence?
- (When talking about violence) And how would you feel while all this was happening?
- In time, was there a change in what would make him angry? How?
- Would there be times when he would treat you well, show care and affection? How did that make you feel?
- What would he say about you? Did you call you names, or humiliate you? Tell you things that would make you feel bad about yourself? Did he tell you what you actually wanted or how you felt? What did he tell you about the violence, about your relationship?
- How did you feel while listening to this? What would you want to do, how would you like to react? Did it ever make you feel confused? What did you think you wanted, or what did you think about yourself? (Following the

violence) What did you do to feel better? What could make you feel better?

What did you think about yourself? Did it change during the relationship?

- Can you tell me a bit about the process of leaving? What did it mean to you?

Did you ever consider leaving? What did you think or feel about leaving?

What did you think or feel about staying in the relationship?

- Lets go back for a moment to when you were a young women. How would

you describe yourself back then, how was the X. back then? And what

happened to her in time, what changed in her?

- Since when have you been to therapy? What role do you think it has in your

life? Did it have an effect on how you thought of all this? Did you ever use

medication?

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