*Research Article*

# The Meaning of Marriage According to University Students: A Phenomenological Study

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal the meanings university students attribute to marriage. The sample of the study consists of 14 final year students (7 males and 7 females), whose ages range between 22 and 32, studying in the Education Faculty at Ege University. The study is of *phenomenological research* design. *Semi-structured interview forms* were used as the data collection tool of the study. The data was analyzed with content analysis based on the inductive analysis method. Themes were constituted out of the codes. The analysis results suggest that marriage mostly evokes positive emotions among the participants; the premarital phase consists of *self-knowledge, choosing the right life partner and deciding to marry* stages, and students emphasized social relations, financial issues, relationship with family of origin, communication and roles in the marriage in association with the marriage process. According to the final year students, the unchanged but definitive constructs of marriage are *deciding on marriage, key elements of marriage* and *marriage dynamics.* The study results were also discussed in relation to the literature and some implications were suggested.

## Keywords

Marriage • Romantic relationships • Premarital counseling • The meaning of marriage

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Marriage, which includes the coupling of two people possessing different interests, desires and needs, is a special association given shape by social rules and laws and significantly affects individuals' development and self-realizations (Ersanlı & Kalkan, 2008). Functions such as meeting the need for love and being loved, meeting both individuals' biological, social, psychological and motivational needs, bringing new generations to world, gaining a place in society, the feelings of being safe and protected, the sense of cooperation, being confident about the future, feeling proud of each other and healthy functioning of sexual life (Canel, 2012) make marriage universal and significant for societies. Although its dimensions and contents have changed during human history, the institutions of family and marriage have maintained their universality and are still the core unit of societies (Özgüven, 2001). In many societies, marriage is acknowledged as the institution in which intimacy and fellowship exists and also children are raised in safety and that allows individuals to have sexual intercourse and provides an emotional development opportunity (Yavuzer, 2012). Although the institution of marriage has started to transform into a structure in which equality dominates, today when the number of divorces has risen, the understanding towards the structure of marriage and the relationships between spouses have gained greater importance (Çelik, 2006). Because considerable efforts have been made to determine the differences between happy and consistent marriages and those that are not (Hall, 2006). Thus, many studies conducted in Turkey and abroad have focused on effective factors in mate selection (Bozgeyikli & Toprak, 2013; Bugay & Tezer, 2008; Efe, 2013; Kılıç, Kaygusuz, Bağ, & Tortumluoğlu, 2007; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005; Yıldırım, 2007; Zhang & Kline, 2009); marital adjustment (Gaur & Bhardwaj, 2015; Khalili, 2013; Mir, Wani, & Sankar, 2016; Sabre, 2016; Tutarel-Kışlak & Çabukça, 2002), the variables predicting marital satisfaction (Carandang & Guda, 2015; Çağ & Yıldırım, 2013; Gadassi et al., 2016; Lavner, Karney, & Bradbury, 2016; Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004), the relationship between financial satisfaction and decision to pursue marriage (Archuleta, Britt, Tonn, & Grable, 2011); the secrets of a long term, happy relationships (Bachand & Caron, 2001), happy and permanent marriages (Marks et al., 2008), the role expectations of spouses from each other (Botkin, Weeks, & Morris, 2000; Kaufman & Goldscheider, 2007; Sterrett & Bollman, 1970), and marriage expectations (Crissey, 2005; Gibson-Davis, Edin, & Mclanahan, 2005). These studies conducted with married couples and university students. The researches which studied married couples aimed to provide support to the effort to decrease marital problems and to increase satisfaction in current relationships, while the findings of those conducted with university students were thought to contribute to psychological counselors and mental health workers delivering family and marriage counseling services to university students. University students are accepted as an important group in that they experience romantic relations intensely which is thought to provide them with opinions about issues like partners'

adjustment to each other and relationship satisfaction. In related literature, this period is defined as the *emergent adulthood* stage and it is of critical importance to establish and maintain romantic relationships during this transition period (Arnett, 2000). It is known that this stage covers the ages between 19 and 26 in Turkey (Atak, 2005). Typically, during this period, adolescents tend to postpone developmental tasks such as marrying, having children, completing education and living in their own house, to the end of twenties (Casper & Bianchi, 2002, as cited in Eryılmaz & Atak, 2011). In fact together with the emergent adulthood stage, youth are reported to accept marriage as an important indicator of how and when to be an adult (Carroll et al., 2009). This age range includes people studying at university and postgraduates in Turkey. Thus, this premarriage stage which includes post-adolescence plays an important role in mate selection and maintenance of romantic relationships. It also includes marriage plans during and after university life. Hence, the studies conducted with university students are thought to contribute to the researchers and service providers in that they can structure the services for the youth before marriage. It is seen that the research in Turkey generally aims to determine mate selection preferences of university students (Bozgeyikli & Toprak, 2013; Bugay & Tezer, 2008; Efe, 2013; Kılıç et al., 2007; Yıldırım, 2007). However, there have also been researches studying university students' thoughts and opinions towards marriage (Pınar, 2008; Türkaslan & Süleymanov, 2010). Other studies have investigated university students' attitudes towards marriage and its meaning, who are commonly accepted to be in the emergent adulthood stage. A related study revealed that university students choose to marry because it provides a more organized life, a more relaxed sexual life and ensures the continuation of their family (Ondaş, 2007). Another study mentions that for students, marriage means taking responsibility, and sharing organized and happy lives (Pınar, 2008). Pınar (2008) highlights that young people's perception of marriage is positive but at the same time they approach it with caution. In an international study, it was concluded that marriage primarily signifies commitment, love, fellowship, trust, giving promise and family (Curran, Utley, & Muraco, 2010). To examine the meanings attributed to marriage is thought to reveal the social changes undergone in individuals and family institutions, and to help explain the changes in marriage and divorce rates (Curran et al., 2010). It is claimed that in Turkey there have been a number of changes in various aspects of marriage, from age of marriage to roles in marriage. For example, between 2006 and 2015, the first marriage age of both females and males increased 1%, becoming 27 for males, and 23.9 for females (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [Turkish Statistical Institute-TSI], 2015a). Although the age rate of females is still low, an increase throughout the years reflects a change. Similarly, the divorce rates have risen from 120,117 to 131,830 in these five years (TSI, 2015b). Other crucial issues surround the fast changes in social roles of both females and males which stem from the effects of powers such as globalization and urbanization. It

means that there have been changes in both males' and females' attitudes towards their roles in marriage, namely, in traditional role distribution (cited in Bener & Günay, 2012). Thus, it is thought that this situation would also be observed in the changes in the meanings attributed to marriage. These attributions are believed to influence how individuals behave before and after marriage, and the total marriage success (Hall, 2006). For instance, an individual who accepts marriage as a life-long notion is thought to considerably solve his problems and increase his individual happiness in marriage, because divorce is not an option for that individual (Amato & Booth, 1997, as cited in Hall, 2006). Considering the fact that the meanings spouses attribute to marriage affect their expectations, it is believed that determination of these meanings are of vital significance. Thus, there is a need to investigate deeply what marriage means for university students.

In other respects, university students are thought to be one of the most important target groups of marriage relationship enrichment programs. Among premarital relationship enrichment programs which can be classified based on their *problem solving* and *preventive* features, marriage relationship enrichment programs are labeled preventive because they strive to improve relationships before marriage (Yalçın, 2012). On the contrary, problem solving marriage programs target spouses with problems (Yalçın, 2012), these programs include providing the couples with basic information and skills trainings before marriage to maintain and improve their relationships (Senediak, 1990, as cited in Carroll & Doherty, 2003). The improvements in these programs such as teaching couples how to cope with conflicts and problems in marriage, taking precautions before problems increase, preparing couples for possible problems in the future, teaching them skills to solve them before they become serious, and maintaining the relationship without experiencing negative outcomes, have increased the significance of these programs, (Ersanlı & Kalkan, 2008). Marriage programs which are designed with different approaches, cover goals such as facilitating the transition process from single to married, increasing consistency and satisfaction in the short and long term among couples, improving couples' communication abilities, increasing fellowship and commitment in relationship, increasing spouses' intimacy to each other, and improving problem solving and decision making skills in issues surrounding marital roles and finance, (Stahmann & Salts, 1993 as cited in Stahmann, 2000). Marriage preparation programs are accepted as the biggest helper of couples as they provide them with time to spend together and learn more about each other (Williams, Riley, & Van Dyke, 1999), and as they help couples raise awareness about their attitudes towards marriage and how these attitudes influence their marriage and families on both sides (Martin, Specter, Martin, & Martin, 2003). Thus, the knowledge about the meanings and attitudes of couples towards marriage is thought to possess a critical role for these programs.

In Turkey, premarital relationship enrichment programs are broadcasted in quite limited terms; thus, it is thought that there is still a need for programs which prepare young people for marriage (Ersanlı & Kalkan, 2008; Pınar, 2008). Additionally, due to the fact that one of the primary reasons for university students to apply to psychological counseling and guidance centers within universities is generally related to problems with the opposite sex (Doğan, 2007, as cited in Doğan, 2012; Erkan, Cihangir Çankaya, Terzi, & Özbay, 2012) it is thought that there is the need for psychological counseling services concerning romantic relationships which are accepted as the premarital stage. Carroll et al. (2009) emphasizes that premarital trainings would help both males and females who are in the emergent adolescent stage, get ready for marriage. Also, there is a need for marriage programs which are based on the preventive approach and which aim to increase the quality and happiness in marital relations (Yılmaz & Kalkan, 2010) and which are designed and broadcasted in accordance with Turkish culture and which deal with important issues for university students preparing to marry. Hence, this qualitative study aims to explain the dimensions constituting the meanings of marriage for university students in detail. In fact, in an overview of the studies related to marriage and university students, the majority are of quantitative research designs (Bugay & Tezer, 2008; Çağ & Yıldırım, 2013; Duran & Hamamcı, 2010; Durmazkul, 1991; Efe, 2013; Hamamcı, Buğa & Duran, 2011; Kılıç et al., 2007; Pınar, 2008; Tutarel-Kışlak & Çabukça, 2002; Türkaslan & Süleymanov, 2010; Yılmaz & Kalkan, 2010). So, from the point of view that there is a need to deeply examine what marriage means for university students, the current study aims to reveal the meaning of marriage for university students. The study results are thought to contribute to the marriage preparation programs and psychological counseling programs for both couples considering marriage and for university students. They will also contribute to the preparation of the contents of these programs, and also give an opportunity to service providers to revise the contents of these programs. In this sense, the problem statement of this study is: "What does marriage mean to university students?" and the sub-problems are "What are the themes revealing the meaning of marriage for university students?" and "What are the permanent constructs which define marriage for university students?"

## Method

### The Research Design

This research, which aims to reveal the meaning of marriage for university students, is a "phenomenological study." Phenomenological study refers to how individuals perceive, describe, remember and evaluate a topic, and what kind of discourse they use to transfer this topic to other individuals (Patton, 2001, as cited in Bayar & Bayar, 2004). The focus of the current study is how university students give meaning to marriage, thus the given research design is utilized.

## Participants

The study preferred the use of convenience sampling method considering the access opportunities to the participants. With this aim, the final year students at Education Faculty in Ege University were determined as the sample of the study. The maximum variation sampling method was also used, which facilitates the determination of similarities among various cases in order to increase the reliability of the results (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013), thus the researchers strived to ensure variety both in terms of gender and relationship status. In this context, keeping in mind the hypothesis that individuals would be disposed to marry if the necessary conditions were met after graduating from university, 14 volunteer female and male final year students, some of whom were in a relationship and some of whom were not, were interviewed. Hence, through working with individuals not currently in a relationship a multi-dimensional perspective was assured. The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 32, and seven of them were female while the remaining seven were male. Besides this, seven of the participants were currently in a romantic relationship and seven were not. Six of the participants were not in a romantic relationship stated that they had had a romantic relationship before.

## Data Collection Tools

A semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool in this research. For this purpose, with the support from the literature, a question matrix was designed by the researcher concerning the use of possible interview questions in relation to each sub-question. Through that matrix, the relations between interview questions and sub-questions were established, which in turn facilitates determining which interview questions corresponded with which sub-questions. A draft interview form was prepared based on the draft interview questions in the matrix. The draft interview form was evaluated based on the feedback given by an expert lecturer in the Program Development Department in the Education Faculty who also teaches a Qualitative Research Methods Course for master and doctorate students, and by three doctorate students currently enrolled in this course. Following checking the draft for language and expressions, an expert conducting studies on marriage and romantic relationships was asked for her opinions about the questions. Then, a pilot scheme was conducted with a university student so that the functionality and efficacy of the questions were ensured, and the average interview time was determined. Upon completion of the pilot scheme, a vague question was excluded from the interview form and the finalized form was constituted with a total of 17 questions including personal information questions such as age, romantic relationship status etc. Following the editing phase, the finalized interview form included questions aiming to obtain data related to personal information of the participants and the responses which would contribute to the research questions. A sample question in the interview form is: "What are the first five words that come to mind when you think about marriage?"

The interviews took place in the Individual Psychological Counseling rooms residing in Ege University Education Faculty, the Department of Educational Sciences, since the acoustic insulation ensured privacy. These rooms also had sound and video recording systems and the study aimed to establish a standard setting at every meeting. The participants were selected though the announcements given to the students at the department by the department research assistants and those who volunteered were informed about the interview day and time. The interviews, which lasted 22-45 minutes each, were completed in May of the spring term of the 2013-2014 academic year. During the interviews, the aim and content of the study were explained to every participant, they were also informed about privacy and the interview process, and they were asked to fill a consent form which acknowledged that they participated in the study voluntarily. The participants were coded as P1, P2… P14 to ensure the privacy of their identities. The findings also included information about the participants' romantic relationship status.

## Data Analysis and Interpretations

The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews was analyzed via the content analysis method which is the most commonly applied method in phenomenological studies (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The basic steps in analyzing the data are presented below.

- *Preparation to Analysis*: In this process, the interviews totally lasting 411 minutes and 41 seconds were converted into 84 page transcriptions. Then these texts were read by the researcher twice without interruption, and once with interruptions.

- *Draft Coding:* In the first part of this phase, the researcher prepared a code list based on the literature (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). This code list was used to provide external validity evidence. In the second part, the raw data set was coded as drafts considering the meaningful data units. Following the draft coding phase determining which codes could create themes through combinations, the marriage concept was revealed to be examined under three main categories: "premarital phase, during marital phase and post-marital phase".

- *Coding:* The draft code list prepared based on literature and the obtained codes and main categories were compared and through match-ups the final theme-code relations were determined to use in the actual coding processes.

- *Organization of the Data:* Meaningful data units in relation to each code were organized on an excel spreadsheet. Thus, it becomes possible to see which participants make which kinds of explanations in relation with each code. This organization also facilitated the selection of citations in the reporting phase.

- *Reporting:* The themes which would be used to explain the research questions were determined at this phase; codes related to each theme were clarified with the selected citations of the participants. To ensure the variance in citations, contradictory statements were also included as well as those covering the most data sources and explaining the themes and codes best. The findings were presented under these titles: a) The Meaning of Marriage Concept, and b) The Permanent Constructs in The Meaning of Marriage, both of which cover the sub questions as well.

**Validity and Reliability**

Certain precautions were taken by the researcher to ensure validity and reliability in the study. Purposive sampling methods were used with the aim to increase the transmissibility and determine both the typical events and notions and the different features among them. The "maximum variation sampling method" was also used through gathering data from both genders who are and are not in a relationship to reveal different meanings and opinions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The audio of interviews were recorded so that there would not be missing data. The approval of the participants was also sought to reveal "how adequate the results are to reflect the reality," (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). With this aim, the transcripts of the interviews were e-mailed to the participants and they were asked about whether they wanted to add or change anything. When the participants approved the interview data, they also stated that there was nothing they wanted to change or add. Additionally, through receiving expert opinions during the data collection and analysis processes the quality of the research rose. A pilot interview was done to check the functionality of the questions in the interview form. Various citations were included in the presentation of the findings and a sufficient number of citations from different participants and cases were used to increase the credibility. Also, the study sample, setting and process were defined in detail to make comparisons with different samples. Besides, the researcher clearly explained her role and status in the study process in her research report to guide other researchers. Lastly, the gathered data was reported in detail and the process by which the researcher reached the results was also explained.

**The Researcher's Role**

The researcher is a psychological counselor and research assistant in the process of completing her doctorate. She has taken two courses during her undergraduate education and one course during her graduate education addressing the concept of marriage. She participated in a research concerning the social interest levels and future tendencies of university students who had romantic relationships. However, this is the researcher's first qualitative research experience. The researcher had just

begun her employment in the institutions when she was conducting her study. Thus, the participants were not familiar with the researcher or her research. There was not a lecturer-student relationship between the students and the researcher. Also, the researcher explicitly explained the reason for the study as well as how and where she would use the study results to the participants during the interviews. This ensured that the participants would be totally candid in their answers. The researcher took necessary precautions to raise the transmissibility and credibility of the study.

## Findings

Following the data analysis process, three categories were revealed in relation to the first sub question of the study - "What are the themes university students make use of while expressing the meaning of marriage?" These three categories are labeled "premarital," "marital," and "post marital" phases. The premarital phase refers to "self-knowledge, spouse selection, deciding to marry and ceremonies" themes; the marital phase includes "marital functions, marital principles and marital dynamics" themes; and lastly, the post marital phase includes "possible divorce/separation reasons and the emotions accompanying divorce/separation" themes.

### Themes Revealing the Meaning of Marriage

The marital themes obtained from the analysis, "Self-knowledge, spouse selection and ceremonies" in relation to the premarital phase, "marital functions" in relation to the marriage process, and "possible divorce/separation reasons and the emotions accompanying divorce/separation" in relation to the post marital phase, were assessed within the scope of marital meanings.

**Self-knowledge.** This premarital theme covers "being ready to marry, current relationship status and past experiences." The analysis showed that being ready to marry with its various dimensions is related to "self-knowledge." The participants especially emphasized the financial maturity under this theme (n = 9). A participant expressed that he did not develop a financial maturity by saying: *In financial terms, I don't have an economy to carry the cornerstone of family, to maintain family life, [because] I am a student. Maybe it's the same in social terms…* (P-2, Male, In a relationship). A female participant stated that *Well, I am not ready [to marry] in terms of financial issues… I want to earn my own salary first.* (P-5, Female, Not in a relationship). In the issues surrounding psychological and physical maturity, the participants referred to responsibilities (n = 3) and age (n = 2) with these words: *… I am just 22 and.. I don't feel myself ready to marry. I still see myself [like] a child… I am kind of escaping from responsibilities… the economic [responsibilities] are the biggest ones. Then comes the responsibilities of having a child…* (P-3, Female, In a relationship). The participants mentioned that current relationship status (n = 2) and

previous relationships affect the sense of readiness to marry. Referring to this issue, a participant said: *Right now I do not really feel ready to marry in any way…maybe it stems from that I'm not in a relationship now…also, my previous relationships were kind of unreliable. So, I do have some problems about this matter. I don't trust people that much. I mean, I can't make a decision to marry today (laughing).* (P-5, Female, Not in a relationship).

**Spouse selection.** In spouse selection theme in the premarital phase, the participants were observed to emphasize similarities and differences on specific issues like socio-economic status, educational background, characteristics, age, religious and political views and ethnic and cultural features. The participants expressed their ideas about spouse candidates' finances. They were expected to have similar economic income to their spouses and to be at adequate level to sustain family living, they said: *[my spouse] shouldn't be at a lower or higher financial level than me. I want his to be equivalent to my income.* (P-1, Female, Not in a relationship). / *…I think individuals who want to marry should have self-sufficiency in terms of socio-economic…for me, financial issues are the basic ones in marriage. The financial level should be sufficient…for both sides.* (P-2, Male, In a relationship). Three of the participants emphasized the equivalent educational and socio-cultural levels between the spouses, and one of them expressed as such: *For example, I am studying at his school. I want my spouse to be at my level.. or at least, he should be a foresighted person sharing common thoughts with me.* (P-3, Female, In a relationship). The participants accept that the person they would marry should be psychologically strong, independent, responsible, compassionate, humanistic, non-authoritative, respectful, loving, adaptive and respectful to differences, social and trustworthy persons. In this sense, some of the statements are: *I want somebody who can get out from under many things alone.* (P-1, Female, Not in a relationship)./ *I don't want an irresponsible person.* (P-3, Female, In a relationship). / *…I don't want to marry a person who always spends time at home… I want somebody to hang out together for social activities.* (P-4, Male, Not in a relationship). And a participant expressed her thoughts about her spouse's age with these words: *I wish him to meet my expectations, which is dependent upon his characteristics.. maturity, his age. I mean, I don't have an age preference but I want him to be older than me, because men get mature later.* (P-5, Female, Not in a relationship). Some of the participants mentioned their desire to share common opinions and interests with the person they would marry while a participant said she would prefer her spouse to be open to ethnic and cultural differences by saying: *There should be a balance in me and my spouse in terms of the interests, needs and the things we can gain from each other. I think that two people should not come from extreme cultures* (P-8, Female, In a relationship). / *… I am Turkish, how can I express.. I mean she can even be an Armenian.* (P-7, Male, In a relationship).

**Ceremonies.** The male participants were also mentioned their opinions and thoughts about the premarital ceremonies. Their statements related to ceremonies include: *That boring, intense processes comes to my mind… ceremonies.. for example, engagement, wedding.. Meeting many new people, introducing your spouse.. This can be somehow stressful. Although you are happy, that can be busy and tiring. People can feel anxiety owing to them.* (P-6, Male, Not in a relationship). / *I don't know how to find money for them. Will we have a wedding or not? Who will come to that wedding? For example, I don't want a wedding ceremony.. just 50-60 people are okay for me.. I would feel financially strained.. expenses.. that atmosphere.. weeding setting, families… acquaintances, friends, relatives.. you are dressed up, they are dressed up, I understand of course it's a happy day all in all. I would get excited.* (P-4, Male, Not in a relationship).

**The functions of marriage.** The analysis showed that marriage is of "psychological and social" functions for the participants. The participants specifically emphasized the psychological functions of marriage through the use of these statements "not being lonely" and "to be belong to (or belonging)" : *…there is somebody next to you who you can stand against life together.. you are not alone, it's a good thing…* (n = 6) (P-5, Female, Not in a relationship) / *I think it would make you feel better to know that there is always a supporter next to you. All in all, although nobody loves, likes or gives value to you, that there is somebody loving you, makes a man feel good.* (P-4, Male, Not in a relationship)/ *… to me, the idea of a person who would always be with you, close to you.. who you would share and make a connection through your heart.. it must be something very nice.* (P-2, Male, In a relationship). Two of the participants mentioned the "adaptation to society, gaining formality and raising children" social functions of marriage: *…you can be in the same setting with the person you love.. I mean you are free to live whatever you want… in fact as I told you, marriage facilitates establishing of family… I think it is mostly effective on children. I don't mean the child would have a family… it's about custody.* (P-3, Female, In a relationship)./ *… when I imagined that I was married, I used to think that I would do something expected from me by my family and other people, so I used to think that it would make them happy. Also, it would relieve me and the people around me in social terms… it's just like I completed a mission for me… namely, people go to university, and after some age, they marry… and when I marry, it means that I obey the social norms.* (P-1, Female, Not in a relationship).

**Divorce and separation process.** The participants also mentioned which characteristics they do not want in their marriages, the possible problems they think they could encounter and talked about whether these problems would result in separation or divorce. The possible problems that can be encountered in marriage are dealt with under these titles: "social, sexual, financial problems and other problems

between couples." The social problems are generally related to families of origin, and the inclusion of outer individuals to the family issues. Some statements from the participants are: *I do not want to be interfered with or have someone intervene in my marriage.* (P-7, Male, In a relationship) / *There shouldn't problems in our families of origin, because if there was a problem in my family of origin, it would also reflect to my spouse's family of origin…* (P-2, Male, In a relationship). The only participant talking about possible sexual problems stated that: *I do not want a relationship, in which we would have sex at night, and I wouldn't or she wouldn't want to look at each other's faces in the morning…* (P-4, Male, Not in a relationship). In relation to financial problems, some of the statements of the participants included: *I think both sides' socio-economic levels are to be self-sufficient. Otherwise, in the future it would also disturb social relations … it would affect emotions as well… because in my opinion, the financial problems may not affect people's tranquility but it would damage other kinds of relations.* (P-2, Male, In a relationship) / *"Finance is a must… as the marriage also requires responsibilities from individuals. When there are financial problems, a relationship wouldn't continue after some extent, also killing the respect between couples.* (P-3, Female, In a relationship). The mentioned possible problems that can be seen between spouses include "extreme jealousy, constant conflicts, mistrust, disrespect, cheating, violence, being compared with others, and difference of culture and opinion. The participant statements in this sense are: *I definitely do not want to live in a house with somebody I always fight with.. it's nonsense to expect that individuals who do not share the same thoughts live in the same house… for sure after some time, they would break up… I do not want a setting in which spouses act disrespectfully to each other, in which they do not care what another person thinks, or they do not even love each other…for instance, I do not want a problematic marriage in which spouses act irresponsibly, do not know what the other is doing, or where he is, or I do not want the complete opposite, either, like, spouses love each other but they create more problems owing to extreme jealousy.* (P-3, Female, In a relationship) / *… now, we are free…we have a law unto my own.. We go anywhere we want, let it all hang out… but when we marry… we can't go somewhere and relax for a couple of days.* (P-5, Female, Not in a relationship) / *…for example, I hate violence and cheating, which are unacceptable things for me. I can't continue to share my life with him any more…* (P-8, Female, In a relationship). In relation to the idea of divorcing owing to these problems, one of the participants said that *the society disapproves of divorce… of course, I do not want to divorce when I marry. But if it's not going well anyhow, I do not know what I can do at that point."* (P-4, Male, Not in a relationship).

With the aim to reveal the themes underlying marriage, the participants used certain metaphors in relation to marriage. The analysis of the responses given to the "What are the first five words when marriage comes to your mind?" question, suggests that for the participants, the most common associations related to marriage are "happiness

(f = 8), child (f = 5), family (f = 4), loyalty (f = 4), commitment (f = 3), and sharing (f = 3)." Although the participants' responses to the question "If you are asked to liken marriage to an object or a living thing, what would it be?" included various options, the biological function of marriage, *reproduction,* was observed to be distinguished (n = 4). One of the participants explained the reason for likening marriage to a flower with these words: *The plants that are separate before pollination come together and create a unity just like creating a new family. They reproduce new flowers. Through this way, the generations continue. [Just like] the unity and reproduction of two separate individuals.* (P-3, Female, In a relationship). A participant, who likened marriage to a *ticket*, expressed his thought related to insignificance of marriage for him through saying that *there should be a ticket to enter somewhere. However, it can be entered without that ticket, to me… I mean, it doesn't matter whether there is a ticket, or not.* (P-4, Male, Not in a relationship) One of the female participants who has a romantic relationship, likened marriage to a butterfly learning to fly, and expressed that marriage requires the processes of knowing each other and learning how to live together. Other participants likened marriage to a tree/plant in that it is long-lasting when cared for well (P-1,P-7, P-11); to a dove in that it gives tranquility (P-14); and to the ocean in that it is wavy and you cannot see its end (P-13). Except the statements of P-4, the metaphors of all participants were seen to put emphasis on "the marital functions, truthfulness in marriage, marital principals and marital process."

During the interviews, the participants were asked to complete the sentence "The meaning of marriage for me is…." In this context, the participants emphasized the marital principles in completing the sentences, such as "effort (P-5), sacrifice (P-8), sympathy (P-6), happiness (P-2, P-9, P-10), coupling (P-4, P-12, P-14)." In terms of the responses given to "The best part of marriage is…" and "The worst part of marriage is…" statements, the participants were observed to highlight the psychological functions of marriage like not being alone (P-1, P-4, P-12) and coupling, marital principals like commitment (P-2), unity (P-7), sharing (P-3, P-9, P-12) as the best parts of marriage. For the worst parts of marriage, they mentioned the possibility of divorce (P-1), being alone again one day (P-4) and the limitation of freedom (P-6, P-10, P-14).

When the participants were asked to explain marriage with a color, they selected purple, blue, white, red, green, orange, mottled, turquoise. The reasons for choosing such colors are expressed through that marriage recalls formality and seriousness; it gives the senses of tranquility and freshness; it reflects love; and it includes a lively experience and various emotions. For example, the participants who indicated white as the color of marriage, explained its reasons as such: *Wedding dress… it recalls white to my mind…[marriage is] a pure and neat relationship…* (P-5, Female, Not in a relationship). *… [Marriage] symbolizes white together with certain emotions. If*

*you are truly honest, open and transparent with your spouse, it means that you do not have any stain, I mean, white color gives a nice appearance. The sky is also white, sometimes. White symbolizes purity* (P-7, Male, In a relationship). P-13 (Female, Not in a relationship) referred to mottled color as the color of marriage with these words: *Every emotion exists in marriage. There is red, there is white, there is black…* There was no correlation found between color choice and gender or relationship status.

To the question of "Is marriage a happy end or a beginning?" 13 of the participants responded that it is a beginning while 3 of them stated that it is a happy end and a beginning. P-1 (Female, Not in a relationship) expressed that she considered marriage as a beginning *…because, with marriage, the couples begin a new life together. In terms of various sides, the individuals really experience changes. Individuals attend a new family. I mean, you do not marry just with one person. It's like beginning a new life. I think [marriage] it's like a new beginning also when children participate in the family.* One of the participants reflecting marriage like "a happy end" and "also a beginning," expressed her ideas as such: *…when you marry, you get out of your routine life. You start a new life. So, marriage is a beginning in individuals' lives. However, from a different perspective, individuals have the time of their lives…I mean they gallivant around… then comes a calming down phase. You get married and have children. There is a path in front of you, which, thus, reminds [me] of an end. Together with marriage, the phase of predictions starts. Until that moment, we are not able to predict something in our lives. Which school to go to, with whom will we marry? While we are not able to answer some questions, after marriage we know that there will be a child, we will raise the child, the things we all do is obvious, I mean predictable. In this term, marriage is an end.* (P-3, Female, In a relationship).

During the interviews, the participants were asked to narrate marriage through a movie. In this sense, the participants mentioned movies such as *More Than Blue, Love Demands Effort, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Lonely Man, Only You, Lean, Escape Plan, Water and Fire, Lorenzo's Oil, Walk of Shame*. One of the statements given as the reason for mentioning these movies is *…in Leon, a very young girl falls in love with an older man. The basic feelings are love and trust…to me, there should be romance in marriage, but since love and trust are more dominant in that movie, we can liken marriage to that movie…* (P-6, Male, Not in a relationship). It is seen that the key components of marriage are emphasized in the given movies such as effort, sacrifice, love and trust. It is understood that these components are common for every participant no matter the gender or relationship status.

## The Permanent Constructs in Meanings of Marriage

Regarding the secondary sub question of the study: "What are the permanent constructs defining marriage according to university students?" among the themes obtained in relation

to the first sub question, permanent constructs for all participants were determined. These include: *Decision to Marry*, *Principals of Marriage*, *Marital Dynamics*.

**Decision to marry.** Regarding this phase, the participants were seen to emphasize "who decided to marry (n = 5), the facilitative factors in this decision (n = 4) and the feelings accompanying the marriage decision (n = 7)." Some of the participants who indicated their desires to determine the person they would marry also expressed that it would make them happy when others respect their decision. Also, the participants were found to prefer to make a "marriage for love." Some of the participant statements are: *What others think does not concern me… I make my own decisions. I want my spouse to be so. I do not care what other people think.* (P-7, Male, In a relationship) / *I can make my own decision and I would be happy if everybody respects it, I mean I'd feel better…* (P-8, Female, In a relationship). / *I do not approve of an arranged marriage without love. Couples should love each other… I want to have a marriage for love* (P-3, Female, In a relationship). The participants also implied that family approval is of importance for them. This approval was reported to have a facilitative effect on the participants' decision making process. For example, the statements of P-8 (Female, In a relationship) are: *He must be somebody whom my family approves of firstly. I mean, it would really relieve me.* The participants stated that they felt "anxiety, happiness, panic, excitement and sorrow" when they decided to marry. *For example, anxiety… I wonder how the following phases would be. During the phase of marriage… meeting the families of origin, meeting families from both sides… I wonder if there would be a problem. I might feel anxiety owing to it* (P-6, Male, Not in a relationship). / *In one sense, I might feel sorrow. There is a setting of my own family in which I have grown up, spent years. It might upset me to leave them… and there might be excitement for a brand new life…I would be happy on one hand, but on the other hand, I would question that happiness… yes, one part of me would be happy since I would live with the person I love… but my other side always would be in a query of whether he is the right person, or not.* (P-3, Female, In a relationship).

**The Principals of Marriage**

**Values.** The participants underlined certain values in responding to the question "How should a marriage be?" such as "commitment (n = 2), love (n = 5), respect (n = 5), indulgence (n = 3), trust (n = 7), solidarity (n = 1), sharing (n = 4), harmony (n = 2)." Some of the statements from the participants are *most importantly, there should be respect* (P-5, Female, Not in a relationship) /*There must stable love, trust and romanticism between spouses* (P-1, Female, Not in a relationship). It is striking that the components which the participants accept as *sine qua non* in a marriage are similar. Thus, it can be accepted that these values are the key for both male and female participants who have and do not have a relationship.

**Emotions.** The feelings of romance (n = 7), excitement (n = 4), happiness (n = 5), anxiety (n = 5) and responsibility (n = 2) that marriage evokes among the participants are also seen to be permanent components of marriage. Whether it is for a partner or marriage, the feelings are common: *Thinking about marriage kind of evokes the senses of warm-heart, interest, romance, happiness, joy… I feel anxiety in thinking how it would be. Although it's less, I also worry about what if that happens.. what if this happens.. or what if it doesn't work…* (P-7, Male, In a relationship). / *When I think about how my husband should be, I become happy. It gives a kind of tranquility… a kind of excitement.* (P-11, Female, Not in a relationship). The participants were observed to emphasize positive feelings more such as romance, happiness and excitement. These sensations obtained through analysis can be thought to be common and prominent among final year students.

## Dynamics

The marital dynamics obtained through analysis include the titles of "social relations, communication, finance-budget, relations with families of origin and martial roles." Regarding social relations in marriage, one of the participants stated that: *…after marriage, individuals should not leave their social lives. I mean, they should have both a personal social life and another social life established through marriage. I think the social life before marriage shouldn't be limited after marriage… with marriage, to me, the social life of individuals is affected in a negative way. Namely, I think marrying and starting a family makes individuals anti-social a little.* (P-1, Female, Not in a relationship). As seen in the explanations of P-1, without differing in terms of gender or the presence of a relationship, the final year students do not want big changes in their social lives after marriage, and they prefer to maintain their social relationships with others even after they get married.

With regard to communication between spouses in marriage, the participants emphasized some titles such as "listening, manner of talking, nonverbal behaviors and conflict solving." *Although there can be minor problems, the attitudes of my partner is more important for me. He should approach it analytically. The problem shouldn't produce extra problems because it would create a negative atmosphere… he should sit and talk to me calmly… he shouldn't try to impose his thoughts on me by behaving harshly, instead he should make me understand him by baring his heart to me warmly, explaining what disturbs him… he should talk in a manner of finding a compromise together.* (P-3, Female, In a relationship). The participants indicated the importance of listening between couples and the adoption of an understanding and solution-oriented manner in solving questions.

In terms of financial issues in marriage, the participants emphasized "incomes, expenses and money management." The participants' various thoughts about this

issue are: *…if money comes to house, it means it's coming from two sources. I think they should put all of their money in one place, and they should take it from there… there shouldn't be talks of 'your money… my money' etc.* (P-5, Female, Not in a relationship). / *If both of us work, I need to manage the money. Of course, I will save money for her private expenses, or she can spare herself, too.* (P-4, Male, Not in a relationship) / *One side shouldn't rely on another's financial situation… also I think; both sides should maintain their individualism in finance as long as the expenses wouldn't be spent on absurd things.* (P-1, Female, Not in a relationship).

In terms of relationships with the families of origin in marriages, the participants highlighted these points: *the interference of family, their influence on the decision making process and the frequency of family visits.* One of the participants stated, concerning the relations with families of origin: *I do not want a marriage in which families interfere a lot. I want a marriage in which the decisions will be made by the couple, not by the families.* (P-9, Female, Not in a relationship). As understood from the statement of P-9, the final year students do not want families of origin to interfere with marriage issues and they prefer to make family visits at a sufficient frequency.

Regarding marital roles, the participants dealt with gender roles, responsibilities and decision making processes through such statements: *There are female and male points of view…women work at home, and the things men needs to do are generally out of the house. I am totally against this approach. If both of us work, I want to share the duties at home equally.* (P-1, Female, Not in a relationship) / *For example, lets imagine that both of us work, I want the meal ready when I come home. I also want her to meet me with a smiling face.* (P-4, Male, Not in a relationship) /*…I want to make common decisions… I do not want him to make a decision without asking me.* (P-5, Female, Not in a relationship).

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study strived to reveal the meaning of marriage according to university students. The results suggest that marriage generally evokes positive feelings among final year students. Similarly, Bener and Günay (2012), and Pınar (2008) reached results suggesting that the young people studying at university possess positive attitudes towards marriage and family life. Love, romance, respect, trust, commitment, compassion, loyalty, indulgence, self-sacrifice, patience and sharing are among the qualities expected to exist between couples (Canel, 2012). In accordance with this expectation, the participants were observed to mention elements in their metaphors related to marriage, and they commonly accepted them as indispensible components of a marriage. In their studies, Curran et al. (2010) concluded that for their participants, marriage means basically commitment and love. Other themes in the study include

fellowship, trust, giving promise and family. As the findings suggest, these themes construct the basis of marriage for final year students in this study.

The study findings show that the premarital phase covers "self-knowledge, selecting the right spouse, deciding to marry and ceremonies" stages. As seen in the literature, the first step in the premarital stage is individuals knowing and being aware of his/her own characteristics, and the second step is to learn about other person's characteristics. It is of critical significance for both sides to know whether they match each other in every sense before making a marriage decision because social points of view, habits, values, life perspectives, political opinions and similarities between families contribute to couples' happiness in marriage (Canel, 2012; Kalkan, 2012b). With regard to the first step of this stage, namely self-knowledge, final year students were observed to think that they were not ready to take on the financial and social responsibilities of a marriage and they thought they would marry later in life. The sense of being-ready-to-marry did not show any difference in terms of gender or existence of a romantic relationship. Even the participants who had romantic relationships stated that they did not feel ready for marriage yet and were waiting for the right conditions. According to the study results conducted by Pınar (2008), the university students who had romantic relationships were considering marrying their partner but they were not hasty to marry, which supports the findings of the current study. Age and financial maturity play an important role in the sense of being ready to marry. In this context, two female participants underscored the role of age while both male and female participants emphasized financial maturity in the process. Based on the absence of an relationship currently, two female participants stated that they did not feel ready for marriage yet. That financial maturity is accepted as important by both male and female students suggests that both genders have expectations from each other about taking responsibilities in financial issues in marriage. Köroğlu (2013) also reached similar results in his study suggesting that the majority of young people think economic freedom is important in deciding to marry. The sense of being ready to marry requires a certain level of physical, mental, social and emotional maturity (Bowman, 1970; Ünlü, 2002).

The marriage age is acknowledged as one of the prominent factors for healthy families and societies, and that both males and females possess adequate levels of maturity is also important. The sufficient level of maturity refers to individuals' knowing themselves and to be able to select the person s/he would marry (Ekşi, 2005). In this sense, the responses of the participant final year students to the questions concerning the process of being ready to marry can be said to be statements of expectation in terms of a healthy marriage and family life. In Turkey, finding employment becomes harder day by day for young people, which in turn results in the possibility of a happy marriage fading. Additionally, the existence of romantic

relationships before marriage has become more culturally accepted in Turkey, which also plays a role in postponing marriage (Kılıç et al., 2007). In addition to TSI (2013) data, there have been other researches suggesting that university students indicate ages 25-30 as the ideal marriage age (Köroğlu, 2013; Mermer, 2011). This age ranges is seen to be in accordance with the fact that university students need some more time to feel ready to marry.

It is thought that the happiness and harmony in marriage largely depends on finding the right spouse (Bowman, 1970; Kalkan, 2012a; Özgüven, 2001). The factors taken into consideration while selecting a spouse includes socio-economic features, education status, personal characteristics, physical appearance, age, ideological and religious beliefs, and ethnic and cultural differences (Kalkan, 2012a; Şenel, 2012). The participant final year students predicate that they want spouses who are psychologically strong, independent, responsible, compassionate, humane, non-authoritative, respectful, loving, adaptive and respectful to differences, social and trustworthy. In their study with university students, Yıldırım (2007) and Efe (2013) reached similar outcomes in relation to the elements of a favorable spouse. In determining spouse type, these facts were especially emphasized that final year students desired to own similar characteristics with their spouses as well as some socio-cultural features (Yılmazçoban, 2010), and that they highlighted the mutual similarities in socio-economic and education status, and opinion and needs in life. In addition to investigations suggesting the similar qualifications in selecting a spouse (Ceylan, 1994; Kılıç et al., 2007), there are other studies indicating that similar political views, ages, and same religious or ethnic identities are relatively less emphasized features (Yıldırım, 2007). However, the characteristics of a spouse are thought to be an important factor for a happy marriage (Yılmazçoban, 2010). With the fact that there are a number of theories for selecting a spouse, the "common characteristics theory" implies that views that spouses possess common characteristics would increase the happiness and achievement in marriage (Kalkan, 2012a; Özgüven, 2001). In this sense, considering the spouse selection theories in the literature, the final year students can be said to act in accordance with the premises of the mentioned theories. It is recommended that psychological counseling services take into consideration spouse selection theories as this would help clients realize their own expectations towards an ideal spouse before marriage.

The findings suggest that male participants find premarital ceremonies intense, boring and tiring and that this stage creates excitement as well as an anxiety stemming from the expenses and ambiguities concerning how this stage would get along. Every culture has marriage and wedding concepts according to its own rules and patterns (Irmak & Taş, 2012). In Anatolia, a typical marriage ceremony covers the phases of *asking for the girl's hand, betroth-sherbet, engagement, wedding and*

*post-wedding acts* (Kaya, 1996 as cited in Irmak & Taş, 2012). In Turkey, although there are regional differences, a common tradition is the groom and his family pays for the ceremony in full. Thus, the given finding above about males can be explained with the traditional roles expected from males in ceremonies. It is thought that the determination and sharing of mutual expectations and responsibilities could decrease the possibility of problems between spouses and families.

Through marriages, spouses have the chance to meet their social and psychological needs such as being in safe, cooperation and companionship (Özgüven, 2000). In relation to these functions of marriage, the findings demonstrate that the participants emphasized "companionship, coupling, and biological functions of marriage" in their metaphors. Similarly in his study, Durmazkul (1991) found that the reason for university students to marry is "to share a life together." Mermer (2011) also revealed that 90% of females thought that marriage would meet the love, respect and reliance needs of individuals, so they wanted to marry. The study findings show that the psychological functions of marriage are underlined by both genders regardless of whether or not they are in a relationship. In this sense, the desire not to be alone and the sense of belonging can be thought to be an essential need for final year university students because the basic institution which naturally meets their need not to be alone and to belong to a group is family (Baymur, 1978, p. 67, as cited in Kır, 2011). Additionally, in Turkish culture, traditionally young married couples are more accepted in society. Hence, for a majority of young people, the institution of marriage is accepted as a substantial way to take part in society and make a life with an independent will (Kılıç et al., 2007). As a result, marriage is accepted as an important tool in gaining status in society (Benedict, 2000). The fact that only female participants mentioned the social functions of marriage can be explained by Turkey's traditional gender roles. Female participants are more disposed to adapt to society and gain a formality to their relationships to make an independent life and take part in society through marriage.

Among final year students in the "decision to marry" stage, the feeling of being sure about marriage which is accepted as an unchanged component was emphasized by both female and male participants regardless of whether or not they are currently in a relationship. Similarly, family approval and support of marriage decision were found to be important for the participants, and to affect the decision making process. The findings in the surveys of Durmazkul (1991), Köroğlu (2013) and Mermer (2011) support this finding. In other investigations conducted with university students, it was concluded that young people want to decide themselves whom to marry, but they would also apply for family approval as well (Köroğlu, 2013; Pınar, 2008; Özgüven, 1994 as cited in Özgüven, 2000; Türkaslan & Süleymanov, 2010). These findings suggest that family approval is quite significant in marriage (Yılmazçoban,

2010). On the other side, the study results of Xie, Dzindolet, and Meredith (1999) indicate that American students think that their families should not interfere in their marriage decisions and that they would marry the person they want to even though their families may not be content with their spouse. This difference can be explained with the fact that the effects of family values in Turkey still persist. In fact, owing to the traditional norms, families are thought to approve the selected spouse although they cannot select their child's spouse directly (Eshleman, 1978). In an intercultural survey, it was revealed that the spouse selection process differs in individualistic and collectivist cultures, for instance, families and friends play important roles in selecting a spouse in China (Zhang & Kline, 2009). In China, which is one of the collectivist cultures, families still possess influence on individuals' marriage decisions (Pimentel, 2000). In this sense, it is advised that this decision process should be dealt with during psychological counseling sessions delivered before marriage, and the couples' expectations should be determined beforehand. It is also thought to be critical to consider the cultural norms in the decision making process of couples about marriage.

The findings suggest that the participants prefer "love marriages." Here, they imply want to marry someone who they love and feel a sense of commitment with. The surveys of Kılıç et al. (2007) reached similar results. However, it is recommended to select spouses based both on emotion and intellectual judgment (Maslow, 1954, as cited by Özgüven, 2000). Striving to make a marriage of just love or just convenience is seen as a factor in the increasing rate of divorce (Canel, 2012). Premarital counseling services can underscore the balance among these components and help spousal candidates revise their marriage decisions from this point of view.

To the findings, the final year students emphasize social relations, financial status, the relationship with family of origin, communication and marriage roles as the dynamics of a marriage. These participant students want no big changes in their social relations after they marry, and they prefer to resume both individual and social relations. The literature stresses that the existence of a setting in which both spouses has their own time to spend with their friends and individually is of great importance. It is thought that establishing a relationship in which spouses not only indulge their own interests individually and but also share time together would strengthen the marriage bond between couples. It is known that the sufficient relationships established with spouses and friends, and the high levels of spouses' satisfaction obtained from these relations, would increase marital adjustment. In order for spouses to organize their friendships in a way that would satisfy both sides, to maintain and reinforce current friendship relations, and to make new friends, the spouses are to create opportunities (Canel, 2012; Kearns & Leonard, 2004; Özgüven, 2000; Şener & Terzioğlu, 2008). Therefore, it is of vital importance for spouses to arrange relationship boundaries with friends, and those with their spouse and to balance the two (Kearns & Leonard,

2004). In this sense, the final year students can be said to possess healthy expectations towards social relationships in marriage. The premarital psychological counseling services are expected to deal with the arrangement of social relations in marriage, and to highlight the importance of maintaining both common and individual social relationships, and the couples should be supported in this context.

The participants were observed to mention the importance of communication and listening between spouses, and the adoption of an understanding and solution-oriented attitudes in solving problems in marriage. Wright and Fichten (1983) indicated that problem solving behaviors of happy couples were better than unhappy ones; that unhappy couples had conflicts more often and made use of dysfunctional communication skills during these conflicts. The absence of conflict and problem solving skills, and the inadequate or wrong communication between spouses (Canel, 2012) are known to be among the essential reasons for conflicts between couples. The communication problems between spouses is known to decrease marriage satisfaction for both men and women (Eskin, 2012) and the reactions such as being offended or abstaining from communication can disturb the relationship between spouses and trigger conflicts, which in turn spoils the marital adjustment (Karahan, 2007). Here, the spouses are to talk plainly without ignoring the problems in marriage, and it is emphasized that the unsolved problems between couples would increase conflicts in marriages (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). That the participant final year students also emphasized the importance of communication, problem and conflict solving processes, suggest that premarital psychological counseling services are expected to tackle issues surrounding communication and conflict solving skills. Indeed, in the content of an extensive marriage program which was developed for various socio-economic and cultural groups considering all stages from adolescence to pre and post parenting stages, and the cases like divorce, living together and remarriage, Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, and Willoughby (2004) underscore the importance of communication patterns and problem solving behaviors as the strengthening or weakening factors in marriages. Thus, the reinforcement of conflict and problem solving skills, and communication abilities of couples are recommended to be one of the targets of premarital counseling services.

Most financial problems stem from the management and spending of money rather than the absence of money (Özgüven, 2000). The cooperation among family members in terms of financial goals, and the way they use the money are among the influential factors in the general strength of a family (Canel, 2012). The study findings revealed that the majority of the participants want a common economic budget in marriage but at the same time they desire to keep economic freedom to some extent. At this point, it is of vital significance for spouses to make an agreement concerning how much and what to spend, to make a decisions and implement them together. So, the

determination of spousal candidates' expectations about budget and management of financial matters in marriages is thought to be one of the important issues which should be dealt with during premarital psychological counseling process.

The study findings found out that the participant final year students did not want to be interfered with by members of family of origin, and they preferred to visit them at a sufficient frequency. Related literature mentions the problems which can arise from extreme or unreasonable commitment and connection to a spouse's family of origin. This, along with families' constant intervention in a couples' life brings about marital problems (Canel, 2012). Xie et al. (1999) revealed that American students did not want their families to interfere in their marriages, which also supports the current study's findings, and shows that the intervention of families into marriages is seen as a source of marital discord. In this context, it is advised that the premarital psychological counseling services to work with candidate spouses on arranging the relationships with their family of origin.

According to the study findings, the participant females were revealed to emphasize an equalitarian construct in marital roles, to mention responsibilities towards children and mutual decision making in marriage. Similarly, Flouri and Buchanan (2001) stated that females present a more equalitarian attitude towards marital roles than males. Considering the effects of social gender roles, that women emphasize an equalitarian attitude is an expected outcome. As a result of the urbanization stemming from various changes in production instruments, social change has affected the family structure in various ways, reorganized it, changed the roles, responsibilities and traditional gender roles of family members, and redefined them. The basic characteristics attributed to women in traditional gender roles include "mother" and "spouse." However, today the equalitarian discourses for women and men stand out (Akın & Aydemir, 2007; Aydın & Baran, 2010). In time, social changes have turned into individualization, freedom of women, and thus transformation of families into units in which love and respect are shown mutually, instead women passively residing in the background as in the past. Among such marriages established on the basis of this premise, the "dependency" of women to men has been replaced with "mutual commitment," the meanings attributed to marriages have undergone changes; and more cooperation, fellowship, sharing love and emotional intimacy have been expected from marriages (Aydın & Baran, 2010). Given this perspective, the findings are also thought to reflect these changes. However, that male participants did not mention these issues, and especially that only female participants talked about the responsibilities of children in marriage signal that the traditional structure still exists to some extent. However, the changes in social life indicate that fatherhood roles have changed as well. While the social and cultural expectations from fathers were limited to earning the family income in the past, fathers now are expected

to play an active role in their child's life (Kuzucu, 2011). However, only women participants mentioned this matter in the study. Additionally, these results concerning marital roles imply that role sharing in marriages is an influential component of marital happiness. Marital satisfaction is affected if one of the spouses is act against their role expectation (Keith & Schafer, 1986, as cited in Botkin et al., 2000). In this sense, it is commonly known that individuals are aware of their partners' roles and their role expectations. The key point here is the harmony between spouses about which constructs they would choose. Therefore, premarital psychological counseling services can be recommended to design studies to determine spouses' expectations about marital roles.

It's important to determines spouse candidates' expectations concerning social relations, finance, the relations with family of origins, communication and marital roles, which are all the accepted as the marital dynamics, and the conflicts and disagreements in these fields are among the reasons for divorce (Özgüven, 2000). The findings show that apart from the disagreements in the issues mentioned above, the possible problems that can be seen in marriages include "extreme jealousy, constant conflicts, mistrust, disrespect, cheating, violence, being compared with others, difference of culture and opinion, external interferences to marriage," which the results of Köroğlu (2013) are in accordance with. According to Miller, Nunes, Bean, and Day (2014), jealousy and financial problems are among the most common problems between couples. Similarly, Fincham (2003) stated that marital problems might stem from various reasons like verbal or physical abuse, perceived inequality and strength, marital infidelity and jealousy. Canel (2012) also mentioned jealousy, violent behavior, financial problems (how much money and on what to spend it, how much money to save etc.) problems related with relatives, differences in religious, ethnic, political opinions, beliefs and values as being the most common problems in marriage, which endangers the happiness of marriage. The study results of Haskan Avcı (2014) also claimed that the most common three problem areas which students have during their relationships and which they think they will have when they get married, are communication, conflict solving and acceptance of differences. Additionally, the problem areas students think they would have during marriage are generally similar with the causes of divorce which implies that the participants predicted some of the problems they would face after marrying. Thus, it can be thought that the participant final year students may highlight these problems through observing their parents' or others' relationships, or through experiencing them in their own romantic relationships. Considering the fact that the problems students mentioned are the same with the most common problems in marriage, the content of the premarital psychological counseling services would be more functional as long as they prevent these problems, or facilitate the problem solving process.

The participants mentioned certain negative aspects of marriage such as "the possibility of divorce, getting lonely one day, and the limitation of freedom." From this, these participants can be said to worry about divorce which closely affects preliminary spouses and children as well as the entire social structure (İlgar, 2012). Another source of anxiety and reason for divorce in marriages for the participant final year students is the limitation of freedom (Özgüven, 2000), which is parallel with the findings in the literature. Sürerbiçer (2008) also claimed similar reasons for divorce. That divorce is a source of anxiety for the final year students is an expected notion. That the participants from both genders expressed their feelings of unease due to social reactions shows that the students' negative perceptions related to divorce were influenced by social reactions. It is also thought that the emphasis on the rising numbers of divorces in late years is also influential in this situation. At this point, considering the fact that the participants mentioned the reactions of society towards divorced individuals, it can be thought that the social results of divorce cause more anxiety in final year students, and that society's negative attitudes towards these individuals still continue.
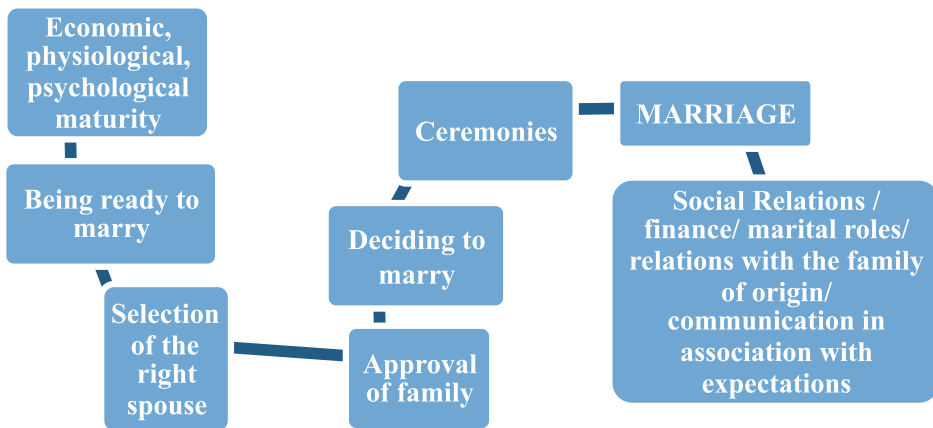


*Figure 1.* Pre and Post Marriage Processes on the basis of the Participants.

In light of the findings, pre and post marriage processes the final year students prefer to experience is presented in Figure 1. The figure demonstrates the common and prominent structure given in pre and post marriage processes based on the data obtained from the participants. This common structure refers to what marriage means to final year university students, so it is thought to give an important idea about the content of the program which can be developed to improve the quality of romantic relationships before marriage. As seen in the figure, that the importance given to ceremonies and the need for approval from families in marriages signals that the effects of cultural values still continue. On the basis of the study findings, during the premarital stage, the effects of especially cultural norms are thought to be quite critical. As Yılmazçoban (2010) indicated, receiving family approval and the harmony

between both sides of the families of origin concerning personal expectations and preferences in marriage are still important matters in Turkish culture. However, the instructive effects of families during the pre and post marriage stages are to decrease so that the young would gain freedom and would complete their self-development. In light of the findings, as a cultural norm, the effects of family on the marriage process are thought to be one of the components which should be taken into consideration when marriage preparing programs in Turkey.

Following the review of marriage programs which are prepared to broadcast based on various theories and approaches with the aim of improving relationships between couples before marriages, it was revealed that, for example, Relationship Enhancement (RE) and Couple Communication Programs (CCP) focus on communication and conflict solving skills while Premarital Relationship Enhancement and Prevention (PREP) program emphasize effective communication as well as expectations and beliefs. Premarital Preparation Course (PREPARE) is seen to work with issues surrounding free time activities, children and parenting, role relations etc. (cited in Kalkan, 2012c). It can be inferred that the content of the mentioned programs focus on fields in which couples can gain skills. In accordance with the study results, the participants were observed to want to possess common opinions with their spouses concerning social relations, financial issues, and the relations with the families of origin, especially during the marriage process. The concerns the participants emphasized are thought to be the issues which require couples to raise awareness about their expectations and require them to develop their skills. Thus, it can infer that tackling these issues before marriage is of critical importance.

According to other research results conducted in Turkey, university students want to receive trainings before marriage on issues such as communication skills, stress coping techniques, problem and conflict solving skills, acceptance of differences, financial management in marriage, spending time together, duties and responsibilities related to the home, the decision making process in marriage, relations with parents or close relatives, management of social relations, learning to parent, leisure time activities etc. (Hamamcı et al., 2011; Haskan Avcı, 2014). The study findings revealed what these given issues in marriages mean for university students. It is thought that the popularization of such training is of importance in Turkey, and that the study results would contribute to the content of educational programs directed towards this matter. Especially in determining the topics that would be dealt with and the structure of the services in this field, these findings are believed to bring light to the works of mental health careers and social workers working at universities and providing services concerned with marriage and romantic relationships.

The study findings could provide a conceptual framework to understand the meanings attributed to marriage by university students who possess common characteristics. In the study, it was found that although the participant university students had not experienced marriage yet, they emphasized common meanings and constructs, which are in accordance with the literature findings, through depending on their observations and their own romantic relationships. In this sense, while talking about the meanings of marriage, the students can be spoken about the ideal marriage and spouse they imagine for themselves in the future. At the same time, these participants have experienced the concept of marriage in their own family life during their childhood without making any effort (Hall, 2006). Thus, the participants might attribute meaning to marriage based on their parents' marriages. Future studies can learn about how participants derive meaning from their parents' marriages. Thus, it can reveal how much meaning attributed to marriage by young people is affected by their parents' marriages. Also, the findings demonstrate the meanings attributed to marriage by only the final year university students studying at the education faculty, which can be thought of as one of the limitations of the study. Although the findings show parallels with quantitative research findings conducted with university students, the meanings attributes to marriage might differ in terms of students studying at various faculties. For the students from different faculties, the effects of cultural norms or students' expectations of the premarital process and marriage constructs might be different. In the literature, no research was found comparing the opinions of students from different faculties. In light of these findings, it is recommended to conduct research with students from different faculties, to conduct interviews with partners in romantic relationships so as to increase the generalizability of the outcomes, and to make use of different data sources apart from interviews.

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