

**FORGIVENESS IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: LOVE,
SELF-MAKING AND JUSTICE**

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**FORGIVENESS IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: LOVE,
SELF-MAKING AND JUSTICE**

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ABSTRACT

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Cultural Studies, M.A. Thesis, July 2025

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Keywords: IPV, GBV, forgiveness, justice, subjectivity

This thesis examines the experiences of women and LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey who have faced intimate partner violence (IPV) in non-marital and financially independent relationships. In a context where IPV is widespread yet often studied within marriage, it highlights narratives that remain outside institutional recognition. Participants describe violence as deeply entangled with love and intimacy, where the boundaries between forgiveness and endurance are often blurred. Forgiveness appears less as a moral resolution than as an ambivalent practice shaped by cultural scripts and the pressures of staying. The analysis traces how survivors negotiate the emotional grammar of love: how pain is romanticized, how fantasies of “the one” persist, and how love becomes both labor and social investment. It further shows how survivors navigate stigma, shame, and contradictory expectations, reshaping their own subjectivities in the process. The role of community and institutional responsibility emerges as central to how violence is endured and how justice is imagined beyond formal institutions. By attending to the emotional, relational, and narrative dimensions of IPV, this study contributes to feminist debates on endurance, forgiveness, and justice. It shows how survivors live with harm, love despite it, and articulate selves that unsettle binary framings of weakness and empowerment.

ÖZET

YAKIN PARTNER ŞİDDETİNDE AFFETMEK: AŞK, KENDİLİK İNŞASI VE ADALET

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Kültürel Çalışmalar, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Temmuz 2025

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Anahtar Kelimeler: IPV, GBV, affetmek, adalet, öznellik

Bu tez, Türkiye’de evlilik dışı ve maddi olarak bağımsız ilişkiler yaşayan kadınların ve LGBTQ+ların maruz kaldıkları yakın partner şiddeti deneyimlerini incelemektedir. Şiddetin yaygın olmasına rağmen genellikle evlilik bağlamında ele alındığı bir bağlamda, bu çalışma kurumsal tanınmanın dışında kalan hikâyelere odaklanmaktadır. Katılımcılar, şiddeti çoğu zaman aşk ve mahremiyetle iç içe tariflemekte; affetme ile katlanma arasındaki sınırların bulanıklaştığını göstermektedir. Affetme, etik bir çözümden çok, kültürel söylemler ve ilişkide kalma baskılarıyla şekillenen ikircikli bir pratik olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Analiz, mağdurların aşkın duygusal grameriyle nasıl başa çıktıklarını izler: acının nasıl romantikleştirildiğini, “biricik” fantezisinin nasıl sürdüğünü ve aşkın nasıl bir emek ya da toplumsal yatırım haline geldiğini. Katılımcıların stigma, utanç ve çelişkili beklentilerle nasıl mücadele ettikleri ve bu süreçte öznelliklerini yeniden kurdukları da ortaya konmaktadır. Kurumsal ve toplumsal sorumluluğun şiddetin nasıl deneyimlendiğini ve adaletin kurumsal yapılar dışında nasıl tahayyül edildiğini belirlemede merkezi bir rol oynadığı görülmektedir. Tez, partner şiddetinin duygusal, ilişkisel ve anlatısal boyutlarına odaklanarak katlanma, affetme ve adalet üzerine feminist tartışmalara katkı sunmaktadır. Katılımcıların zararlı yaşamayı, tüm bunlara rağmen sevmeyi ve zayıflık ile güçlenme ikiliklerini aşan öznellikler kurmayı nasıl mümkün kıldıklarını gösterir.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Shaping the Research Context

Witnessing women and LGBTIA+ people who disclose the sexual harassment of people who attacked them, on social media, now more often than ever, with the movement of #MeToo, has led me to think more about the subject of apology and forgiveness. I noticed that I find the stories of women and LGBTIA+ people who have been victims of intimate partner violence and who managed to find the courage to disclose their assailant, who might be their former partner, more empowering and desirable as opposed to a story that involves forgiving. However, some survivors choose to forgive their former partners who assaulted them, whether in terms of an internal feeling of forgiving or forgiving that ends in reconciliation. They may also continue to have a relationship with the same person without forgiving them, sometimes a similar relationship with the same dynamics, sometimes with a different hierarchy of power relations, and sometimes a completely different relationship. However, I am more interested in how forgiveness functioned for survivors, what forgiveness does to the individuals and their relationships, and how survivors became subjects, rather than why survivors of intimate partner violence choose to forgive.

I was one of those friends, which is one of the utmost reasons I want to study this. During the first months of the COVID-19 quarantine, around March 2020, one of my closest friends opened to me and a friend of ours about the struggles she was going through with her romantic relationship. She was being subjected to psychological violence from her partner, manifesting itself in the forms of manipulation, gaslighting, humiliation/belittlement, swearing, and controlling behavior. As her friends, we tried to support and empower her, making her realize that she was experiencing violence. We suggested she leave the relationship, as she was in a place of questioning whether to do it. She took our advice; however, we quickly found ourselves in a cycle of break-ups and getting back together. I was worried about her mental as well as physical health due to the potential I saw in her partner to

hurt her. I remember thinking, “This is how women get murdered..” I could not make sense of her decision to maintain an abusive relationship that clearly harmed her. I began to question her mental stability and whether she was in the right place to make healthy decisions. Slowly, I began to retract from our relationship by not responding to her calls every now and then, texting late, and contributing just a little to the conversation. Our friend and I were also constantly discussing what we could do, and we were in a similar place about questioning, maintaining such a practice with her that affects our mental health negatively as well. In the end, we both ended our relationship with her, saying that we needed some space.

After almost 4 years, I still wonder whether I did the right thing. Maybe I left when she needed me the most. The isolating experience of being subjected to intimate partner violence on top of the COVID-19 lockdown was exacerbated by my leaving. However, I know that continuing such a relationship will make me sorrowful. I was also hurt by the fact that our friendship ended before I ended it, since the conversation became one-sided, with me always supporting her but not getting any support in return. In a way, her decision to continue the abusive relationship ended our friendship.

About a year and a half later, the news of a young woman who got married to her assailant quickly became a trending debate on social media. People reacted to this news with feelings of disappointment, anger, disgust, and even a sense of betrayal, as if she had turned all the support and effort she got back then, when she was assaulted, into nothing. The public had gotten drawn into Berfin Özek’s case in 2019 when her ex-boyfriend attacked her with sulfuric acid, resulting in heavy face deformation, complete loss of her right eye, and partial loss of sight in her left eye (BBC Türkçe 2019). Comparisons between her and the famous singer, Bergen, who was attacked in the same way, were made public on social media, and the fact that Bergen was murdered by the assailant later on worried crowds about her future (Açıkgöz 2021). Berfin’s case became very popular in media, attracting the attention of politicians and states people as well, due to the news that Özek’s treatment expenses were not covered by the Social Security Institution because the operations were regarded under the ‘aesthetics’ category (BBC Türkçe 2019). CHP (Republican People’s Party) submitted a bill to the parliament proposing a change in the relevant legislation and the Ministry of Health declared that they would cover the expenses, and later on, the minister himself visited Berfin in the hospital (BBC Türkçe 2019). A local women’s rights association, İskenderun Women’s Platform (*İskenderun Kadın Platformu*), worked on a social media campaign to make her story visible (BBC Türkçe 2019). A similar reaction had occurred when previously Berfin had dropped her complaint against him. In fact, Iskenderun Women’s Platform

even declared that they would no longer pursue the lawsuit with Berfin. However, as Yeşil Gazete says, this act got backlash from the feminist organizations, resulting in the reinvolvement of the association in the lawsuit (Yeşil Gazete 2020).

This public reaction led me to think about what lies beneath the attitudes towards women who forgive. We don't know whether Berfin or my friend expresses such an act of grace toward the assailant. However, Berfin's action of dropping the charge, and later marrying him, reflects a practice similar to forgiveness. To receive such a reaction, it does not matter whether the person expresses such a feeling of forgiveness. My friend's situation is similar in the sense that, whether she expressed that she forgave him or not, we disliked her decision to stay in the abusive relationship and felt angry and disappointed about the outcome of our emotional investments. In addition to such feelings, the public reaction seems to be employing the narrative of women who forgave, which either reflects a lack of agency, such as "These women are forced to/manipulated to do this" or a lack of sanity, "They are idiots/crazy/sick for forgiving them." Such debates continue to occur when the news of a woman killed by their partner made the headlines, such as in Pınar Gültekin's case, focusing on women's actions, their decisions to engage with 'these types of men' and to stay in the relationship when abuse happens, as if it foreshadows being murdered (BBC Türkçe 2025). So, when the agency of women is delivered by the public or not, it is the woman, her actions, her sanity and so on, that ends up being discussed in the public space, where the perpetrator is simply dismissed under the promise of pathologization ('He is a psychopath.') or dehumanization ('He is a monster.'). Knowing well that such accounts reduce the complexity of the issue at hand to simple binaries (either fully agent or fully victim), I wanted to explore how women and LGBTQIA+ survivors of intimate partner violence build their own subjectivities. How do they navigate the tension between being a victim and being a subject? How such narratives that undermines their agency affect them? If their forgiveness or enduring violence in the relationship is the way they reclaim their agency and build their subject position, does this signal for an alternative understanding of dealing with violence (and crime), in which forgiveness is among many options like punishment to do justice?

1.2 Towards and Beyond a Research Question

As I gradually became aware of the emotional, social, and political weight carried by the act of forgiving in the context of intimate partner violence (IPV), I found

myself compelled to ask more questions; not only about the survivors, but also about the nature of violence and forgiveness, and the social, cultural and political environment that surrounds these experiences. Observing the public, activist, and personal responses to such situations, including my own, I began to understand forgiveness not as a single, morally charged act happening in a singular moment but as a site of conflict, projection, and meaning-making that involves constant negotiations.

With all of this in mind, the initial question that ignited this research was a fundamental one: What does it mean when survivors of intimate partner violence forgive their abuser?

Over time, this question evolved and multiplied. I began to ask:

- What kinds of narratives emerge when survivors choose to forgive?
- How do survivors make sense of the decisions to continue or end these relationships, to forgive or not forgive, to speak or remain silent?
- Do the narratives survivors of intimate partner violence who forgave or endured harm in the relationship call for a different understanding of violence; one that the perpetrator is not the only wrongdoer but their friends, families and the institutions they belong to are included in the people to be ‘put on trial’ by enabling (or failing to end) such behavior?

At the beginning, I believed I had clear answers to some, if not all, of these questions. Influenced by my own lived experience as a feminist and a friend of many survivors, I often equated forgiveness with disempowerment. I was, admittedly, skeptical. However, during the research process, my position began to shift, listening to the participants’ complex and non-linear narratives, narratives that are ambivalent by nature and that do not follow a ‘logical’ order of things, I realized that many of my assumptions were based on a narrow understanding of agency.

Initially, I viewed staying in relationships with abusive partners or acts of forgiveness as setbacks in judgment or failures to resist. Over time, I have come to understand these actions as sites of negotiations, deeply shaped by emotional attachment, survival strategies, and a result of social, cultural and political mechanisms. There were those who saw value in forgiveness; there were those who rejected it. However, in both cases, their decisions were not lacking a thought process or power but were responses to the contradictions and constraints of their environments, as well as to the desire for healing and moving on.

This realization led me to broader questions about feminist politics and solidarity. What do we, as feminists and friends, owe to survivors whose choices challenge

our moral instincts? What happens when support turns into withdrawal because someone does not follow the script of leaving, denouncing, or staying angry? These questions have no easy answers. But they stress the necessity of moving beyond binary conceptualizations of agency or political correctness, toward an approach that holds space for ambivalence and contradiction.

In this context, while this thesis asks the aforementioned questions, it also becomes a reflexive inquiry into the terrain of feminist response and interpersonal justice. It explores not only how survivors navigate harm and conceptualize justice, but also how those around them, friends, families, communities, interpret, problematize, or co-construct these experiences. In doing so, it gestures toward a rethinking of justice itself: one that listens more closely to survivors, even when what they have to say is difficult to hear.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 IPV

Intimate partner violence is defined as behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, such as physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behavior (World Health Organization 2021). The World Health Organization estimates (2021) that globally, about 1 in 3 (%30) of women have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, and most of this violence is caused by an intimate partner. However, incidents of IPV are believed to be underreported to the officials due to concerns about further violence and feelings of shame and guilt caused by the stigma around victims of violence, primarily, but not limited to, sexual violence. Therefore, the real numbers are expected to be much larger.

Intimate partner violence can have serious and lasting effects on victims, including anxiety (Lagdon, Armour, and Armour 2014), depression and suicidal ideation (Park et al. 2017), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Dickerson-Amaya and Coston 2019; Scher and Resick 2005), poor mental health in general (Devries et al. 2013) and disruptions to personal autonomy and identity (Campbell 2002). The impacts also extend beyond the individuals directly involved. IPV contributes to the normalization of coercive dynamics in intimate relationships, shapes broader cultural understandings of love and control, and reproduces patterns of gendered harm across social settings (Stark 2007).

The term IPV slightly differs from other conceptualizations of interpersonal violence such as domestic violence or gender-based violence. Domestic violence and intimate partner violence are often used interchangeably. Both domestic violence and intimate partner violence state that anyone, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, or class, can be a victim of violence. However, domestic violence includes children, other relatives, or any other household members in the victims of domestic abuse, whereas IPV is restricted to an intimate partner in a current or former romantic relationship. The definition of IPV does not limit the victims' gender to females, as the concept of violence against women or violence against women and girls does. It includes people from any gender or sexual identity, including men involved in heterosexual, same-sex, or any other type of romantic relationship. However, statistics show girls and women are more likely to be victims of IPV. According to data from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) conducted by the US CDC (Leemis et al. 2022), approximately 41% of women and 26% of men reported having been the victim of physical violence, contact sexual violence, or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. The term “gender-based violence” is often used interchangeably with “violence against women”, although the former encapsulates people of all genders, gender identities, and sexual orientations. UNHCR (n.d.) states that “Although the majority of survivors of GBV are girls and women, LGBTIQ+, boys and men can also be targeted through GBV.” The terminology is summarized in Table 1.1 below.

My research focuses on intimate partner violence, a conscious decision to account for experiences of women's and LGBTQ+'s experience of violence directed from a partner in romantic relationships.

1.3.1.1 Situating IPV within GBV frameworks

While this thesis consciously focuses on intimate partner violence (IPV), it is important to situate IPV within the broader field of gender-based violence (GBV) research. GBV is defined by the United Nations (UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) 2023; United Nations 1993) as violence directed at an individual based on their gender or gender identity, including, but not limited to, violence against women and girls. This framework emphasizes the structural and systemic nature of violence, rooted in patriarchal power relations, heteronormativity, and intersecting inequalities. IPV, then, can be understood as one manifestation of GBV, but one that intersects with multiple other forms, including sexual harass-

Table 1.1 Terminology of violence

	Perpetrator	Victim/survivor	Strengths
Gender-based Violence (GBV)	Anyone	Anyone. (“Although the majority of survivors of GBV are girls and women, LGBTIQ+, boys and men can also be targeted through GBV.” ²)	• Includes violence LGB-TIQ+s experience • Emphasizes patriarchy
Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)	Anyone	Women and girls	• Emphasizes patriarchy
Domestic Violence	Any household member including women	Any household member including children	• Makes violence in private spaces visible
Male violence	Men and boys	Women	• Emphasizes patriarchy • Emphasizes the perpetrators
Intimate Partner Violence	Anyone in a romantic relationship	Anyone in a romantic relationship	• Includes queer relationships • Includes non-marital relationships • Includes violence directed towards men

ment, femicide, and violence against LGBTQ+ people (Kelly 1988; Merry 2009).

Feminist scholars have long argued that IPV must be understood not simply as an interpersonal dynamic but as part of a continuum of gendered violence. Liz Kelly’s (1988) notion of the “continuum of sexual violence” is particularly useful here. She demonstrates how behaviors ranging from harassment to physical assault form a spectrum that normalizes male control and women’s subordination. From this perspective, IPV is not an isolated phenomenon but one that draws legitimacy from broader cultural scripts of gender and sexuality. Evan Stark’s (2007) concept of “coercive control” similarly emphasizes that IPV involves more than discrete incidents of harm; it encompasses a systematic pattern of domination that seeks to

erode autonomy and enforce dependency. Such insights help contextualize IPV as both personal and political harm.

At the same time, GBV frameworks have been critiqued for overemphasizing heteronormative male–female dynamics and under-attending to queer and male survivors (Donovan and Hester 2014; Ristock 2002). Scholars of LGBTQ+ IPV highlight that while feminist GBV theory remains essential for understanding structural gendered inequalities, it must be adapted to account for diverse relational configurations and identity-based vulnerabilities (Barnes 2011; Kanuha 2013). This thesis builds on that dual insight: recognizing the indispensable contributions of GBV research in exposing the gendered roots of violence, while also interrogating its limits when applied to queer and non-marital contexts.

1.3.1.2 IPV in heterosexual relationships

Research on intimate partner violence (IPV) in heterosexual relationships has emerged relatively recently as a focused academic field. The term IPV itself only came into widespread use in the 1990s and 2000s, however, studies dealing with physical, sexual, and emotional abuse within romantic partnerships were conducted under the terminology of 'wife abuse', 'battering', 'family violence', and 'domestic violence'.

Second-wave feminist movements in North America and Europe brought the issue of domestic violence to public and academic attention in the 1970s and 1980s (Altınay and Arat 2009). During this period, two distinct research paradigms emerged: the 'family violence' approach and the 'male violence' feminist paradigm (Altınay and Arat 2009). Although the 'family violence' studies were interested in quantifying violent behaviors in family settings regardless of gender, feminist researchers criticized them for overlooking power relations regarding gender. As Altınay and Arat (2009) emphasize, feminist scholars reframed domestic violence not merely as interpersonal conflict but as a tool of patriarchal control and domination. This paradigm shift influenced the following research that now examines not just acts of violence but also the meanings, consequences, and structural roots of abuse.

One branch of research has focused on understanding victims' behaviors, particularly why survivors remain in abusive relationships. Early psychological frameworks offered explanations that, while influential, have also sparked substantial critique. For instance, Lenore Walker's (1979) "Cycle of Violence" model describes how survivors become trapped in a repeating pattern of tension-building, acute violence, and a "honeymoon" phase during which the abuser expresses remorse and affection,

giving the survivor hope for change. This cyclical model was often coupled with the theory of "learned helplessness", also developed by Walker, which suggests that repeated abuse leads survivors to internalize a sense of powerlessness and lose the belief that they can change their situation. Similarly, the concept of "trauma bonding" (Dutton and Painter 1993) has been used to explain how intense emotional attachments can form between abuser and survivor, reinforced by cycles of violence and intermittent reward.

While these frameworks have helped highlight the psychological effects of chronic abuse, they have also been criticized for individualizing survivors' responses and minimizing structural constraints such as economic dependence, social stigma, and institutional neglect (Anderson and Saunders 2003). Feminist scholars have pushed back against the implication that staying results from weakness or pathology, arguing instead for interpretations that foreground survivor agency and contextual complexity. More recent research has identified strategies survivors employ to navigate abusive relationships, such as emotional detachment, soothing the abuser to minimize escalation, or reaching out to informal support networks (Liang et al. 2005; Sylaska and Edwards 2014). These approaches reflect a broader shift in literature toward recognizing staying not as passivity, but as a form of ambivalent, often constrained agency, shaped by emotional, social, and political factors.

1.3.1.3 IPV in queer relationships

Research on intimate partner violence (IPV) within queer relationships has grown over the past two decades, but it still remains limited. Early literature often failed to address IPV among LGBTQ+ individuals, either due to a lack of recognition of same-gender violence or the influence of heteronormative assumptions that framed IPV as a male-perpetrated, female-victim phenomenon. However, growing empirical evidence suggests that IPV occurs in same-sex relationships at rates comparable to, if not higher than, heterosexual relationships (Edwards, Sylaska, and Neal 2015; Zierler, Witbeck, and Mayer 2000). Early research indicates that IPV affects between 25% and 50% of all same-sex relationships (Burke, Jordan, and Owen 2002; McClennen 2005). In these relationships, physical violence has been reported by 22–46% of participants (Greenwood et al. 2002; Vidas 1999), while sexual abuse (Waldner-Haugrud and Gratch 1997) and emotional abuse (Scherzer 1998) are also widespread.

Despite this data, queer IPV remains understudied and under-theorized. Survivors in same-gender relationships often report lacking the conceptual tools to name or

understand their experiences, which are frequently rendered invisible by dominant IPV frameworks rooted in heteronormativity (Kanuha 2013). This lack of framework can delay recognition and reduce access to support systems. Moreover, Harden et al. (2022), in their review of 19 qualitative studies, identified core barriers to help-seeking for queer women survivors of IPV: fear of reinforcing negative stereotypes about queer communities, lack of support from law enforcement (who often respond based on gender presentation and bias), and unsafe survivor spaces where abusers may remain present due to shared identity categories. Focusing on woman-to-woman relationships, Barnes argued that the limited attention to the area stems in part from the enduring belief in a 'lesbian utopia', a myth that same-gender male relationships are inherently egalitarian and safe due to the absence of men (2011).

In addition to empirical gaps, theoretical efforts to account for IPV in queer relationships have begun to emphasize the role of intersectional and identity-based factors. Minority stress, defined as chronic stress resulting from stigma and marginalization, is increasingly cited as a contributing factor to both victimization and perpetration in LGBTQ+ contexts (Meyer 2003). Relatedly, McKenry et al. (2006) introduced the "disempowerment theory," proposing that minority individuals may assert power through aggression due to personality vulnerabilities, internalized oppression, or low self-esteem. These insights are supported by findings indicating that sexual minority men, in particular, may experience IPV at rates equal to heterosexual women and significantly higher than heterosexual men (Greenwood et al. 2002; Peterman and Dixon 2003). However, these experiences are not evenly distributed across the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Studies have highlighted how intersecting identities—such as race, ethnicity, immigration status, disability, and gender non-conformity—shape both the risk and visibility of IPV. For example, Bornstein et al. (2013) and Hassouneh & Glass (2008) show that queer women of color or gender non-conforming individuals often face additional barriers when seeking help, including discriminatory treatment by law enforcement, such as misgendering.

Lastly, despite high prevalence, reporting rates remain low. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (2017) reported that only one-third of LGBTQ+ survivors made formal complaints to law enforcement in the USA. Many queer survivors described being disbelieved, misgendered, or blamed, as a result of not only gender based discrimination but also homophobia and transphobia within criminal justice systems (Hardesty et al. 2011; Hassouneh and Glass 2008). These findings emphasize the importance of the requirement of a refinement of IPV frameworks theoretically and expansion of empirical studies that account for the lived realities of queer survivors, including the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and systemic marginalization.

Taken together, the literature indicates a need for further IPV research to meaningfully include queer survivors, not just through inclusion but through frameworks that recognize the challenges unique to queer life and love. This includes acknowledging the double bind queer survivors often face: navigating abuse while also resisting the stigmatization of their identities and communities. As such, both scholarly and activist work increasingly calls for trauma-informed, anti-oppressive, and culturally responsive responses to IPV in LGBTQ+.

1.3.2 Turkey and IPV

1.3.2.1 Turkey context regarding IPV

In Turkey, intimate partner violence (IPV) must be understood within the broader framework of gender inequality and patriarchal norms that continue to shape intimate and familial relationships. Despite significant legal reforms, including the adoption of Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women in 2012, women in Turkey continue to face systemic barriers to equality in both private and public spheres. The Global Gender Gap Index, for example, ranked Turkey 129th out of 146 countries in 2024, reflecting persistent disparities in political participation, economic opportunity, and bodily autonomy (2024).

The issue of violence against women has been part of public debate in Turkey since 1987, when feminist activists organized the landmark “Dayağa Karşı Dayanışma Yürüyüşü” (Solidarity March Against Battering) in Istanbul. This demonstration, prompted by a court decision that denied a woman’s request for divorce despite severe abuse, marked the emergence of an autonomous feminist movement that brought domestic violence out of the private sphere and into public discourse (Sirman 1989). Feminist groups began systematically documenting cases of violence, opening the first independent women’s shelters, and pressuring the state to take responsibility (Sirman 1989).

Since the 1990s, Turkey has made several formal commitments to gender equality and the prevention of violence against women. The country became a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, and in 2011, it was the first country to sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention, a comprehensive legal framework to prevent gender-based violence. Domestically, Law No. 6284, adopted in 2012, granted legal protections for women experiencing violence, including restraining orders and shelter access,

and recognized the state's duty to protect against gender-based harm. These steps represented significant victories, largely due to persistent feminist organizing and advocacy.

However, recent years have seen increasing political backlash against gender equality and women's rights, particularly under the AKP government. Discourses that frame gender equality as a threat to family values have become more prominent, and state institutions have at times undermined or failed to enforce existing protections. This culminated in Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021, a move widely condemned by national and international rights organizations. Feminist scholars and activists argue that such political developments not only signal the erosion of institutional safeguards but also contribute to the normalization of violence through the reassertion of patriarchal norms and the shrinking of civic space.

Followingly, the issue of violence against women in Turkey has become increasingly alarming. Official statistics reveal a troubling rise in femicides over the past two decades. The We Will Stop Femicide Platform (2025) reported that 395 women were murdered by men in 2024 alone. Although Law No. 6284 defines domestic violence comprehensively and prohibits all forms of violence, its enforcement remains inconsistent. Mor Cati Foundation (2021) indicates that legal protections are often undermined by arbitrary law enforcement practices and judicial leniency toward perpetrators. Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 has further deepened concerns over the state's commitment to gender-based violence prevention.

1.3.2.2 Studies on domestic violence, gender-based violence, violence against women and girls and intimate partner violence in Turkey

While studies on Turkey primarily focus on the experiences of ever-married women, through the concept of domestic violence (Altınay and Arat 2008; Güvenc et al. 2014; Kocacık, Çağlayan, and Arslan 2007; Tokuc and et al. 2010; Şahin and et al. 2010), intimate partner violence (IPV) in other contexts receives comparatively less attention. This focus on domestic violence is not merely due to the terminology of IPV being relatively new compared to domestic violence but rather shaped by institutional and political forces. Government-funded research, legal definitions, and public discourse often equate violence with the erosion of the heterosexual nuclear family, framing it as a threat to the sanctity of marriage rather than as a violation of individual rights. This perspective aligns with broader state narratives that idealize the family as the cornerstone of Turkish society and reinforce heteronormative, pa-

triarchal norms. As a result, unmarried or queer victims of violence are frequently rendered invisible, both in data collection and in policy responses. This thesis attempts to address that gap by focusing on non-marital and queer experiences of intimate partner violence, offering a more inclusive and critically situated account of relational harm.

The latest national study on domestic violence against women was conducted in 2014, by Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies. The 2014 National Research on Domestic Violence Against Women in Turkey found that 36% of women aged 15–59 had experienced physical violence and 12% had experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner (Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies 2015). Despite the prevalence, the majority of victims did not report the violence to authorities.

Early research, such as the study by the Turkish Presidency’s Institute of Family Research (Turkish Presidency Institute of Family Research 1995), identified correlations between domestic violence and variables such as the perpetrator’s alcohol use, household size, and childhood exposure to violence. Later studies, like Altınay and Arat (2008), challenged prior assumptions. Their study showed the narrative that ties women’s victimhood to them being out of the workforce, by showing women who earn more money than their husbands are more likely to be subjected to violence from their husbands compared to those who earn less, equal or none. In addition, their study skillfully showed that those who experienced or witnessed violence in the childhood home, are more likely to be the victims of domestic violence, reinforcing the pattern of intergenerational transmission of violence.

Recent efforts, including Kayaoglu (2013), Erten and Keskin (2018), and Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu and Türkyılmaz (2021), further investigated how reforms in Turkish educational system and sociodemographic variables influence IPV dynamics. These studies reveal nuanced patterns: for instance, Erten and Keskin (2018) found that increasing women’s educational attainment through compulsory schooling reforms was associated with a reduction in psychological and economic abuse. However, this effect did not extend to physical violence.

Contemporary studies have increasingly turned to social-psychological explanations to understand how intimate partner violence becomes normalized within relationships and societies. For instance, Yüksel (2017) examines the role of ambivalent sexism, a framework that distinguishes between hostile sexism (overtly negative views toward women) and benevolent sexism (seemingly positive but patronizing attitudes that reinforce gender hierarchies). Her study also draws on the theory of system justification, which refers to individuals’ tendency to rationalize and defend

the status quo, even when it is disadvantageous to them. These ideological structures contribute to the normalization and invisibility of psychological and emotional abuse by framing male authority and female sacrifice as culturally acceptable or even desirable.

Similarly, Bařar and Demir (2023) highlight how control and coercion operate not only through individual behavior but are reinforced by socio-cultural norms, particularly in rural regions where traditional gender roles remain dominant. These studies point to the importance of contextualizing IPV within broader cultural, economic, and political structures, rather than viewing it solely through physical manifestations of harm.

Taken together, these works must be understood within the broader backdrop of socio-political and legal transformations in Turkey since the mid-1990s. Shifting gender norms, the rise of conservative discourses, changes in family law, and increased visibility of feminist activism have all shaped how violence is named, tolerated, or resisted. This thesis builds on these insights by showing how women and queer individuals in non-marital relationships interpret violence not only through individual or psychological lenses, but through the emotional, cultural, and historical frameworks available to them.

Despite a growing body of research, gaps remain in understanding IPV among marginalized populations. Few studies investigate IPV among LGBTQ+ individuals or in non-marital relationships. Similarly, dating violence is underexplored, even as recent demographic data from TÜİK (2025a) show that the average age at first marriage has risen to 28.3 for men and 25.8 for women, up from 26.0 and 22.7 respectively in 2001. As romantic relationships increasingly occur outside the institution of marriage, it becomes ever more important to expand the scope of IPV research.

According to the results of the Address Based Population Registration System (ABPRS), the proportion of single-person households consisting of individuals living alone, which was 14.9% in 2016, increased to 20% in 2024, and the proportion of households consisting of more than one person, including members who do not have a spouse, mother-child, or father-child relationship, in other words, without a nuclear family, increased from 2.4% in 2016 to 3.2% in 2024 (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK) 2025b). Statistics are summarized in Table 1.2 below.

According to the ABPRS results, the number of people of marriageable age in Turkey who had never married in 2024 was 19,485,977. In other words, 28.8% of the marriageable population had never married. This rate was 27.4% in 2016. In 2024, there were 3,374,686 people aged 25-29 who had never married, which makes up 51.5% of

Table 1.2 Household types as a percentage of total households (2016-2024)

Household Types	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
One-person households	14.9	15.4	16.1	16.9	17.9	18.9	19.4	19.7	20.0
Nuclear family households	66.4	66.1	65.3	65.1	65.2	64.4	64.5	63.8	63.5
Nuclear family: only spouses	14.2	14.2	14.1	13.9	13.5	13.5	13.8	14.0	14.0
Nuclear family: spouses + children	44.0	43.5	42.3	42.0	42.0	40.8	40.4	39.2	38.6
Nuclear family: single parent + children	8.2	8.5	8.9	9.2	9.7	10.1	10.3	10.6	10.9
Single father + children	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.6
Single mother + children	6.5	6.7	7.0	7.2	7.5	7.8	8.0	8.2	8.4
Households: nuclear family + other people	16.3	16.0	15.8	15.0	14.0	13.5	12.8	13.2	13.3
Households: multiple people, no nuclear family	2.4	2.5	2.8	3.0	2.8	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.2

Source: TURKSTAT, Address Based Population Registration System, 2016-2024

The numbers in the table may not add up to the total due to rounding.

the respective population. This rate was 39.9% in 2016 and 33.8% in 2008.¹

All these statistics show that the young population in Turkey is marrying at a significantly lower rate, and those who do marry later on in life. This shows the importance of studying intimate relationships outside of marriage.

1.3.2.3 Studies on IPV in queer relationships in Turkey

Intimate partner violence (IPV) in queer and same-sex relationships has historically been under-researched in Turkey due to social stigma and the heteronormative focus of most domestic violence studies. Same-sex conduct is not criminalized in Turkey, but LGBTQ+ individuals face significant discrimination and lack legal recognition for their partnerships. Until recently, academic attention to IPV in LGBTQ+ relationships was minimal, and no official data exist since national surveys on domestic violence have excluded sexual minorities. In the past decade, however, scholars have begun to address this gap.

Initial research indicates that IPV in LGBTQ+ relationships in Turkey is a dire issue to attend to. Mercan (2021) stated that the prevalence of victimization and psychological dating violence perpetration is high among LGB people in Turkey. Gülmez (2020), surveyed 323 lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adults and found that overall rates of partner violence did not significantly differ by sexual orientation. In other words, lesbian women and gay men reported comparable levels of IPV exposure. Psychological (emotional) violence emerged as the most common form of abuse. Another study, conducted with 149 lesbian and bisexual women, reported that 63.1% had experienced and 66.4% had perpetrated psychological IPV, far higher than physical or sexual IPV rates (Balık and Bilgin 2021).

1. Using the “Merkezi Dağıtım Sistemi” of Turkish Statistic Institution (TURKSTAT) I calculated these myself.

A recurrent theme in the literature is the role of minority stress, defined as the chronic stress faced by sexual minorities due to stigma and discrimination, as a driving factor for IPV. Researchers have specifically examined internalized homophobia/heterosexism (negative feelings about one's own LGBTQ+ identity) and external discrimination as correlates of IPV. Ayhan Balık and Bilgin (2021) found that a majority (74.5%) of lesbian/bisexual women in their Turkish sample frequently encountered public discrimination, and many had moderate levels of internalized homophobia. These minority stressors were significantly associated with IPV experiences: for instance, higher internalized homophobia was correlated with higher likelihood of sexual IPV (both perpetration and victimization) and greater "outness" (being open about one's orientation) was linked to increased IPV as well (Balık and Bilgin 2021). This counterintuitive finding, that being more open about their sexual identity to the public was associated with more abuse, may reflect complex dynamics, such as increased relationship stress or vulnerability to abuse when lacking family support. Gülmez (2020) similarly reported that LGB individuals with lower social support tend to have higher internalized homophobia and higher IPV exposure, whereas those who are open about their sexuality and engaged in the LGBTQ+ community show lower internalized homophobia and greater support networks. Such results underscore that minority stress factors (stigma, concealment, lack of support) can heighten both the risk and severity of IPV in queer relationships.

Recent cross-cultural research by Ummak and their colleagues reinforces this interpretation. In a comparative study of lesbians and bisexual women in Turkey and Denmark, Ummak et al. (2022) found that participants in Turkey were significantly more likely to perpetrate psychological IPV than those in Denmark. Internalized heterosexism was examined as a risk factor: while it predicted psychological abuse perpetration in both contexts, country differences were notable. Turkey's more hostile climate appears to directly contribute to greater IPV perpetration rates (Ummak and Toplu-Demirtaş 2022). A follow-up study focused on victimization likewise showed that Turkish sexual minority women suffered higher psychological IPV victimization than their Danish counterparts (Ummak and Toplu-Demirtaş 2023). Taken together, these studies (often drawing on minority stress theory) suggest that the stress of living in a homophobic environment can manifest within relationships as conflict and abuse. Couples under such stress may have fewer coping resources, and negative self-perceptions may lead to tolerating or perpetrating more abuse. This introduces an intersectional lens: sexual orientation and cultural context jointly influence IPV dynamics (Ummak and Toplu-Demirtaş 2023). Research in Turkey highlights unique dynamics in same-sex partner violence stemming from heterosexism. A qualitative study by Ummak, Toplu-Demirtaş, and Özkan (2024)

used in-depth interviews with 26 LGBTQ individuals to identify patterns of abuse distinctive to LGB relationships. Four major themes emerged:

- **Invalidation of Sexual Identity:** Abusive partners would undermine or deny the victim’s sexual orientation or identity (for example, telling a bisexual woman she is “not really bisexual” or insisting a gay man “could be straight”). This invalidation serves to erode the victim’s self-esteem and assert power.
- **Controlling Sexuality and Behavior:** Perpetrators exerted control over their partner’s sexual expression and behavior. This could include dictating how the partner should dress or act to appear “less gay,” or coercing them into unwanted sexual activities. Such control leverages sexual identity as a tool of power.
- **Threats of Outing and Disclosure:** Many abusers threatened to “out” their partner’s sexual orientation to family, employers, or others as a form of blackmail. The fear of involuntary disclosure – a uniquely LGB-specific weapon – traps victims, who may stay in abusive relationships to avoid being outed in a hostile environment.
- **Binegativity:** In relationships involving bisexual individuals, biphobic attitudes surfaced as abuse. Some lesbian or gay partners demeaned their bisexual partner with stereotypes (e.g. accusing them of being untrustworthy or “indecisive”), reflecting prejudice even within the relationship

These themes underscore that power and control in queer IPV often operate through leveraging sexual identity as a vulnerability. The qualitative evidence suggests that while many abusive tactics (jealousy, insults, physical harm) mirror those in heterosexual couples, LGBTQ victims face additional harm related to their marginalized identity. For instance, the threat of outing has no parallel in straight relationships, and it can strongly deter LGBTQ survivors from seeking help. Abusers may also exploit the victim’s internalized homophobia or shame, saying that no one will help “people like us” or that the victim “deserves” the abuse due to their sexuality.

Research in Turkey, though limited, provides context-specific evidence of these dynamics. Studies such as Kaos GL’s annual reports on hate crimes and domestic violence (Kaos GL Cultural Research and Solidarity Association 2021, 2023) document how systemic homophobia and transphobia permeate intimate relationships. These sources illustrate how coercion in queer relationships often intertwines with external stigma, reinforcing isolation and dependency. In this way, societal homophobia does not remain outside but enters the private sphere, shaping distinctive patterns of abuse and control.

By situating queer IPV within both global literature (Donovan and Hester 2014; Edwards, Sylaska, and Neal 2015) and Turkey-specific studies, it becomes clear that what may appear as "universal" IPV dynamics take on locally inflected forms. In Turkey, pervasive homophobia and weak institutional protection exacerbate queer survivors' vulnerabilities, producing concrete examples of how marginalization amplifies the tactics of coercion already observed in broader LGBTQ IPV research.

1.3.3 Love and Violence in Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships—often idealized as voluntary, private, and emotionally authentic—are in fact intensely structured by social norms, institutional power, and cultural expectations. Feminist and queer theorists have long emphasized that intimacy is not outside of power, but one of its most effective and concealed domains (hooks 2000; Illouz 2012; Jackson 2001). From this perspective, romantic and marital relationships function as technologies of gender, in which inequality is not only reproduced but emotionally naturalized—particularly in heterosexual and cisnormative contexts (Jackson and Scott 2004).

In the literature on gender-based violence (GBV), domestic violence (DV), and violence against women and girls (VAWG), heterosexual relationships—especially marriage and long-term partnerships—have been repeatedly shown to function as sites where control, subordination, and harm are normalized through emotional, economic, and symbolic means (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Stark 2007; Walby 2004). Importantly, violence does not begin with physical acts, but is often underpinned by gendered inequalities in emotional labor, care work, and housework, which shape relational power long before harm becomes “visible.” Feminist theorists have emphasized that these unequal distributions are not accidental but systemically produced and culturally legitimized, contributing to women’s dependency and reducing their ability to exit harmful situations (Bubeck 1995; Delphy 1984; Hochschild and Machung 1989).

Emotional labor, in particular, is central to the gendered dynamics of intimacy. Women—across relationship types—are often expected to manage not only their own feelings but also those of their partner, to de-escalate conflict, maintain harmony, and shoulder the responsibility for the relationship’s emotional survival (Hochschild 1983). These expectations frequently intersect with broader social norms that idealize feminine self-sacrifice, care, and emotional endurance. In heterosexual relationships, this labor often coincides with unequal divisions of domestic and reproductive labor, further entrenching dependency (England and Folbre 1999). The normalizing

of this labor contributes to the invisibility of harm, particularly when survivors internalize relational distress as a failure of effort or commitment, rather than recognizing coercive patterns of control.

For queer and non-normative relationships, these dynamics may manifest differently but are not absent. IPV in same-sex or queer relationships is often misrecognized or dismissed due to heteronormative assumptions that equate violence with masculinity and physical domination (Renzetti 1992; Ristock 2002). However, power circulates in diverse forms—including through emotional withdrawal, identity manipulation, financial control, or the threat of outing—and is deeply shaped by the same cultural myths of love, care, and intimacy.

Situating romantic relationships within these frameworks makes clear that intimacy cannot be separated from structural inequality. Whether through emotional labor, domestic responsibility, or the symbolic ideal of love as sacrifice, survivors may remain in harmful relationships not because they fail to recognize violence, but because power has been naturalized as care, and endurance as virtue. Understanding this entanglement is key to moving beyond individualizing or victim-blaming explanations of staying and toward an analysis that centers relational, emotional, and structural power.

While much of the literature on intimate partner violence centers on visible harm or coercive control, a growing body of feminist and affect theory challenges this narrow framing by highlighting the role of love, emotion, and attachment in sustaining harmful relationships. In this view, intimacy is not outside of power, but one of its most potent conduits (Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2000; Illouz 2012). Lauren Berlant’s concept of “cruel optimism” (2011) is particularly useful for understanding how participants remain attached to relationships that impede their flourishing. Cruel optimism refers to a relationship in which the object of desire—such as romantic love or the promise of transformation—becomes an obstacle to the subject’s well-being. For many survivors in this study, staying in the relationship was not about denial of harm, but about the hope that pain would eventually lead to something meaningful: stability, growth, or redemption. These attachments are often sustained not through coercion, but through affective investments that blur the line between love and suffering. Eva Illouz similarly shows how romantic suffering is not a failure of love but part of its modern cultural script. In *Why Love Hurts* (2012), she argues that late-modern relationships are shaped by a contradiction between ideals of autonomy and the enduring pull of gendered romantic expectations. Love is presented as freely chosen, but in practice, it is governed by deeply internalized social scripts about who is worthy of love, how love should unfold, and what makes love “real.” For the women and queer participants in this study, cultural myths such

as “the one,” “love as destiny,” or “love as sacrifice” influenced not only how they stayed, but how they interpreted their pain—as proof of depth or as part of the cost of meaningful intimacy.

Building on this, Sara Ahmed reminds us that emotions do not simply reside within individuals; they “stick” to bodies, objects, and cultural ideals (Ahmed 2004). Love, in this sense, is not just felt but directed—toward certain types of relationships, fantasies, and moral ideals. When participants described their experiences using language of emotional intensity or transformative potential, they were drawing from these culturally circulated affective economies. The inability to name emotional pain as abuse often stemmed from the normalization of harm within culturally valorized notions of love, particularly when that love conferred social value, as in “love as investment” or “love as capital.”

Participants’ narratives also disrupted dominant relationship typologies. Several described being in “relationships without a name”, connections that were emotionally and erotically intense, but that lacked clear social status or recognition. These ambiguous forms of intimacy are rarely accounted for in IPV frameworks, yet they often intensify dependency by making survivors feel both profoundly attached and structurally unacknowledged. Such relationships challenge the assumption that abuse only occurs in clearly defined partnerships and reveal how cultural scripts shape the very legibility of violence.

Together, the work of Ahmed, Berlant, and Illouz provides a critical lens for understanding why survivors stay—not as a failure of reason or will, but as a function of the emotional, social, and symbolic meanings that attach to love. These narratives must be taken seriously if we are to move beyond victim-blaming frameworks and toward more nuanced understandings of affective entanglement and survival.

1.3.4 Looking at Intimate Partner Violence from (Restorative) Justice

In the aftermath of intimate partner violence, justice is often imagined through institutional frameworks, law, punishment, or state intervention. However, for many survivors, justice is not only about formal accountability; it is also about acknowledgment, apology, and the possibility of transformation. This chapter draws on feminist approaches to justice and healing to examine how survivors navigate support, stigma, and self-recovery outside institutional structures.

Studies with feminist approaches have long emphasized that state-centered models of justice often fail to meet the needs of survivors, especially those whose experiences

fall outside normative categories of violence or who fear retraumatization by the legal system (McGlynn and Westmarland 2019; Ptacek 2009). Participants in this study often described justice as relational, less about punishment and more about being heard, acknowledged, and apologized. Their responses echoed what Nancy Fraser (2003) would call the need for recognition: the validation of one's experience as real, unjust, and socially meaningful. This form of justice hinges not on retribution but on ethical witnessing and affective accountability.

The absence or ambivalence of social support especially from friends and family figured prominently in participants' narratives. In many cases, those closest to them expressed discomfort, or withdrew altogether. This aligns with Ahmed's (2004) account of how speaking about violence can produce "affective economies of discomfort" where the speaker is treated as the problem for naming the violence. The failure of support systems can intensify survivors' isolation and shape their subsequent desire for alternative forms of validation.

Within this context, community care and transformative justice emerge as vital yet complicated frameworks. Scholars such as Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan (2021) argue that justice should not rely solely on punishment but should center healing, accountability, and cultural change. While not all participants explicitly invoked abolitionist language, many articulated visions of justice that aligned with these values: the desire for the perpetrator to understand the harm, change their behavior, or take part in a broader transformation of how violence is culturally understood. These perspectives reveal a justice orientation that is both structural and emotional—concerned with repair, not just consequence.

Survivors also engaged in ethical and narrative self-making processes through which they redefined their agency, challenged stigma, and made sense of their experiences. Judith Butler's (2005) theory of ethical vulnerability posits that we are always implicated in webs of social recognition, and that subjectivity is produced through response to norms, harm, and interpellation. In this view, agency is not autonomous resistance, but the capacity to respond to injury in ways that are narratively and ethically generative. Many participants' accounts showed how therapy became the most available tool for meaning-making and self-understanding in the absence of collective or community-based processes or any other available discourse.

This chapter, then, attends to the emotional and ethical labor of "getting justice" in a world where institutional recourse is often absent, and where survivors must navigate the limits of apology, the ambivalence of social support, and the uneven terrain of healing. Their accounts call for a reimagining of justice as something felt, practiced, and narrated rather than only delivered.

1.4 Methodology

Sabancı University Research Ethics Council has approved the “Experiences of People Who Forgive Abusive Partners” named and “2024-22” numbered protocol through expedited review on April 18, 2024. Interview questions are shared in Appendix A I reached the participants through ads I posted in two cycles on my personal Instagram account, the first one in November 2023 and the second in April 2024.

The posters titled “Would you like to contribute to a study on the experiences of women and LGBTI+ individuals who have been subjected to violence by their romantic partners and who have not ended their relationships?”², and “Would you like to contribute to a study on the experiences of women and LGBTI+ individuals who have been subjected to violence by their partners in their romantic relationships and who have experienced forgiving their partners?”³ The decision to change the wording was intentional to account for nuances in the conceptualizations of forgiveness that may result in nonparticipation of those who think they have not ‘fully’ forgiven their partners. By doing so, I have tried to reach two different samples: one stayed or returned to abusive relationships without necessarily forgiving their former partner, and one forgave their former partner without necessarily staying or returning to abusive relationships; to get a general sense of what staying in abusive relationships means for women and LGBTI+ individuals that may or may not involve forgiving. Although two groups had an overlap, I anticipated reaching possible non-intersecting groups, allowing me to make a more detailed analysis.

I listed 4 criteria of eligibility for the study, 3 of which was common in two call for participants cycles: being a woman and/or LGBTI+; being above the age of 18; and not having had or currently have a financial relationship with your (ex-) partner (such as marriage or being housemates). The other criterion for eligibility differed slightly between the two groups. The first call used the wording “If you have been subjected to violence and have not ended your relationships” and “If you have been subjected to violence (physical or psychological) by your previous romantic partner and have continued your relationships for a while” whereas the second ad had “If you have been subjected to violence (physical or psychological) by your previous romantic partner and have experienced forgiving your partner.” phrasings. Through

2. Original in Turkish: “Romantik ilişkilerinde partnerleri tarafından şiddete maruz bırakılmış ve ilişkilerini sonlandırmamış kadın ve LGBTİ+ların deneyimleri üzerine bir araştırmaya katkıda bulunmak ister misiniz?” All translations, including transcriptions, are mine unless stated otherwise.

3. Original in Turkish: “Romantik ilişkilerinde partnerleri tarafından şiddete maruz bırakılmış ve partnerlerini affetme/bağışlama deneyimi yaşamış kadın ve LGBTİ+ların deneyimleri üzerine bir araştırmaya katkıda bulunmak ister misiniz?”

such intervention, I tried to distinguish between the different equivalents of the word forgiveness in the language: forgiveness as reconciliation (*barışmak/yeniden bir araya gelmek*) and forgiveness as an emotive act, willfully putting aside feelings of resentment, one that may or may not involve reconciliation.

The decision to exclude financial relationships resulted from the desire to reach a sample of people who “voluntarily” stayed in abusive relationships, where economic dependence was not the primary barrier to leaving (Anderson and Saunders 2003). In this conceptualization, financial ties also include shared children, which, while more than financial, constitute long-term obligations that shape survivors’ decisions (Wuest, Merritt-Gray, and Ford-Gilboe 2004). Moreover, since marriage and family are deeply embedded in sociopolitical systems and regulated by legal and cultural norms, I aimed to remove these structural influences to better understand relational endurance in contexts where agency is less institutionally constrained (Mahoney 1994; Ptacek 2009).

Participants contacted me primarily via my university e-mail account, which was in the ad. Others who have contacted me via text messages on Instagram or WhatsApp were directed to email at one point to protect institutional responsibility. Interviews took place where the participants would feel comfortable. Due to financial constraints, participants who do not live in İstanbul were directed to online interviews, with a reminder that it is important they feel comfortable doing so. Participants and I discussed where the interview may take place and which options would be best suitable to them. I recommended places and took their recommendations, and traveled in Istanbul when necessary. I tried to always have a second option in the neighborhood where we meet, but ended up having to use it only once.

I ended up conducting interviews with 15 participants whose pseudonyms, interview type, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, occupation, and education level are summarized in Table 1.3 below.

This study contributes to the literature by addressing these underexplored areas. It includes people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, and focuses specifically on IPV in dating. Of 15 participants, 8 identified as LGBTQ+, with half of them reporting experiences of IPV in same-sex relationships. Furthermore, 2 participants reported having been subjected to violence while identifying as men. Beyond demographic diversity, this research examines unique cultural factors influencing violence tolerance, including justice and love narratives, adding a novel dimension to IPV scholarship in Turkey.

Additionally, this study makes a theoretical intervention by intentionally including only participants who experienced IPV in relationships outside of marriage and

Table 1.3 Demographics of participants

Pseudo-nym	Interview type	Age	Gender orientation	Occupation	Education level
Doğa	Online	30	Woman. Heterosexual.	Teacher/Editor.	Bachelor's degree
Deniz	Online	24	Non-binary. Lesbian, I guess.	Office job	Master's degree
Şevval	In person	26	Woman. Bisexual.	Office job	Master's student
Yaren	In person	25	Gender is a difficult question (laughs). I don't like to define it too much. I usually say queer in a very general way. Because I don't really feel that way. Sometimes I call myself a woman, and sometimes I say, "Pff, no, whatever." So, we're in a place where we're just kind of floating around, not knowing what's going on.	Student	Master's student
Efe	Online	27	I have been presenting myself as an openly queer person since 2019.	Student	PhD student
Asya	Online	24	Woman. Heterosexual.	Lawyer	Bachelor's degree
Bengisu	In person	34	I identify as female or non-binary.	(did not specify)	Bachelor's degree
Mert	Online	25	Queer	Office job	Bachelor's degree
Asel	In person	29	Woman. (Heterosexual).	Clinical Psychologist	Master's degree
Damla	In person	46	"I thought about it, let me say I'm a woman hahaha" Bisexual? Queer (Talked about her experience in a heterosexual relationship)	Lawyer	Bachelor's degree
Nehir	Online	21	I'm a woman, and I'm also queer. I identify as pansexual.	Student	University student
Bahar	Online	31	I identify as a woman. I'm heterosexual.	Office job	Bachelor's degree
Beyza	In person	26	Woman. (Talked about her experience in a heterosexual relationship)	Student	University student
Ezgi	In person	26	Woman. (Talked about her experience in a heterosexual relationship)	Office job	Bachelor's degree

without financial dependency. By focusing on cases where there is, at least on paper, a "possibility to walk away," the research seeks to uncover the deeper social, emotional, and cultural mechanisms that contribute to the endurance of violence and even forgiveness within partnership, even when institutional constraints like legal or financial dependence are absent.

1.4.1 Doing Ethical Research: Attempt at a Feminist Methodology and on Studying Friends

Before starting the interviews, I explained the Informed Consent process that form of which I had sent beforehand. When I was explaining the form, they either had it in front of them printed or, when online, were looking at it via their screen. I took their questions, if any, and asked them to sign the form (one for each of us).

Online signatures were taken via e-mail. The Informed Consent Form is shared in Appendix B.

Throughout this research, I was acutely aware that engaging with the subject of intimate partner violence (IPV) requires a deep sense of ethical and emotional responsibility. IPV is not only a complex social issue, but also one that touches on deeply personal and traumatic experiences, often marked by long-lasting psychological and relational impacts. For many survivors, speaking about such experiences, even in retrospect, can evoke a wide range of emotional responses, from pain and ambivalence to clarity and strength. With this in mind, I approached the research process intending to center care, flexibility, and participant agency at every step.

A key principle guiding this process was the withdrawal from asking participants to provide details they were not ready to share, such as details about the experience of violence. Instead, I tried to focus on understanding how they made sense of the relationship itself, its emotional, social, and moral contours. Constructing a timeline of events by asking detailed questions was simply not necessary. Followingly, the questions in the interviews primarily revolved around how they, as well as their relationships, were affected by the experience of violence, and how they view and make sense of their experience. This approach stems from a feminist ethics of research that resists voyeurism and prioritizes relational sensitivity over informational gain. As Ellis (2007) and others have argued in feminist qualitative inquiry, emotional safety and respect are not simply technical ethics but methodological commitments that shape the entire research encounter.

Some participants initially expressed interest in taking part in the study but later withdrew, citing that they were not yet ready to discuss their experiences. I responded with appreciation for their openness and assured them that their decision to withdraw was fully respected and carried no negative consequences. One participant was hesitant about participating and wanted to see the questions beforehand. I responded saying that I understand their hesitancy, and that it is not easy to talk about such challenging experiences, and although I prefer not sending the questions beforehand to protect the natural flow or and not convey the sense that there are ‘correct’ answers; I am happy to do a pre-interview with them to answer all of their questions about the research. We ended up doing the pre-interview and the interview later on another day. I believe doing a pre-interview was more about the participant getting to know me and understanding my motivations behind doing such research, rather than concerns about anonymity, since we ended up talking about how I started to be interested in this issue and what I hope to learn during this process.

With their explicit consent, written and oral, I took audio recordings of the interviews, either via my phone or my computer if online. I let them know that the recordings will be kept on my computer and my phone, both of which passwords are only known to me, and that I will delete the recordings as soon as my Master's thesis is finished and that I will only keep the anonymized version of the transcripts. I also offered all participants the option of taking notes instead of an audio recording, but none of them showed any preference.

Naturally, to protect the privacy of participants, I took measures to anonymize their accounts. I used pseudonyms for each participant and the names of the people they mentioned, and changed other details for some when necessary.

In some cases, my relationship with participants predated the research; we were friends or simply knew each other beyond the interview space. For the early interviews with friends, I tried to distance myself from my position as a friend moving to a researcher position. I thought this way I could protect the participants as they agreed to share their experiences with the 'researcher Soner Cem' rather than 'my friend Soner Cem'. For instance, during one interview with a friend whom I still a social circle with, I did not share my views on the subject or comfort them more than I would any other participant. When the interview finished, she immediately reflected, saying, "This was a bit weird." That day, we spent more time together, during which I refrained from commenting in any way on her experience. Later on, we discussed this; she shared that she understood my motivations for making such a move, knowing that I was still premature in conducting interviews. The fact that she shared that she participated in my study with our friends and talked about her experience with IPV with them too, made me relieved. From that point on, I became more open to talking about her experience if it was brought up. Following interviews with friends or acquaintances, although none were as close as she is to me, went more easily. Realizing there can never be two versions of myself, researcher and friend, I provided care, commented when asked, or discussed my research questions with the participants.

My worries about emotional over-involvement or prejudice have long been highlighted in the literature. Intimacy, according to feminist ethnographers, may be both ethically responsive and methodologically productive (Smith 1987; Tillmann-Healy 2003). For instance, participants can feel more at ease since they already have a connection with the researcher, which can help participants feel heard, known, and understood (Tillmann-Healy 2003, p. 737). Haraway (1988) refers to this as "situated knowledge," acknowledging that knowledge production is fundamentally relational rather than aiming for objectivity or detachment. This point of view forces a type of contextual ethics in which caring and accountability are demonstrated by proximity

rather than distance. This made friendship with participants an ethical and epistemological position based on vulnerability, accountability, and shared context rather than a methodological fault. Tillman-Healy beautifully summarizes the nature of researching friends:

“Perhaps the most important aspect of this methodology is that we research with an ethic of friendship, a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love. Friendship as method is neither a program nor a guise strategically aimed at gaining further access. It is a level of investment in participants’ lives that puts fieldwork relationships on par with the project.” (2003, p. 735)

My own subjectivity is central to this process. I am not a neutral observer. I am a friend, a former friend, a listener, and a person who has made difficult decisions in response to someone else’s experience of violence. One of the central motivations for this research emerged from my own unresolved feelings: grief, guilt, worry, and uncertainty about having ended a friendship with someone I loved dearly, following her decision to remain in an emotionally abusive relationship. I sought to use my own "knowledge from personal experience" in this context, as feminist theory frequently highlights the significance of the personal as political, while appreciating subjective experience as a valid and potent source of knowledge and using it "to guide the analysis" (Deitch 2020, p. 219). I did not always share this personal history with participants, but I did not hide it either. When asked, I was open. Looking back, I say that I could share it with everyone regardless of their interest, which I assume would provide a developed sense of mutuality with the participants. I am glad, however, that with the ones I shared, I did it at the end of their interview, since the reverse could affect participants’ honesty about their relationships with friends, resulting from a fear of being judged.

While acknowledging that "standpoints are not individual and static but community-based and processual," this has been an iterative process that "aggregates partial perspectives" (Çağatay 2024; Sweet 2020, p. 928). Therefore, without homogenizing the experiences of survivors, I aim to utilize the "nondominant knowledge and its potential for theorizing power from the experience of everyday life" (Çağatay 2024; Sweet 2020, p. 928).

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis investigates how women and LGBTQ+ individuals in non-marital intimate relationships experience, interpret, and endure violence. It foregrounds the emotional, relational, and ethical complexities of endurance, forgiveness, and justice, while questioning normative frameworks that assume linear progressions from victimization to recognition and recovery. Rather than presenting survival as a straightforward path, the thesis emphasizes ambivalence, contradiction, and the narrative work through which participants make sense of their experiences.

In this thesis, I work with two concepts that appear repeatedly in survivors' narratives: forgiveness and endurance. At first glance, they may seem distinct: forgiveness often carries moral and emotional connotations of letting go, reconciliation, or release, while endurance refers to the act of continuing a relationship despite harm. Yet in the lived accounts I gathered, these categories often overlapped and blurred. Participants sometimes described staying in violent relationships as a form of forgiveness, even when they themselves questioned whether forgiveness had truly occurred. At other moments, they narrated endurance—remaining, tolerating, or holding on—without invoking forgiveness at all. Rather than treating these terms as interchangeable or fully separate, I approach them as entangled practices and discourses: forgiveness as a cultural and moral language that survivors sometimes used to name their choices, and endurance as a broader set of motivations and conditions that shaped their staying. Tracing how survivors moved between these categories allows me to examine not only what they endured, but also how they made sense of endurance through the moral vocabulary of forgiveness. By saying forgiveness and endurance entangled I build on the fact that narratives of participants who attended the study responding to two different ads, one with the wording of “continuing the relationship after violence” and one with “forgave their partner after violence”, did not differentiate according to ads.

The first chapter examines violence itself. It begins with participants' accounts of psychological, emotional, and physical harm, tracing the profound impacts on their mental health, relational trust, and sense of self. It explores the difficulty of naming partners' behaviors as violence—often occurring retrospectively and through engagement with feminist concepts, therapy, or activist spaces. This complicates dominant models such as the Cycle of Abuse, which presume recognition precedes endurance. The chapter situates these dynamics within feminist trauma theory (Judith Herman, Liz Kelly), cultural critiques of denial and normalization (Nicola Gavey, Jo Woodiwiss), and philosophical debates on forgiveness (Derrida, Griswold, Jankélévitch). It

closes with an analysis of how endurance, reconciliation, and self-forgiveness emerge as relational practices shaped by cultural and structural conditions.

The second chapter *Love, Intimacy and Reluctance to Leave* turns to love and intimacy as powerful forces that structure how participants understand and endure violence. This chapter analyzes how cultural narratives of romantic love shaped participants' decisions to continue their relationship. Such narratives includes the normalization of emotional harm, the ideal of the irreplaceable "one," or the having a romantic partner as a social capital. Here, I engage with Eva Illouz's work on the cultural scripting of love and suffering, bell hooks's redefinition of love as an ethic of mutual care, and Bourdieu's concept of social capital to explore how participants viewed relationships not only as emotional bonds but also as sources of symbolic legitimacy and value. I also incorporate Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism to understand how attachments to harmful partners were sustained by fantasies of transformation, and Audre Lorde's framing of the erotic as a site of power to consider what gets lost when intimacy is reduced to pain. Toward the end of the chapter, I explore how ambiguous relationship forms, such as situationships or relationships "without a nametag," disproportionately benefit men by granting them access to emotional and sexual intimacy without reciprocal commitment. Finally, I reflect on how concepts such as the mainstreaming of terminology around dating violence have not translated into better protective practices or more responsive support systems for the participants in this study, highlighting the limits of cultural visibility in addressing gendered harm.

The third chapter turns to the question of power, agency, and subjectivity. It examines how participants narrated endurance and forgiveness not merely as choices, but as acts embedded in social scripts of gender, sexuality, and responsibility. Drawing on theorists such as Butler, Ahmed, and Berlant, the chapter explores how participants negotiated ambivalence—sometimes positioning themselves as agents, other times as constrained by emotional, cultural, or material conditions. It also draws on participants' reflections about regret, self-forgiveness, and whether their younger selves could have acted otherwise, showing how subjectivity after violence is continually re-evaluated. Special attention is given to contradictions: how survivors could simultaneously resist and reproduce dominant gender norms, and how agency can manifest within vulnerability. The chapter also considers more relational understandings of subjectivity, shaped through feminist circles, friendships, and professional encounters. In this context, love, intimacy, and obligation are treated not as the central focus but as part of the broader landscape of relational power in which violence and endurance unfold.

The last chapter addresses justice, community, and meaning-making. It examines

how participants reflected on what justice could mean outside of courts and punitive frameworks. Their responses ranged from acknowledgment and apology to transformation of perpetrators and broader cultural change. The chapter engages with feminist critiques of carceral justice, restorative justice debates, and transformative justice models, showing both the risks and possibilities they hold for survivors of intimate partner violence. It also analyzes the role of friends, families, and therapists as sources of support—or silence—and how participants used narrative, activism, and community to resist stigma and build alternative ethical frameworks. Justice, in this sense, is approached as a relational and imaginative practice rather than a fixed institutional outcome.

Taken together, the chapters bring survivors' narratives into conversation with feminist philosophy, affect studies, and justice scholarship. The thesis as a whole contributes a multidimensional account of how violence is endured, narrated, and reinterpreted, offering new insights into agency, subjectivity, and the pursuit of justice in non-normative relational contexts.

2. VIOLENCE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND FORGIVENESS

In this chapter, I explore how intimate partner violence (IPV) can be defined, recognized, and theorized, and how these conceptual frames shape the visibility of survivors' experiences. My aim is twofold: first, to situate participants' accounts within wider feminist, sociological, and philosophical debates about the meaning of violence; and second, to show how the limits of existing frameworks often leave out the realities of those who do not conform to dominant social categories of gender, sexuality, and family.

The term IPV is widely used in international policy and research to describe harm within intimate relationships, encompassing physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Different strands of feminist research have highlighted that definitions of violence are not neutral but deeply political, reflecting cultural priorities and ideological struggles (Hearn 2013; Kelly 1988). What is counted as violence and what is excluded matters profoundly, because it determines whose suffering is recognized, whose voices are amplified, and which survivors are left outside institutional and cultural frameworks of care.

Mainstream discourses often equate violence with domestic violence, implicitly tied to the marital or cohabiting household. This framing risks obscuring the realities of individuals in non-marital, dating, or queer relationships, whose experiences are no less significant but less likely to be captured by existing categories (Koğacıoğlu 2004). At the same time, the privileging of physical harm over psychological, emotional, or symbolic forms of abuse creates hierarchies of violence, reinforcing the perception that some harms "count" more than others (Stark 2007). My participants' struggles to name gaslighting, humiliation, or coercive control as violence echo this tension, revealing how definitions shape recognition and response.

Another challenge arises in relation to gendered models of violence. Feminist frameworks that root IPV in patriarchal domination have been indispensable in exposing male violence against women. Yet, they can fall short in explaining violence in

same-sex relationships or abuse perpetrated by women, where dynamics of power do not map neatly onto heteronormative hierarchies (Donovan and Hester 2014). These gaps invite us to broaden our conceptual vocabulary, drawing on inclusive frameworks that acknowledge both the gendered structures of inequality and the diverse forms in which violence manifests.

This chapter therefore adopts IPV as a working term, while remaining attentive to its limits and exclusions. Rather than assuming a single theoretical lens, I place participants' accounts in dialogue with a range of perspectives—feminist, sociological, psychological, and philosophical—in order to show how violence is lived, named, and resisted in different relational contexts. The following sections begin by outlining theoretical debates on the nature of violence (Section 2.1, Section 2.2), before turning to participants' own accounts of experiencing abuse (Section 2.3) and the complex processes of naming violence and forgiveness in their narratives (Section 2.4).

2.1 Conceptualizing Violence

This study begins by situating participants' accounts within broader debates about how violence is defined and understood. The term intimate partner violence (IPV) is widely used in international policy and research to describe physical, sexual, and psychological harm inflicted within intimate relationships. However, as feminist scholars have long argued, the categories through which violence is defined are never neutral: they reflect social priorities, cultural norms, and political struggles (Hearn 2013; Kelly 1988).

Mainstream frameworks often treat violence against women as synonymous with domestic violence, a term that emphasizes the private sphere of marriage and cohabitation. This risks obscuring the experiences of those who are not married, cohabiting, or embedded in heteronormative family structures, such as queer individuals or partners in dating relationships. As Koğacioğlu (2004) notes, the “family frame” can both bring attention to violence and simultaneously erase cases that fall outside of its scope. In Turkey, where the most widely cited data is still derived from the 2015 Hacettepe University survey on domestic violence against women, this slippage in terminology has real consequences for visibility and intervention (Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies 2015).

Feminist critiques also highlight that the emphasis on physical injury as the most recognizable form of harm creates a hierarchy of violence. Psychological abuse such as gaslighting, humiliation, threats, and isolation often remains under-acknowledged,

despite extensive evidence of their long-term harm (Overstreet and Quinn 2013; Stark 2007). Participants in this study repeatedly described struggling to name such experiences as violence, echoing Ahmed's (2014) claim that naming is a transformative act that disrupts denial and creates new political and personal possibilities.

Another challenge arises in relation to same-sex relationships and male survivors of female-perpetrated abuse. Gender-based violence frameworks, rooted in patriarchal power critiques, have been indispensable for understanding structural inequalities and the disproportionate impact of violence on women. Yet they are less equipped to address cases where violence occurs outside heteronormative gender arrangements. As Donovan and Hester (2014) argue, the persistence of gendered models can inadvertently marginalize queer survivors, who may not see their experiences reflected in dominant narratives.

This chapter therefore, adopts the language of intimate partner violence while remaining attentive to its limitations. Rather than presuming a single model of power or harm, it draws on participants' narratives to illustrate how violence was experienced, endured, and, at times, normalized. At the same time, it places these accounts in dialogue with feminist theory, which insists on the necessity of broadening our conceptual tools to capture the complexities of violence across gendered, sexual, and relational differences. In the sections that follow, I first examine the theoretical perspectives on the nature of violence (Section 2.2), before turning to participants' accounts of experiencing it (Section 2.3) and naming violence (Section 2.4)

2.2 The Nature of Violence: Different Perspectives

Understanding violence in intimate relationships requires an engagement with a diverse set of theoretical and philosophical perspectives. No single theory fully captures the complexity of intimate partner violence (IPV), yet each sheds light on different aspects of how violence emerges, is sustained, and is normalized. Building on feminist scholarship, this section also integrates sociological and psychological perspectives, as well as more recent inclusive frameworks that attempt to account for violence in same-sex and queer relationships (Lopez 2015). It further draws on philosophical and critical theory, which foreground questions of visibility, recognition, and the systemic embedding of violence within broader social structures.

Early sociological work framed IPV under the broader category of family violence. From this perspective, conflict is seen as inevitable in family life, with violence understood as one possible, though harmful, strategy for managing conflict (Gelles and

Straus 1979). Systems theory (1973) similarly views violence not as an exception but as part of recurring family dynamics, shaped by the response families give to violent behavior. In this view, violence is a learned and reinforced behavior rather than an individual pathology. Dutton's (2006) ecological theory extends this by situating violence within multiple layers of context, from cultural norms (macrosystem), to community structures (exosystem), to the immediate family (microsystem), and finally to individual traits (ontogenic factors). Each layer interacts to shape the likelihood of violence occurring.

Social exchange theory further suggests that violence arises when the perceived rewards outweigh the risks. Where reporting mechanisms are weak or stigma silences survivors, aggressors may perceive little cost in using violence (Gelles and Straus 1988). Similarly, resource theory views violence as one resource among others, such as money or social capital, used to manage conflict. Individuals with fewer resources may rely more heavily on violence as a means of asserting control (Goode 1971).

These perspectives, while valuable in underscoring structural and situational contexts, have been criticized for downplaying issues of power and gender. By conceptualizing violence as merely another conflict management strategy, they risk minimizing the intentionality and asymmetry that often characterize abuse.

Feminist theory reframed IPV as fundamentally rooted in gendered power relations. Seminal works such as Dobash and Dobash (1979) positioned "wife abuse" as a manifestation of patriarchal structures that legitimize male dominance. Violence is thus not incidental but a key mechanism through which gender inequality is reproduced. This framework has been critical in drawing attention to the disproportionate victimization of women and the social norms that excuse or trivialize such abuse.

At the same time, feminist approaches have faced critiques for their limited scope. Their central contribution has been to explain male-to-female violence within patriarchal contexts, and in this respect they have been enormously valuable in showing how gendered power relations produce and sustain IPV. Yet precisely because they are tailored to account for this specific form of violence, they are less able to explain other instances, such as female-perpetrated abuse, male survivors, or violence in same-sex relationships (Donovan and Hester 2014; Lopez 2015). While gender remains central to understanding IPV, relying exclusively on patriarchal domination as the explanatory frame can obscure other dynamics, including psychological, relational, and structural factors.

Beyond empirical theories, critical thinkers have interrogated the meaning and function of violence itself. Foucault (1978; 1990) situates violence within wider regimes of power and discipline, suggesting that intimate violence is not merely personal but

part of broader technologies of control and normalization. This is useful because it allows us to see IPV not as an isolated pathology but as embedded in the very systems that govern everyday life. Walter Benjamin (1921/1996) distinguishes between law-making and law-preserving violence, a paradox that resonates with feminist critiques of how legal responses to IPV often reproduce domination; here the law that promises protection can also serve as a means of reinforcing hierarchies (Benjamin 1996).

Žižek (2008) differentiates subjective violence (visible acts of harm) from structural and symbolic violence, the background conditions of inequality and exclusion. This distinction underscores how IPV must be read both as an interpersonal act and as an expression of systemic forces such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, and economic precarity. Butler's (2004; 2009) reflections on vulnerability and precarity push this further, showing how relational dependence, inescapable in intimate life, can be exploited, turning shared vulnerability into domination. Finally, Bourdieu's (2001) notion of symbolic violence clarifies why survivors may struggle to name abuse as violence: because cultural norms misrecognize domination as legitimate. Taken together, these thinkers do not provide a direct theory of IPV but broaden the conceptual field, reminding us that what looks like a private event is shaped by larger logics of power, law, and recognition.

These perspectives remind us that IPV is not only about discrete acts but also about how harm is made visible or invisible, recognized or misrecognized, within broader regimes of knowledge and power.

More recent work has sought to broaden the lens beyond heteronormative models. Research on same-sex IPV shows patterns that both mirror and diverge from heterosexual contexts. For example, the widely cited cycle of abuse (Walker 1979), tension-building, acute battering, and reconciliation, has been observed across both heterosexual and same-sex relationships (Burke and Owen 2006). Yet the applicability of this model is debated: while it helps explain recurring escalation and temporary reconciliation, critics argue that it oversimplifies survivors' experiences and underestimates their agency (Dutton and Goodman 2005; Ferraro 1997; Loseke, Gelles, and Cavanaugh 2005). Ferraro (1997) argues that the cycle of abuse model treats survivors as passive, overlooking the ways they actively negotiate, resist, and endure violence within constrained circumstances. She highlights that women's decisions to stay, leave, or return are often shaped by complex calculations rather than an inevitable cycle. Dutton and Goodman (2005) similarly critique the model for assuming uniformity, noting that it reduces varied experiences of abuse into a repetitive script that erases context. They emphasize instead a "coercive control" framework, which centers the strategic, ongoing domination exercised by abusers

beyond physical episodes. Loseke et al. (2005) point out that the cycle metaphor is too rigid to capture the fluidity of real relationships, where reconciliation may not follow violence, or where psychological abuse is continuous rather than episodic. Together, these critiques underline that while the cycle of abuse may resonate with some survivors, it risks oversimplifying and misrepresenting the lived realities of many others.

Integrated theories attempt to combine structural, relational, and psychological dimensions. Ehrensaft (2008), for instance, links IPV to developmental histories, suggesting that individuals from aggressive families may gravitate toward similarly violent partners, perpetuating cycles across generations. Meyer's (2003) minority stress model highlights how stigma and discrimination create unique vulnerabilities for sexual and gender minorities. Stressors such as homophobia, internalized shame, and social exclusion can both exacerbate violence and make it harder for survivors to seek help (Balsam 2001; Bryant and Demian 1994).

Such frameworks illustrate that IPV is not a monolithic phenomenon. It emerges through the interplay of structural inequalities, interpersonal dynamics, and broader cultural discourses. As Lopez (2015) emphasizes, the task is not to find one overarching theory but to bring multiple perspectives into dialogue, acknowledging their respective strengths and blind spots. Taken together, these theories reveal tensions between universalist and particularist accounts. Family violence and systems theories emphasize recurrence and structural reinforcement, but risk normalizing abuse. Feminist theories foreground patriarchy, but struggle with inclusivity. Cycle models help explain patterns, but flatten complexity. Minority stress and integrated models expand inclusivity, but may overgeneralize minority experiences. Philosophical accounts, meanwhile, interrogate the very visibility, legitimacy, and systemic embedding of violence.

In this study, I engage with these perspectives critically. Rather than privileging one explanatory model, I use them as heuristic tools to contextualize participants' narratives. This allows space for accounts that fit certain models while also recognizing when lived experiences resist theoretical neatness. Violence, as participants show, is both patterned and unpredictable, socially structured yet personally navigated.

2.3 Experiencing Violence: Participants' Accounts

In order to allow participants to proceed at their own pace, I began by asking basic demographic questions and what motivated them to take part in the study. I then

said, “You know the research topic. I want to give the ground to you first. You can start however and from wherever you want. Later on I will ask questions.” This approach was intended to create a safe space where participants could share as much of their experience as they felt comfortable with, while also making it clear that I was not positioning myself as an authority in interpreting or labeling their experiences. In addition, this method highlighted how participants themselves narrate violence, where they begin, what details they stress, and what they omit. The very length of their initial narratives indicated levels of comfort and how much prior reflection they had dedicated to constructing their stories.

Participants described intimate partner violence in multiple forms: physical (forced retention, battering), psychological (manipulation, gaslighting, cheating, lying, threats of self-harm, belittling, humiliation, swearing, ghosting, stonewalling, silent treatment), sexual, and what one participant called biological violence, being pressured to meet despite knowing a partner might be infected with coronavirus. These wide-ranging accounts align with feminist conceptualizations of violence as not only physical but also psychological, relational, and embodied (Kelly 1988).

A recurrent theme was the hierarchy of violence. Several participants explicitly distinguished their experiences from “serious” violence, assuring me they had not faced physical harm, as though psychological abuse might be insufficient. Beyza explained: “I haven’t experienced any physical violence. But [I wanted to participate] because I thought it was psychologically violent in a few relationships.” Doğa echoed: “There was never any physical violence. That’s a very clear line of mine... But looking back now, I see that the psychological violence involved was actually quite significant.” These statements reflect how cultural hierarchies normalize psychological harm as less real, despite feminist scholarship (Stark 2007) showing coercive control to be profoundly damaging. Because such harms often lack clear markers like bruises, they are harder for survivors to recognize (Overstreet and Quinn 2013).

Most participants reported that, while in the relationship, they did not initially name their experiences as violence. Deniz recalled: “In the first year, I hadn’t realized these were abuses yet. It felt like, ‘How much does she care!’ ... Later I realized, ‘She actually uses everything I say against me constantly.’ Similarly, Şevval explained how her queerness and inexperience left her questioning whether she truly understood what relationships “should” look like. Beyza struggled even during our interviews: “I can’t look at myself and say 100%, ‘Yes, you’ve been subjected to psychological abuse.’ ... I couldn’t really name it, and sometimes even when I thought about things, I would dismiss them in my mind and try to move on.” As Ahmed (2014) argues, naming violence is not merely descriptive but transformative: it breaks through denial and reshapes one’s sense of self and relationship.

Denial was also evident. Mert described: “At first, there’s a denial... Because in your mind, one also refuses to demonize that person.” Yaren reflected on how her self-image as strong made it painful to admit abuse: “It’s hard to say, even to my closest friend: ‘I didn’t just say no and leave.’” For Damla, witnessing her father’s violence against her mother normalized mistreatment: “My mother also lived under constant physical and psychological abuse from my father. So, for example, it felt like that ‘this is what a man is.’” These reflections resonate with trauma theory, which identifies denial as a protective survival strategy (Herman 1992), and with Altınay and Arat’s (2007) data on intergenerational transmission of violence. Women beaten by their fathers reported nearly double the likelihood of later partner violence compared to those who were not, illustrating how normalization across generations shapes recognition.

Feminist trauma theorist Judith Herman emphasizes that trauma disrupts narrative and memory, making it difficult for survivors to name and integrate their experiences while the abuse is ongoing. In *Trauma and Recovery*, she argues that recognizing violence often occurs in the “reconnection” phase of healing, after survivors have established safety and support. At that point, survivors may begin to reassemble a coherent narrative of their past, which can bring delayed insights, anger, or grief that was inaccessible earlier (Herman 1992, 155-175). This delayed recognition was reflected in participants’ accounts, where naming often followed distance from the relationship and access to supportive spaces.

Liz Kelly (1988), in her foundational work *Surviving Sexual Violence*, makes a similar point. She shows that the process of “naming” an experience as violence, whether physical, emotional, or sexual, is often political and social, not merely psychological. Kelly introduces the idea of a “continuum of sexual violence,” arguing that many women only begin to see their experiences as part of this continuum after encountering feminist ideas or support networks. This resonates deeply with several participants in my study, who described themselves as forgiving their partners at the time, often attributing the abuse to external stressors or to themselves, and only later, sometimes years after, identifying it as violence when they gained access to new political language or social validation. Similarly, Nicola Gavey (2005) critiques what she calls “cultural scaffolding”, the broader ideologies of romance, femininity, and heterosexual normativity that prevent many women from interpreting coercion and abuse as such. In *Just Sex?*, Gavey argues that recognition is not a purely rational or immediate process, but is entangled with emotion, social expectations, and internalized gender roles. Survivors, especially those committed to feminist or egalitarian ideals, may struggle with intense cognitive dissonance, delaying recognition in order to preserve their sense of self or the ideal of romantic love. This dynamic

was especially visible among feminist-identified participants in my study, who later described their past forgiveness as premature, issued before they could even name the events accurately.

Finally, Jo Woodiwiss (2014) argues that the dominant cultural narratives surrounding victimhood and recovery often require survivors to fit their experiences into a linear script, one that begins with victimization, proceeds through recognition and disclosure, and concludes in healing or justice. In her view, this narrative structure can obscure the actual complexity of how survivors come to understand their past. Some, she notes, may not recognize themselves in the dominant “survivor script” at all, or may only identify with it retrospectively. Her critique helps clarify why the Cycle of Abuse, with its prescriptive and repetitive structure, cannot fully account for the kinds of nonlinear, delayed, and recursive narrative work that participants in this study engaged in.

Realization often came later, catalyzed by feminist literature, activist spaces, therapy, or friendships. Ezgi described: “I didn’t call it violence at the time. But then I saw something called dating violence on Twitter, researched it, and said, ‘Yeah.’ Then I volunteered at a women’s association...” Mert credited therapy and queer friendships: “Thanks to my therapist and my friends, I gradually realized that this was, in fact, psychological violence.” These narratives highlight how recognition is socially mediated: survivors drew on collective resources, echoing Cvetkovich’s (2003) argument that trauma is not only an individual experience but also a public, political one. Taken together, these feminist scholars provide a more nuanced and flexible framework for understanding how survivors come to name violence, and what that means for processes like forgiveness. Rather than being a natural endpoint to healing, or a moral achievement that follows recognition, forgiveness in this study often preceded recognition and had to be re-evaluated once the violence was fully understood. This finding underscores the importance of narrative and political context in shaping survivors’ interpretations of their own lives and cautions against relying too heavily on behavioral models like the Cycle of Abuse, which may miss these temporal and epistemic complexities.

The impacts of violence on body and mind were severe. The WHO (2013) emphasizes that prolonged stress restructures the hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex, impairing cognitive and emotional functioning. Campbell (2002) shows how repeated stress disrupts the nervous system, leaving survivors unable to cope with everyday life. Participants’ accounts mirrored these findings. Yaren described months of feeling like a “robot.” Asya recounted panic attacks that left her bedridden. Şevval recalled her brain “shutting down” mid-argument. These testimonies illustrate somatic survival strategies, dissociation, emotional numbing,

that trauma theory identifies as adaptive yet costly (van der Kolk 2014). Many participants had trouble talking about such experiences, even if for some a considerable amount of time has passed. Their narratives show how being subjected to violence is an all-encompassing experience one that transcends the limits of time and space, one that affect many relationships not just one.

Some participants reported harmful coping mechanisms: Substance abuse makes the individuals more prone to other violences as well, as Yaren's sexually engaging with people who she does not know or drinking until the point of not remembering shows how substance abuse is closely related with risky behavior. Yet others found healing through therapy, activism, and friendships. These pathways underscore bell hooks' arguments that recovery is relational and political, not simply individual (hooks 2000).

Psychological and neurological impacts are also enduring. Dillon et al. (2013) link IPV with depression, PTSD, and low self-worth, sometimes resurfacing years later. Golding (1999) finds that trauma is carried into subsequent relationships. Participants echoed this: Efe avoids conflict because of stonewalling, Yaren struggled with intimacy and turned to casual encounters, Şevval still feels unable to connect. These experiences highlight what Berlant (2011) calls the "slow death" of everyday trauma, ongoing diminishment of the capacity to flourish.

Taken together, these accounts illustrate how violence is experienced and recognized in nonlinear ways. Survivors navigated denial, normalization, and belated realizations; they carried embodied harms that reverberated long after relationships ended. At the same time, recognition and recovery were made possible through feminist ideas, activist communities, and supportive networks. These narratives reveal both the enduring harms of violence and the fragile, yet significant, resources through which survivors resist, heal, and remake their lives.

2.4 Temporality, Naming, and Forgiveness in Lived Narratives

From the very first interviews, it became clear that the temporality of intimate partner violence did not align with the linear sequence I had imagined. I had assumed there would be a "before" and "after", a period of harmony, interrupted by acts of violence, followed perhaps by a stage of forgiveness or departure. Yet several participants described relationships where violence was woven into the very fabric of their intimacy, present from the beginning rather than erupting as a later rupture. Deniz, for example, reflected on how she initially blamed herself for the escalation

of conflict, interpreting her own cheating as the trigger. Looking back, however, she realized that the distrust and aggression were embedded from the start: “I thought cheating had caused a lot of problems and that the violence I inflicted, the cheating, was the cause of all this, but when I look back now, I see that the dynamic of the relationship from the very beginning was built on a lack of trust and the resulting violence.”

This complicated the moral and emotional order I had expected around forgiveness. I thought forgiveness would appear at the end of a process: recognition of harm, confrontation, and then perhaps letting go. Instead, many participants narrated forgiving well before they even named what they experienced as violence. Several returned to their partners, not because remorse was expressed or change promised, but because they had already folded forgiveness into their understanding of endurance. In their words, forgiving was not necessarily a distinct act, but part of staying, continuing, or hoping for transformation. These accounts suggest that forgiveness was not a single, uniform practice, but a shifting and layered concept whose meanings and implications varied depending on context—sometimes overlapping with endurance, sometimes with reconciliation, and at times with resignation.

Damla, for instance, distinguished between what she called “true forgiveness” and what she had lived through: “Mine is actually a form of forgiveness, but we call it forgiveness, but I’ve tolerated this person. For forgiveness to occur, the person needs to be aware of what they’ve done, show a willingness to not do it again, make a promise, do something, etc. It doesn’t work that way. I’ve never had that experience with a man, anyway.” Here, forgiveness is named but immediately unsettled, pointing to how participants grappled with dominant narratives that surround their choices. Remaining in a violent relationship could be narrated as forgiveness, even when participants themselves recognized it as closer to endurance.

Other accounts spoke to the unfinished, fragile quality of these processes. Şevval explained that while she could forgive individual acts, she could not forgive the ongoing denial of her existence within the relationship: “In fact, you never fully forgive. Because from the beginning, that change, that transformation doesn’t happen... I forgave him for treating me badly on the phone that day, I forgave him for not inviting me anywhere, but I can’t forgive him for making me feel insecure all the time. Forgiveness was actually something superficial there.” In her story, forgiveness was not a singular resolution but an ongoing tension between what could be overlooked and what remained unforgivable.

For some, forgiveness came later, after separation, when life circumstances shifted. Mert described contacting his former partner years later to say he had forgiven him.

By then, he had stabilized his life, secured a job, and realized that the grievances he carried no longer defined him: “Forgiveness, for me, is such a... It’s a comprehensive word. Actually, for me, all my frustrations, resentments, my sadness, the injustices they did to me, etc., have ceased to affect me that much... I said, I can’t say if I’ve forgiven you %100. But at least I don’t want to carry this anymore.” Here, forgiveness was less about reconciliation and more about self-release, an act of unburdening himself from the residue of the past.

Similarly, Arjin reached out to her abusive ex-partner after the relationship had ended, at a time when she described herself as “forgiving everyone from the past.” Her decision was not about condoning what had happened, but about creating a sense of closure: “We’ve been through so much, and for a long time, I wished you terrible things. But right now, I’m in a very healthy and happy relationship. I just sent her a message like, ‘I don’t know, I think I can say I forgive you now.’” In this moment, forgiveness was narrated as a personal threshold crossed, even though she still longed for deeper acknowledgment and apology.

These accounts echo philosophical debates around the conditions of forgiveness. Charles Griswold (2007) describes paradigmatic forgiveness as dependent on acknowledgment, regret, commitment to change, and dialogue, conditions rarely met in participants’ narratives. In fact, what they called forgiveness was closer to endurance or reconciliation, driven less by perpetrators’ remorse than by hope, relational scripts, or the inability to leave. Derrida (2001) , by contrast, famously framed forgiveness as paradoxical, only meaningful when offered in the face of the unforgivable. Yet in the lived accounts here, forgiveness often had little to do with impossibility or ethical purity. Instead, it was entangled with cultural scripts of love, gender, and commitment, where staying, returning, or reconciliation (*barışmak*) became synonymous with forgiving.

Bahar explained this dynamic poignantly:

“Of course, there were times when I expected an apology, and there were times when I apologized, but no apology was given. [...] So how was this resolved? You have to forgive because when the other person doesn’t ask for forgiveness, you forgive automatically. So, you either let go or you’ll leave, since you can’t leave... That was very difficult, for example. It really was very difficult. It’s very difficult to forgive someone when they haven’t done anything. And I’ve experienced this many, many times. It was very manipulative. I mean, they’ll take you, convince you, and you’ll be the one to blame. That’s how it is.”⁴-Bahar

4. "Özür beklediğim tabi ki oluyordu özür dilediğim de oluyordu ama özür dilenmiyordu.[...] yani nasıl çözülüyordu peki affetmek zorunda kalıyorsun çünkü karşı taraf affedilemeyince kendilğinden affediyorsun yani bırak o zaman ya da bırakıp gideceksin bırakıp gidemediğine göre o çok

This temporality, forgiving before recognition, forgiving without apology, forgiving as a condition of staying, destabilizes the notion that forgiveness is a moral resolution reached after harm is named. Rather, participants narrated forgiveness as something that preceded, displaced, or even obstructed recognition of violence. They “forgave” partners without naming their experiences as abuse, sometimes years before reframing those acts as violence through new language, therapy, or feminist consciousness.

In this sense, forgiveness in participants’ lives was both an act and a discourse: it named their return to the relationship, but also reflected broader cultural expectations that to endure, to forgive. Charles Griswold (2007) frames forgiveness as conditional, requiring acknowledgment, regret, commitment to change, and dialogue, an ideal that many participants did not encounter. Jacques Derrida (2001), by contrast, views forgiveness as paradoxical, possible only when directed toward the unforgivable, detached from conditions. In light of these frameworks, participants’ practices, where forgiveness often meant staying, returning, or reconciliation (*barışmak*), both approximate these philosophical ideals and diverge from them. They reveal forgiveness less as a moral achievement than as a lived negotiation that unsettles the boundaries drawn by theory. What emerges is not forgiveness as a fixed moral category, but forgiveness as a lived negotiation, a way of making sense of ambivalent, recursive, and deeply social experiences of violence and intimacy.

Feminist theorists have long argued that normative frameworks often fail to capture the ambiguous and messy nature of lived experience, particularly in the context of intimate partner violence (Ahmed 2004; Brown 1995). What forgiveness “should” be philosophically often bears little resemblance to how it is in everyday life. Centering these lived experiences challenges dominant paradigms and invites a rethinking of both recognition and forgiveness as unfolding through nonlinear, often contradictory, emotional timelines.

2.5 Motivations and Conditions for Endurance

As the previous section showed, forgiveness often folded into endurance. But endurance extends beyond forgiveness, shaped not only by discourse but also by emotional, social, and structural pressures. To see this broader constellation, we turn

ağırdı mesela yani. Gerçekten o çok ağırdı. Birini hiçbir şey yapmamışken affetmek çok zor bir şey. Ve bunu çok çok kez yaşadım. Çok büyük bir manipülatifti ya. Yani sizi alır, ikna eder, siz suçlu duruma düşersiniz. Yani öyle."

to endurance as a category in its own right.

While forgiveness, as narrated by participants, often overlapped with staying or reconciling, it is important to distinguish between forgiveness as discourse and the broader set of motivations that shaped endurance in abusive relationships. Participants emphasized that remaining with a violent partner was rarely reducible to a single choice or to passivity. Instead, it emerged from a constellation of factors, emotional, social, cultural, and structural, that constrained and shaped their agency.

Emotional and psychological factors: For many, intense attachment and hope for change played a central role. Feelings of love, fear of loneliness, and a desire to preserve intimacy coexisted with harm. Psychological manipulation, such as gaslighting or stonewalling, also eroded participants' sense of autonomy, making endurance feel inevitable rather than chosen. I dive more into this category of factors in the "Love, Intimacy and Reluctance to Leave" chapter.

Social networks and support: Survivors' ability to endure or to leave was deeply influenced by the presence (or absence) of supportive networks. Some described friends or family members who normalized abuse or encouraged reconciliation, while others noted that isolation and secrecy left them without alternatives. For LGBTQ+ participants, fear of homophobic responses from families further limited options. Many participants received therapy although many of them after their experiences with IPV. I dive more into this category of factors in the "Narratives of Justice and Injustice" chapter, especially under the "Calls for Public Accountability, Community Accountability and Action" subsection.

Cultural scripts and gendered expectations: A recurring theme was the role of cultural discourses that equate love with sacrifice and position women, and sometimes queer partners, as responsible for maintaining relationships. Participants noted feeling pressure to forgive as a sign of maturity or femininity. Doğa for instance talked about how she always is the motherly (*anaç*) figure in her relationships which now she promises herself to not to do that anymore. The gendered expectation that women endure and that forgiveness is a virtue weighed heavily on decisions to stay. I dive more into this category of factors in the "Love, Intimacy and Reluctance to Leave" chapter.

Structural and material constraints. Practical conditions also shaped endurance. Threats of further violence, threats of outing or sharing nude pictures made leaving riskier than staying. Some participants framed endurance as a survival strategy rather than a failure to act.

Together, these factors illustrate how endurance cannot be understood solely as

a lack of will or agency. Instead, it emerges at the intersection of emotional attachment, social context, cultural norms, and structural pressures. Participants' accounts highlight endurance as a complex practice of navigating danger, desire, and constraint, one that complicates binary framings of victims as either weak or empowered.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has traced how participants narrated the experience of intimate partner violence, how they made sense of forgiveness, and how endurance emerged through overlapping emotional, social, cultural, and structural factors. A recurring thread across accounts was the difficulty of naming violence. As many feminist scholars have shown, recognition is never self-evident: psychological or emotional harm often lacks visible markers, making it harder for survivors to identify as "violence" what they endured. Several participants echoed this, describing how they once believed their experiences were "not serious enough" or "not the kind of violence the law recognizes" (Ergöçmen, Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, and Jansen 2013; Koğacıoğlu 2008). Naming was therefore a temporal and relational process—one that often came after decisions to stay, return, or even forgive had already been made.

Theorizations of violence provide useful, though not exhaustive, frameworks for contextualizing these narratives. Feminist perspectives have been central in identifying violence against women as a structural manifestation of patriarchy (Dobash and Dobash 1979). Yet as López (2015) and others have argued, these models risk being overextended when applied to same-sex relationships or to instances where women abuse men. Their contribution remains invaluable in locating IPV within broader systems of gendered power, but they cannot fully encompass the diverse forms violence takes. Foucault's account of violence as intertwined with disciplinary power and social control offers another lens, one that situates interpersonal harm within broader technologies of governance (Foucault 1977). In contrast, Benjamin's distinction between 'law-preserving' and 'law-making' violence (Benjamin 1978) opens questions about whether violence within intimate relationships reproduces social orders or creates ruptures within them. These conceptual frames help to highlight both the specificity and the systemic embeddedness of the violence described by participants.

Forgiveness, as participants used the term, often blurred into reconciliation (*barışmak*) or staying in the relationship, a stark contrast to philosophical traditions that

frame forgiveness as transcendent, unconditional, or a gift beyond calculation (Derrida 2001; Griswold 2007; Jankélévitch 2005). While a few participants—such as Mert, Deniz, and Asya—described forgiveness as an active choice for closure that even elicited apologies, most articulated it as endurance or as part of the cycle of making up and staying. This divergence underscores the need to think of forgiveness not as a singular moral act but as one among many strategies survivors mobilize to navigate danger, memory, and desire.

Endurance, then, cannot be reduced to passivity. It is a practice forged at the intersection of love, fear, cultural expectations, social silences, and material constraints. As participants' testimonies illustrate, enduring violence was often less about consent than about survival, less about forgiving than about navigating conditions of constraint. The complexity of these choices challenges binary representations of survivors as either powerless victims or autonomous agents. Instead, their stories highlight endurance as an ambivalent but meaningful negotiation with violence.

Taken together, these discussions show that to understand IPV, one must attend simultaneously to lived experience, cultural scripts, and theoretical frameworks. This chapter has situated participants' accounts in dialogue with feminist and philosophical theorizations of violence and forgiveness, while also critiquing the limits of dominant models such as the cycle of abuse. It sets the stage for the Narratives of Justice and Injustice chapter, which turns to questions of justice and explores how survivors imagine accountability, recognition, and repair beyond the frame of endurance.

3. LOVE, INTIMACY AND RELUCTANCE TO LEAVE

In the previous chapter, I have analyzed the motivations behind and the factors weighed into the participants' decisions to continue the relationship with their abusive partner or forgive them. Doing so revealed that the decision to forgive or get back together is not a singular temporal point, but a continuous negotiation of the upsides and downsides. Participants do not make a one-time decision where they can fully get behind, but make multiple ones where the decisions are not simply binary decisions of "to forgive or not" but more blurry, messy, and human ones where personal, social, and cultural factors come into play. One of the categories of participants' motivations and factors that affected their decision was the societal and cultural factors. Internalized ideals of love, relationships, and intimacy, as well as the conceptualizations of violence in intimate relationships, shaped how victims of IPV viewed their experience. In this chapter, I will focus on one of the most significant yet often overlooked factors, which is the narratives of love. Such narratives include:

- Normalization of harm, where participants described emotional pain not as abuse but as either expected or indicators of passion and depth, or intensity of love; and love as investment, where participants viewed their suffering as something that might eventually pay off (e.g., through marriage or personal growth).
- The myth of "the one," which led participants to stay in relationships out of fear of losing a singular, irreplaceable bond.
- Love as social capital, where being in a relationship conferred symbolic legitimacy or prestige.
- Situationships or relationships without a nametag

You know how they say everyone has that one crazy love in their life? For me, X was definitely that. I remember it clearly, because the moment I first saw him, I was like, "What is this?" Like wow... Actually, he kind

of looked like a bathroom slipper (laughs). But yeah, like no one really understood what I felt for him, but I was just... incredibly in love. For me, it was completely love, you know? I mean, I wonder if it also had something to do with his narcissism, like maybe that's what triggered my feelings for him? He saw himself like a god, especially when it came to music, and I've always really liked musicians—it's always been like that for me. And he really was talented, by the way. He could play anything he picked up. So of course, I was impressed. I mean, it was already something that generally affects me, and with him, it was even stronger.⁵ -Asya

3.1 Normalization of Harm: Pain as a Sign of Passion and Love as Investment

Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism offers a powerful lens through which to understand how participants came to normalize emotional harm within their romantic relationships. In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Berlant describes attachments to things that promise well-being or fulfillment, but in reality, prevent people from flourishing. These attachments are "cruel" not because people are unaware of the harm they cause, but because letting go of them would mean giving up deeply held fantasies about love, security, or identity. Many participants in this study expressed a similar dynamic: they did not always name their partner's behavior as abuse, but instead interpreted (or reported having done so in the past) emotional pain as either something normal and acceptable or as signs of a deep and passionate connection.

I mean, even though I wouldn't categorize it as physical violence, it was something that could've happened for me. It was both something I was okay with and something that could possibly happen. For example, I didn't really understand the sexual violence aspect — for me, it was more on the psychological side. But, like, being made to feel bad about his sexual performance. And then kind of being dehumanized because of that, like through certain dehumanizing acts. I actually experienced that.⁶ -Efe

5. "Herkesin hayatında böyle hani bir tane böyle o deli aşk olur derler ya. Benim için X kesinlikle oydu yani. Böyle hani şeyi hatırlıyorum çünkü hani çocuğun ilk gördüğüm anda böyle şey olmuşum. Yani bu neymiş ya falan ahh... aslında tuvalet terliğine haline benziyor (gülüyor). Ama yani hani böyle hiç kimse ona karşı olan şeyini anlamlandıramıyordu ama ben böyle inanılmaz. İşte çok aşkıttım. Benim için tamamen sevgiydi yani o? Böyle o yani onun biraz şeyle de alakası olabilir mi bilmiyorum hani onun o kendi narsisistliği benim de ona o şekilde sebep olmuş olabilir mi acaba diye hani? Kendini tanrı gibi görüyordu mesela özellikle müzik konusunda ve ben de müzisyenlerden hep çok hoşlanmıştım, hayatım boyunca hep öyleydi. Bu arada gerçekten yetenekliydi işte eline aldığı her şeyi çalardı falan böyle hani? Zaten etkileniyordum. Hani benim genel anlamda da çok etkilendiğim bir şey onda daha fazla vardı.

6. "Ama yani bir yandan da bu tarz bir şiddetin fiziksel boyutta görebileceğim bir şey olduğunu da biliyordum. Yani fiziksel şiddet olarak kategorize etmesem de bu olabilecek bir şeydi benim

Nehir's account does not explicitly romanticize the harm she experienced in the relationship; in fact, she reflects on a moment of rupture and agency, recalling how she broke the gift "to say enough." However, her language also points to how emotional volatility and romantic intensity were entangled in her understanding of the relationship. Describing the period as "love at full speed (*dolu dizgin aşk*)" and referring to it as a "quarrel, noise, spiral of love (*kavga, gürültü, aşk meşk sarmalı*)" suggests that the relationship was experienced not simply as violent or distressing, but as part of a highly charged emotional atmosphere. While this may not constitute a conscious justification of harm, the use of such vivid, poetic expressions reveals the extent to which cultural narratives of passionate love can normalize conflict and emotional turbulence, blurring the boundary between affection and abuse. Drawing on Lauren Berlant's (2011) work, this kind of framing can be understood as a form of cruel optimism: an attachment to a fantasy of meaningful, intense love that is sustained precisely through its dramatic highs and lows, even when it undermines one's well-being.

Was it maybe Valentine's Day or something? It was some kind of special occasion. He had prepared something special for me. But then, because of jealousy, he started such a big fight that everything inside the package he made for me got broken that day. I remember that. By the way, I was the one who broke it, not him. Just to say, "Enough already." And at the same time, our so-called passionate love was still going on. For some reason, I don't remember the good things as clearly anymore. But in short, this cycle of fighting, yelling, and love kept going on. Until, eventually, I couldn't take it anymore and broke up with him.⁷ -Nehir

Some participants reflected on how, at the time, they had normalized violence or emotional turbulence in romantic relationships. This normalization was rarely spontaneous; rather, it was rooted in long-standing socialization processes. Several participants pointed to the dynamics they had witnessed in their families growing up, either being subjected to or having witnessed violence, as forming their earliest understandings of what intimacy looks like. Asel, Nehir, Bahar, Ezgi and Damla shared their experiences of growing up in a house where domestic violence was

için. Hem okey olan bir şey hem de olması mümkün olan bir şeydi. Cinsel şiddet boyutunu mesela çok anlamamıştım benim için daha psikolojik şiddet noktasında falandı ama yani cinsel performansından kötü hissettirmek. Bunun üzerine bir nevi insanlıksızlaştırılmak, bir dehümanize edici hareketler işte mesela şey yaşamıştım."

7. "Mesela bir sevgililer günü müydü? Böyle özel bir gündü. Bana özel bir şey hazırlamıştı. Böyle bir kıskançlık sebebiyle öyle bir kavga çıkardı ki o hazırladığı paketin içindeki her şey kırıldı o gün. Onu hatırlıyorum. Ben kırdım bu arada, o değil yani. Yeter artık demek için. Böyle bir yandan da dolu dizgin işte aşkımız sözümona devam ediyordu. Niyeyse iyi şeyleri o kadar hatırlamıyorum eskisi kadar. Ama özetle yani bu kavga gürültü, işte aşk meşk sarmalı devam etti bir süre sonra ben dayanamayıp ayrıldım."

present; Beyza talked about being sexually abused a child. For them, the presence of shouting, jealousy, or control in a relationship was not necessarily read as abuse, but as a common or even expected feature of any relationship. Ezgi's realization that having been subjected to domestic abuse made her more vulnerable to intimate partner violence came only after her relationship ended with the abusive partner and a new partner comes:

I used to start fights in an unbelievable way in the first few months of the relationship. He was someone who didn't really make anything a problem — like, a pretty decent guy. But even then, I would pick fights constantly. And I realized... peace was such an unfamiliar space for me. Like, what do you mean we're not going to argue at all? That's how it was at home too. I'd get upset about something during the day, and by evening I'd feel like I had to start a fight. I knew it the whole day — that we'd fight that night. This happened a lot in the first six months or so. I just couldn't handle it back then. Can was a familiar space for me. Everything I saw at home — my dad controlling me, my brother controlling me — always fights and chaos. And Can was just like that. It was my comfort zone, I guess, and I couldn't get out of it.⁸ -Ezgi

This is not to say that people who have been subjected to or witnessed domestic violence growing up inevitably end up in abusive relationships. Altınay and Arat's (2007) nationally representative study, as also mentioned in the previous chapter, demonstrated the additive effect of such experience, however they also highlighted the fact that it is not destiny. Afterall, women who were beaten by their fathers during childhood reported a %48 rate of experiencing partner violence in adulthood, and women whose mothers were beaten by their fathers, %52 later experienced violence from their partners, meaning about %50 of women who experienced or witnessed violence earlier in life managed to free themselves from such a cycle.

Though it is worth pointing out that nearly all of the participants who have been through such an experience in their childhood home reflected on the effect of this on their experience of intimate partner violence. As Illouz (2007) argues, advice literature, in which psychology and psychiatry take the lead, has played a central role in forming the language through which individuals come to understand themselves, often asserting their authority through the medium of advice and self-help

8. "İnanılmaz bir şekilde kavga çıkartan bir insandım ilişkinin birkaç ayı. Hiçbir şeyi problem etmeyen, gayet düzgün bir insan yani. Ona rağmen çok fazla kavga çıkarttığım bir alandı ve hani böyle şeyi fark ettim. Şu an hiç bilmediğim bir alan yani. Huzurlu olmak, nasıl yani hiç mi kavga etmeyeceğiz? Evde hep böyleydim yani. Gündüzden bir şeye kurulup akşam kavga etmeliyim diye. Bütün gün biliyordum mesela akşam kavga edeceğimi. Çok fazla oluyordu bu ilk altı ay falan. Şey yapamadım yani üstesinden gelememiştım o dönem. Can bildiğim bir alandı yani. Kimden ne görüyorsam evde. Babam kısıtlıyor, abim kısıtlıyor. Kavga kıyamet. Can da öyle hani. O konfor alanıydı yani bence benim için ve çıkamadım içinden."

discourse. This has allowed psychological vocabulary to permeate the ways individuals frame personal experiences, including those related to intimate relationships and violence. This is evident in how my participants reflect on their experiences with intimate partner violence: many draw on therapeutic language to make sense of abuse, trauma, and healing. The fact that nearly all of the participants have, at some point, engaged in psychotherapy in their lives further demonstrates how psychological discourse has become embedded in the cultural frameworks through which people understand and narrate intimate harm.

While participants rarely explicitly referenced cultural media, it is important to consider how broader cultural narratives about love, circulating through television dramas, popular music, and films, may implicitly shape expectations and experiences in intimate relationships. These forms of media often depict love as inherently dramatic, emotionally intense, and marked by suffering. Within such narratives, enduring pain or overcoming hardship is portrayed not as a warning sign but as proof of commitment or emotional depth. Eva Illouz (2007) argues that emotional life in modernity has been profoundly shaped by the cultural industries, which provide individuals with scripts and vocabularies to make sense of their inner lives and relationships. In this sense, even when not consciously acknowledged, these mediated cultural frameworks likely inform how individuals interpret and respond to harmful or violent dynamics in intimate partnerships, normalizing suffering as an expected or even necessary component of "true" love.

I didn't really label it as violence at the time, because when I thought about it later, it felt like this was the kind of relationship logic we were already taught. I mean, maybe this will sound like a funny example, but one time during Ramadan, my mom went to see Nihat Hatipoğlu speak, and my dad started this huge fight at home — he was jealous of Nihat Hatipoğlu. It turned into a whole scene, like "Why don't you go marry him then?" That kind of fight. Then there were the TV shows we watched, the things we saw on social media — they all made it seem like that's just how relationships are supposed to be. And back then, a lot of my friends at the foundation were also in relationships where their boyfriends were controlling. I used to criticize them a lot before I had a boyfriend. But then slowly, it started to feel like this was just normal.⁹
-Ezgi

9. "Şiddet olarak şey yapmıyordum çünkü biraz bunu da sonradan düşündüğümde sanki bize zaten öğretilen ilişkin mantığı bu gibi bir şey. Yani bir komik bir örnek olacak belki ama benim annem Ramazan ayında Nihat Hatipoğlu dinlemeye gitti diye babam evde kavga, kıyamet yapıp Nihat Hatipoğlu'ndan kışkandı annemi. Yani git o zaman onunla evlen'e kadar giden bir kavgaydı. Sonra izlediğimiz diziler, sosyal medyada gördüğümüz şeyler. Sanki zaten bir ilişki böyle olmalı gibi. O dönem vakıftaki bir sürü arkadaşım da sevgilisi tarafından kısıtlanan insanlardı. Onları çok eleştiriyordum zaten o dönem sevgilim olmadan önce. Sonra sanki normali buymuş gibi gelmeye başladı yani."

If I were to go through even just one of the fights we had back then, I wouldn't be able to stay in that relationship today. I think it was incredibly heavy. Like, for example — being sworn at? Right now, that feels like such a huge thing to me. And I wonder how I ever normalized it. Now, even if there's just a moment of raised voices between me and my current partner, we both feel it immediately. Like, "Wait a minute," you know? I'd become so used to the shouting, the screaming — and now I keep having to remind myself that it's not normal.¹⁰-Deniz

Feminist scholars have long challenged the romanticization of pain and suffering in intimate relationships. bell hooks (2000), for instance, critiques dominant cultural narratives that equate love with sacrifice, endurance, and emotional turmoil. She argues that such beliefs distort our understanding of love by normalizing pain as a necessary or even desirable sign of emotional depth. In *All About Love*, hooks insists that "love and abuse cannot coexist" (2000, p. 6), directly opposing the idea that suffering is indicative of passion or commitment. When love is framed as something that must be earned through pain, individuals—particularly women—may be more likely to tolerate or rationalize abuse. This perspective is crucial for understanding how broader gendered ideologies intersect with cultural media and psychological discourse to shape personal expectations and justifications around intimacy and harm.

Rather than locating trauma solely in extraordinary or pathological events, Cvetkovich (2003) draws attention to its everyday textures and its circulation through cultural narratives, especially in the lives of women, queer people, and marginalized communities. Her work allows us to see how cultural forms—such as love stories, music, or self-help discourse—archive and transmit emotional templates through which individuals come to understand their own pain. Many participants in this study made sense of their experience retroactively, through language of therapy or emotional scripts they encountered in broader culture. Cvetkovich's argument helps explain how such scripts are not only internalized but also lived, shaping what kinds of suffering are recognized, remembered, or even romanticized. In this sense, trauma becomes not just a private wound but a narrative resource that people draw on to frame their relationship histories, sometimes reinforcing, and sometimes resisting, the idea that love must involve endurance or pain.

Sara Ahmed's theory of emotion provides an essential framework for understanding

10. "Şu an, ettiğimiz kavgalardan sadece bir tanesini etsem ben devam edemem o ilişkiye yani çok ağır bir şey olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bir yandan hani küfür edilmesi mesela hani? Bu benim için şu an mesela böyle hani dev bir şey gibi geliyor ve nasıl normalleştirmişim diye düşünüyorum. Şu an mesela şu anki partnerimle bir ses yükselmesi anında bile şey hissediyoruz ikimiz de. Yani o bir dakika falan hani ve hani o bağır çağır şeylere çok alışmışım ben ve bunun normal olmadığını tekrar tekrar hatırlatıyorum yani kendime."

how love and suffering become entangled within systems of power. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004) and *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Ahmed does not treat emotions as private states but as relational and directional. They “stick” to objects, circulate between bodies, and shape the contours of social life. Love becomes a “happy object”: a promise of fulfillment that orients individuals toward certain life paths, even when those paths involve pain or subjugation. In the context of intimate partner violence, this framing is particularly resonant. Women and LGBTQ+ people may stay in harmful relationships not only because of emotional attachment, but because love has been socially positioned as the ultimate source of happiness, a promise worth suffering for.

Although participants did not necessarily say that they viewed their romantic relationship as an investment that will pay off in the future, some mentioned the possibility of marriage as a factor when constantly making decisions not to leave the relationship.

What kind of factors influenced me? Do you mean what I thought back then, or what I think now? (You can share both.) Back then, I didn’t want to give up. I loved him a lot. I believed things would get better. I really thought it would all fall into place eventually. Other than that... you know, the idea of living together — and by that I mean things like marriage, spending a lifetime together, all that — it sounded nice. I didn’t want to let that go.- Bahar ¹¹

The second one was someone I could actually call a real boyfriend — but still confusing. Because he was incredibly supportive. I knew his family, he met mine. There was this sense of thinking seriously about the relationship. In my third relationship too, he introduced me to his mom, to his friends. The fact that my family didn’t approve of him was a big trigger for him. But by that point, I could see it clearly: this was psychological violence. It wasn’t good for me. And still — I stayed.-Aysel ¹²

Continuing from Berlant’s cruel optimism, I noticed that participants who reported marriage possibility as a factor also mentioned their hope for things to get better as

11. “Ne gibi faktörler etkiledi? Yani o an düşündüğüm ilişki içerisindekini mi söyleyeyim şu an gerçekte? (İkisini de söyleyebilirsiniz.) O zamanlar vazgeçmek istemiyordum. Çok seviyordum, düzeleceğine inanıyordum. Yani yoluna gireceğine inanıyordum. Onun haricinde... ..hani beraber yaşamak, hani beraber yaşamak dediğim hani... ..evlilik bilmem nedir bir ömür geçirelim vesaire falan filan hani güzel... ..bırakmak istemiyordum.”

12. “İkincisi tam bir hani gerçekten sevgili diyebileceğim ama yine kafa karıştıran. Çünkü acayip destekçiydi. İşte ailesini tanıyordum, ailemle tanıştı. Hani bir ciddi düşünme gibi bir şey de vardı. Üçüncü ilişkimde de beni annesiyle tanıştırdı, arkadaşlarıyla tanıştırdı. Ailemin onu istememesi çok böyle tetikleyici olmuştu onun için ama orada çok net görüyordum artık yani. Bu bir psikolojik şiddet, bana iyi gelmiyor. Buna rağmen kaldım.”

their motivation to stay in the relationship. In a sense, they hold on to a fantasy that they think might happen if they endure the hardships of the relationship. Much like Berlant, bell hooks (2000) also critiques this tendency, cautioning against loving others for who they might one day be, rather than engaging with the reality of how they love now. This reminded me of the report Havle Women's Association prepared in 2022, "Family in Turkey: Dreams and Truth (*Türkiye'de Aile: Hayaller ve Gerçekler*)" in which women were talking about the idea of marriage as a desire that fails to be fulfilled but they continue to invest in it. "Women need and desire a kind of closeness and connection where their emotions can be reciprocated. Even when they face disappointment, as long as they still have reasons to hold on, they keep rebuilding the concept of 'family' every day — to create, repair, and sustain that world called home. [...] The research shows that the family holds a central place in our society. Even though there are different definitions and approaches, it's clear that no policy can be shaped without taking the family into account. Ultimately, in Turkey, the family is a desire that, while beautiful to imagine, is difficult for women to actually live through." (Havle Women's Association 2022, p. 91-95) For instance, Bahar continues like this:

Maybe it'll get better. Like I said, it's better than yesterday. Last week... well, he asked me to go to the movies today. The hope that things will improve — that's all it is. Just hope. Nothing else. ¹³-Bahar

For queer participants, the marriage potential is a more distant possibility, though this does not mean participants do not long for a marriage-like romantic relationship that entails living together and stands for a long-term relationship rather than a casual one. Mert's account is a great example in the sense that it demonstrates both the higher position of the social value assigned to structured relationships and how the image of queer relationships affected his experience. Throughout the relationship, Mert stated, he wanted to 'be official' in the sense that they would be boyfriends rather than people who occasionally see each other and have sex.

For about six months, even though we were doing all the things that come with being in a relationship, I kept getting this constant rejection or denial from the other side — insisting that it wasn't a relationship. And that was basically the core of the psychological violence, really. There was this refusal to put a label on it. A constant denial of what was clearly happening. Like, "I'm new to this country," "I'm not really ready for a relationship yet," that kind of thing. But at the same time,

13. "Belki düzelir. Yani dediğim gibi düne göre daha iyi. İşte geçen hafta ama işte hadi bakalım bugün sinemaya gidelim istedi. Düzeliyor umudu, umut yani. Başka bir şey değil"

we'd talk on the phone for three hours every day, end every call with "I love you." So yeah — it was a draining six months. And because he was the first person I saw real long-term potential with, I started approaching the whole thing from a bit of an obsessive place. I was constantly trying to be with someone who always had one foot out the door. And that created this obsession in me.[...] You know how in queer relationships, being able to sustain something long-term is often seen as a big deal? Like, "Wow, well done." Because it's seen as hard to maintain. I wanted to be able to say that to myself — "I did it." That constant hope. Like... "We have so much potential. This could go somewhere really beautiful. I'm graduating next year anyway. We could build a more independent life together." So I clung to that potential. The present moment alone wasn't enough for me — I kept imagining how beautiful the future could be, and that's what kept me in it. It became something like, "This will go on even longer, we'll keep building this, we're so connected, we can't let go of each other anymore." Yeah. Hope — and the desire to fulfill something in myself. That was a big part of it. [...] Six months felt like a really long time for me back then. Every month that passed surprised me. Like, "Wow, it's been three months. Four months." And we were still talking this much, still spending hours on the phone, on FaceTime. And on top of that — it was during the pandemic.¹⁴ -Mert

To be fair, it is perfectly reasonable for people to want to be in a clearly defined relationship, especially when one is harmed due to the ambiguous nature of the relationship.

14. "Bir 6 ay boyunca da böyle hani bir aslında oluşmuş bir ilişkinin bütün pratiklerini taşıyorken karşı taraftan sürekli bunun bir ilişki olmadığına dair bir red, inkar süreci yaşadım. Aslında genel olarak bu psikolojik şiddetin ana kabuğu da bu aslında. Mutlaka bir label eklemek istememe. Olanın dışında bir denial durumu var sürekli. Sürekli ben bu ülkede yeniyim, biraz daha hazır değilim ilişkiye gibi ama işte her telefonu günde 3 saat yapılan telefon konuşmasını "Seni seviyorum." diyerek kapatılan bir ilişki yaşıyoruz aynı zamanda falan. Böyle 6 ay boyunca yıpratıcı bir dönemdi ve benim ilk uzun dönem ilişki potansiyeli gördüğüm kişi olduğu için kendisi benim de biraz da aslında obsesif bir yerden yaklaştığım bir şeye dönüştü. Çünkü sürekli hani bir ayağa mutlaka dışarıda olan bir insanla beraber olmaya çalışıyorum. Bu da bende bir obsesyona yol açtı aslında [...] hani queer ilişkilerin uzun dönem yaşanması böyle her queer tarafından böyle "Helal olsun." şeklinde karşılanır ya, sürdürmesi zor algılanır. Onu başardım diyebilmek kendime. Sürekli bir umut. Böyle... [...] Bizim potansiyelimiz çok büyük. Bu buradan çok güzel yerlere gider. Ben zaten seneye mezun olacağım. Böyle çok daha bağımsız bir hayatımız olur beraber falan. Böyle bir... Bir potansiyele tutunmam. Hani o anın güzelliğinin üstüne aslında hani belki anın güzelliği tek başına yetmiyor ki ben geleceğin güzelliğini de düşünüyorum sürekli ve o geleceğe tutunma. Beni bu kadar aslında ilişkide tutmaya sebep oldu. Daha da uzar gider bu. Daha da şey yaparız, çok anlaştık, çok birbirimizin hayatına girdik, bırakamayız birbirimizi bence bu noktadan sonra artık falan dediğim bir şeye dönüştü. Aynen. Umut ve kendimi gerçekleştirme... ..hedefi, hevesi. Diyeyim. [...] Altı ay benim için çok uzun bir süreydi mesela o zamanlar. Her ay geçtiğinde şaşırıyordum. Oha üç ay oldu, oha dört ay oldu. Hala bu kadar sık konuşuyoruz, hala bu kadar uzun saatler telefonla geçiyor, FaceTime'da geçiyor. Bir de pandemi dönemindeyiz."

3.2 Myth of “The One”

Another powerful force that emerged in participants’ narratives was the enduring myth of “the one”, the belief in a singular, destined partner who embodies true love and emotional completeness. This cultural ideal, deeply embedded in romantic discourse, framed love as both rare and irreplaceable. Even when participants recognized harmful dynamics in their relationships, the fear of losing this unique connection often overrode their sense of risk or discomfort. The idea that “real” love must be fought for, preserved, or endured contributed to their willingness to stay, in the hope that temporary suffering would ultimately lead to lifelong fulfillment. In this way, the myth of “the one” reinforced both emotional investment and the normalization of harm, rendering even toxic relationships meaningful within a larger narrative of romantic destiny. For example Asya talked about how conceptualizing love as “once in a lifetime” affected her endurance of violence, in which she now says that what she called love was actually abuse.

It’s like... we believed we were the people for each other. And breaking up wasn’t really seen as an option — it felt like if we did, we’d be giving up on something really beautiful. There was this kind of unspoken, unwritten agreement between us, like “We’re almost meant to be.” There was a kind of love in that, I guess. Yeah, I think one of the key things was that we had created our own narrative. Like, “This is the person...” — because we were kind of each other’s first serious relationship, you know? Like our first real university-level relationship. We were discovering sexuality with each other, and all that came with it. So there was this whole romantic storyline we had — “It’s really the two of us. We are, or we’re going to be, something real.” And because of that, there was this sense of marriage very early on. So when it ended, it didn’t feel like a breakup — it felt more like a divorce. Like, “I have to give their stuff back now, we have to separate our lives. They’re no longer going to be the person I message every day,” and so on. That really had a big impact on me. ¹⁵ -Efe

Efe’s narrative is also revealing the effect of having experienced many things for the

15. “Yani işte birbirimiz için o kişiler olduğumuzu düşünüyorduk ve zaten ayrılmanın opsiyon olmadığı ayrılırsak çok güzel bir şeyden vazgeçmişiz gibi bir neredeyse olacaktı gibi bir anlaşıma vardı. Aramızda böyle konuşulmayan, söylenmeyen biraz yani aşk vardı bir nevi [...] Evet, ben bence en temel şeylerden biri kendimizce o anlatıyı oluşturmuştuk. Yani biz bu kişiyle... çünkü işte birbirimizin ilk ciddi ilişkisi tarzı bir şeyiz yani ilk üniversite seviyesi ilişkisi işte cinselliği birbirimizle keşfediyoruz falan bir şey anlatısı vardı. Yani romansal açıdan ve biz biz ikimiziz gerçekten falan olduk olacağız gibi bir yerden. O yüzden evlilik hissettiren bir yanı çok erken vardı. O yüzden evliliği bitirmekte daha boşanmak gibi hissettiriyor. Gerçekten yani. Eşyalarını vermem lazım, hayatlarımızı ayırmamız lazım. Her gün yazdığım kişi olmayacak orada falan. Bunlar bence çok etkiliydi.”

first time together and the struggle he had for giving up not only the relationship but an ideal they created, which was “They were meant to be together.”

3.3 Love as Social Capital

In addition to emotional longing, being in a romantic relationship conferred symbolic value, which could be understood as a form of social capital. For many participants, particularly women and LGBTQ+ individuals navigating heteronormative and patriarchal contexts, having a partner offered a sense of legitimacy, maturity, and belonging. A relationship was not just a private emotional bond but also a public signifier of worth, success, and stability. This symbolic function made it more difficult to leave harmful relationships, as the social prestige attached to being partnered could outweigh the cost of emotional pain. In this way, love operated not only as an emotional ideal but also as a social asset—something that enhanced one’s position in the eyes of others.

When participants talked about their motivations for staying in a relationship and the factors that influenced their decisions, they often mentioned that they could not be alone. Being alone here means not having a lover, that is, not being in a romantic relationship. Although participants described their belief that they could not be alone as an individual factor, I believe that it carries important signs of a sense of worth that can only be felt through a romantic relationship. For example, Bahar talks about her relationship as:

I couldn’t really tell — is the pain I’m in right now worse, or will it hurt more after I leave? The pain I feel when I’m alone has always seemed greater to me. Because I’m someone who has a problem with being alone. I’ve never really been alone in my life. I’ve always had boyfriends. I think that fear — the fear of being alone — was stronger than everything else, and that’s why I couldn’t leave.¹⁶ - Bahar

Many participants viewed their relationships as an addiction, similar to the narrative of not being able to be alone. Asel, a clinical psychologist, spoke about her motivations for staying in a relationship, using psychological terms:

Not wanting to be alone. Fear of being alone. But strangely, even when

16. “Bir de şeyi bilemiyordum yani şu an içinde bulunduğum acı mı daha çok yoksa ayrıldığımda[ki mi?], yalnız kaldığımdaki hep o acı bana daha büyük geldi. Çünkü yalnızlıkla problemi olan bir insanım. Hiç yalnız kalmadım hayatım boyunca. Her zaman erkek arkadaşlarım oldu. Ondan daha çok korktuğum için bırakamadım diye düşünüyorum.”

you're with those people, you're still lonely at some point. Just that someone, let's say, physically fill that chair across from you. There's someone there. Then there's "I want someone in my life, a relationship." So, when I could be at home watching a series on the weekend, or at worst, staring at the ceiling, I can't stay with that emptiness, I can't be [with] myself, preferring to go to my partner, stay with them, or go out together. It also made me think about whether there might be something like a dependent personality organization, a learning. And then there's the fact that everyone in society, my friends, is in a relationship. Will I be alone? It's already very difficult to find someone nowadays. To consider "It's a bit of a strange out there". And this is effective too, the question that changes over time as I live, "Am I going to look for a partner for sex?" Let there be a partner for regular sex. ¹⁷-Asel

However she is aware of the social pressure to have a relationship she feels by saying "everyone in society, my friends, is in a relationship. Will I be alone?." which points out to the social capital of having a romantic partner. The social organization of intimate life often positions romantic relationships as a source of social and symbolic capital. As Bourdieu (1986) theorizes, social capital comprises the resources one acquires through networks of recognition and affiliation. In this context, having a romantic partner grants cultural legitimacy. It signals maturity, normalcy, and success. Illouz (2012) expands on this by showing how love has become central to the formation of the modern self, functioning as a key marker of emotional development and social value. Being in a relationship is not just about personal fulfillment; it is a visible confirmation of having achieved a culturally desirable life stage. Brake's (2012) concept of amatonormativity captures how pervasive this ideal is, the assumption that everyone aspires to and thrives within a romantic dyad. Within such a system, being single or in a non-normative relationship form can feel like social failure. For many participants, the act of being in a relationship was itself meaningful, even when the relationship involved harm. It provided not only emotional attachment but also a form of protection from the stigma of being seen as incomplete, undesirable, or socially out of place.

17. "Yalnız kalmak istememe. Yalnız kalma korkusu. Ama garip bir şekilde o insanlarla birliktayken de bir noktada yalnızsınız. Sadece birisi gerçekten fiziksel olarak atıyorum şu karşınızdaki sandalyeyi dolduruyor. Orada biri var. Ondan sonra hayatımda biri olsun, işte ilişkim olsun. Yani hafta sonu evde bir dizi izleyebilecekken, en kötü tavana bakabilecekken o boşlukla kalamama, kendimde kalamama ve işte partnerimin yanına gitme, onda kalma, işte birlikte dışarı çıkmayı tercih etmem. Bir bağımlı kişilik örgütlenmesi, öğrentisi gibi bir şey olabilir mi hani diye de düşündürdü. E bir de toplumda işte hani herkesin bir ilişkisi var arkadaşlarım. Ben yalnız mı olacağım işte. Artık zaten birini bulmak çok zor. Dışarı çok tuhaf'ı düşünmek biraz. Şey de etkili işte. Zaman içinde yaşadıkça değişen. Cinsellik için partner mi arayacağım? Düzenli cinsellik için bir partnerim olsun işte"

3.4 Not so New Forms of Intimacy: Situationships or Relationships Without a Nametag

Five out of 15 participants in the study talked about their experience with unnamed relationships. Unnamed in the sense that they were not calling each other lovers (*sevgili*), but they engage in romantic and sexual intimacy. In such relationships, there is less convention on what is expected from each other, what is allowed or not.

It probably sounds like a really messed-up story, but yeah — he said, “We can’t be together because I care about you too much, and if we get closer, I’ll definitely lose you.” That sentence is basically the summary of the entire relationship. “If we get too close, I’ll lose you. So I’m going to keep you at a distance.” What he was really saying was: “I’m going to open doors for you in some areas, but in others, I’ll keep slamming them in your face. I’ll hide you from everyone.” “While I keep you close, I’ll also push you away. And you’ll never know where you’re safe within this relationship — where you are allowed to stand, what you’re allowed to want, what you’re allowed to ask for. You’ll never fully know.” And in all that uncertainty, my own confusion — the things I might want to ask for in the relationship but never found the space to express — that all kept leading to constant conflict. Because when we were alone, it was all “I love you,” all sweet words. “You’re the most important thing in my life.” He was always acting so emotional, so close — and I never doubted him in those moments. I really felt it. But then — when we were around other people, or when I suddenly wanted something from him, when I asked for more than what he was ready to give — it all changed. Suddenly, cold winds. The walls went up. It was like: “I’m not your boyfriend. You can’t ask for that. This is my boundary. You can’t cross it.”¹⁸ - Şevval

18. “Çok pislik bir anlatı sanırım ama yani şey oldu dedi ki “Biz seninle beraber olamayız çünkü ben sana çok değer veriyorum ve seninle daha yakınlaşırsak ben seni kesinlikle kaybedeceğim.” Bu aslında tüm ilişkinin özeti gibi bu cümle yani: “Seninle daha çok yakınlaşırsak ben seni kaybederim. O yüzden seni baya uzakta tutacağım. Sana herhangi bir şekilde bazı alanlarda çok fazla kapı açarken, bazı alanlarda kapıları sürekli yüzüne kapatacağım. Seni herkesten gizleyeceğim.” demek oluyor bu. “Seni yanımda tutarken aslında uzak uzağa da iteceğim ve sen hiçbir zaman o ilişkinin içinde nerede güvenli alandasın nerede değilsin, nelere hakkın var, nelere hakkın yok, neyi isteyebilirsin, neyi isteyemezsin? Bunları hiçbir zaman bilemeyeceksin.” demek istiyordu aslında bana. Tüm o belirsizlik içinde de benim bu belirsizlikten doğan birtakım kafa karışıklıklarım, birtakım belki ilişkinin içinde talep etmek isteyeceğim şeyleri ifade edebileceğim düzlemi bulamamam vesaire, sürekli çatışmalara neden oluyordu. Çünkü baş başayken işte “Seni seviyorum.”lar canımlar cicimler. İşte “Sen benim hayatımdaki en önemli şeysin”...Zaten çok duygusal davranıyor, çok yakın davranıyor ve ben ondan asla o an şüphelenmiyorum çünkü bana hissettiriyor. Gerçekten o hissediyorum ama başkalarının yanında ya da bir anda aklıma estiğinde, ben ondan bir şey fazla talep ettiğimde bir anda soğuk rüzgarlar esiyor. Duvarlar çekiliyor işte sen işte ben senin sevgilin değilim, sen bunu şey yapamazsın isteyemezsin şöyle bu benim sınırim, benim sınırima şey yapamazsın, aşamazsın.”

Şevval later on described the insistence to stay in this nature of the relationship by her partner as violence. She and her partner have a common friend group, and by his preference, Şevval and her partner did not disclose the fact that they are not just friends but share intimacy with the rest of the group. This bothered her, since this also meant that she was being isolated from the support mechanisms that could be there for her when he engaged in abusive behavior. She is very much aware of the fact that this reflects an asymmetry of power in the relationship:

It was a relationship. We just weren't naming it, because he resisted it — or, rather, because once we named it, he would lose some kind of power. And in the end, when we were nearly done anyway, he finally admitted it: 'Yes, this was a relationship.' That was the cycle, basically. I kept saying, this thing we're experiencing needs to have a name. Because I truly believed that if we were openly together and people around us knew, all of our problems would be solved. I really believed that. That's why I kept staying in it. That was the first time. And then, after a while — because we started fighting so much — we agreed that we needed some space. So we said we wouldn't see each other for a while... but in reality, we kept seeing each other. We kept talking. We still had mutual friends.¹⁹ - Şevval

Asya's experience is similar:

So when I got back, something started between us too — but I also knew he was with that girl. I knew he had done really awful things to her before. She was actually his ex from high school, and apparently, he had done the same thing to her back then. He was dating someone else, but that girl was still in his life. And then history repeated itself for them. We actually had a really good... [unclear word] — like, we always had fun together. We were really good friends. But when things started happening between us, I would react. I'd say, "You're with someone. You're in a relationship. And you're still coming to me. Don't do this — not for her, not for me. It's just not right." Whenever it got to that topic, we would start arguing or fighting. That went on for about a month, maybe two. Then in the end, I said, "I can't do this. Either it's me or her." And he chose her. [...] Then that next September, when school started again, we saw each other again, stayed in touch — but

19. "Bu bir ilişkiydi. Sadece adını koymuyoruz çünkü o buna direniyor ya da hani adını koyduğumuz zaman bir gücü kaybedecek elinden ve sonrasında zaten bunun bir ilişki olduğumu bitmeye çok yakınlaşmışken o da kabul etti. Evet, bu bir ilişkiydi diye bu şekilde yani hani genel olarak böyle bir döngü.[...]Sürekli işte ben artık hani diyorum ki bu yaşadığım şeyin bir ismi olması lazım ya hani bu şey değil çünkü şeye eminim biz gerçekten bir arada olursak etrafımızdaki insanlar bunu bilirse tüm sorunlarımız çözülecek. Ben buna inanıyordum. O yüzden sürekli orada durmaya devam ettim. O şeyin içinde ilk seferi oydu. Sonra bir süre sonra çok fazla kavga ettiğimiz için artık hani dedik ki yani hani biraz şeye ihtiyacımız var zamana. Bir süre görüşme...görüşmüyor gibi yaptık ama görüşmeye devam ediyorduk. Konuşmaya devam ediyorduk. Arkadaşlarımız ortaklı falan"

just as friends. Nothing more. Then he broke up with that girl — well, she broke up with him. And after she left him, he cried all night. And I was the one who stayed with him through the whole night while he cried. Tragic, right? (laughs) And from that moment on, things started again between us. But like... “started” how? I mean, we were “together,” and we’d sometimes hold hands in public, but if anyone asked, “Are you two dating?” the answer was always no. And whenever I thought he was talking to someone else, I’d get mad at him. And he’d say, “You can’t be mad at me. You’re not my girlfriend.” This went on for a while. His usual excuse was, “When I’m in a relationship, I cheat on my partner. I don’t want to do that to you. So let’s not put a label on this.” But that just meant he was always leaving the door open. And things just kept going like that.²⁰ -Asya

These types of relationships, which today are commonly called “situationships”, resemble other relational arrangements that have historically placed women and marginalized people in vulnerable positions. In the Turkish context, practices such as having a mistress (*metres*) or "*dost tutmak*" allowed men to maintain unofficial romantic or sexual relationships outside marriage, often without emotional accountability or social recognition for the women involved. These relationships, while emotionally significant, were typically hidden or dismissed, leaving the woman exposed to social stigma and devoid of legal or moral protection. Similar dynamics have existed globally: from colonial-era “temporary wives” to domestic workers coerced into relationships with male employers, and queer people trapped in secret relationships due to criminalization and social repression. Across these cases, we see a recurring pattern: one party enjoys intimacy or care without offering commitment, security, or recognition in return. These examples challenge the narrative that unlabeled or non-normative relationships are inherently liberating. Rather, as feminist thinkers

20. “Yani geri döndüğümde bizim aramızda da bir şey başladı ama kızla birlikte olduğunu da biliyordum. Kıza daha önce çok çirkin şeyler yaptığımı biliyorum. Kız eski sevgilisiydi aslında lisede aynısını ona da yapmış. Yani başkasıyla çıkıyormuş ama hayatında o kız varmış daha sonra tarih tekerrür etti onlar için. Aslında çok iyi bir ... (anlaşılmıyor?)’imiz var yani hani birlikte hep çok eğlendik. Çok iyi arkadaşık ama olay işte bu aramızdaki şeye geldiğinde ben tepki gösteriyordum çünkü diyordum ki jani hayatında birisi var, biriyle berabersin ve hani hala daha bana geliyorsun yapma yani hani ne onun için ne de. İyi değil. Konu buraya geldiğinde tartışmaya ya da kavga etmeye başlıyorduk ... böyle bir ay 2 ay devam etti bu sanırım bir ay devam etti. Ben en sonda dedim ki yok yani hani ben? Bir şey yapamam ya o ya ben. Sonra onu tercih etti[...]Sonra bir sonraki Eylül ayında okula geri başladık da yine görüştük ettik ama arkadaş olarak hani hiç fazlası bir şey yoktu. Sonra o kızıdan ayrıldı. Yani kız ondan ayrıldı. Kız ondan ayrıldıktan sonra bütün gece ağladı ve bütün gece ağlarken yanında ben vardım. Trajik(gülüyor). Sonra işte o saatten sonra bir birlikte ilk başladı önümüzde. Ama yani hani şey birliktelik. Birlikteyiz ya da işte ne bileyim dışarıdayken artık işte bazen el ele tutuşabiliyoruz ama hani biri bize bir şey sorduğunda çıkıyor musunuz? Diye cevabı her zaman hayır oluyor. Ve işte. Biriyle konuştuğunu düşündüğümde ona kızıyorum. Bana diyor ki, hani? Sen bana karışamazsın. Hani sen benim sevgilim değilsin? Bir süre bu şekilde Devam etti bu. Hep şey savunması vardı işte. Hani ben bir sevgilim olduğunda sevgilimi aldatıyorum. Sana onu yapmak istemiyorum. O yüzden bana böyle bir isim koymayalım. Ama yani hani? Açık bir kapı bırakmış oldu. Hep sürekli. Bu şekilde devam.”

like Audre Lorde remind us, the question is not whether a relationship resists tradition, but whether it reproduces asymmetries of power, care, and emotional labor under the guise of freedom or choice.

Although Audre Lorde did not theorize contemporary relationship forms such as situationships, her analysis of the erotic as a site of power offers a crucial lens through which to evaluate these emerging forms of intimacy. In *Uses of the Erotic* (1984), Lorde insists that true intimacy must be grounded in mutuality and the honoring of each person's inner power. Her distinction between the authentic erotic and pornography prompts us to ask vital questions about these non-normative relational forms, such as: Is this connection truly mutual, or is one person benefiting at the expense of the other? In this light, although some accounts are ready to read such relationships as liberated forms of intimacy, it may not necessarily represent freedom for women and LGBTQ+ people. If such relationships lack mutuality and equality of care, their fluidity must be approached critically.

For about six months, even though we were doing everything that made it feel like a real relationship, I kept facing constant denial from the other side — insisting that this wasn't a relationship. That was actually the core of the psychological violence. A refusal to put a label on it. A constant denial of what was actually happening.²¹ -Mert

Asel talks about how she was fine with not labeling the relationship at first but she ended up getting hurt:

In my last relationship — actually, I don't even call it a relationship anymore, I say "relation-ish." At first, it wasn't like, "Let's be boyfriend and girlfriend." It was more like, "Let's have a regular sex life, maybe go out sometimes, but there's no need to call it a relationship." I had reached a point where I could approach things like that. And he was like that too in the beginning — no need for labels, we're just hanging out, spending time. But later on, he'd say things like, "I've told my friends about you. We're a couple." And then not act that way at all — cheating, etc. I experienced all of that. Each time, I told myself, "No, I won't go back this time. This time will be different." At first, I remember it with anger — but then I forget it all again, just like that. ²²-Asel

21. "Bir 6 ay boyunca da böyle hani bir aslında oluşmuş bir ilişkinin bütün pratiklerini taşıyorken karşı taraftan sürekli bunun bir ilişki olmadığına dair bir red, inkar süreci yaşadım. Aslında genel olarak bu psikolojik şiddetin ana kabuğu da bu aslında. Mutlaka bir label eklemek istememe. Olanın dışında bir denial durumu var sürekli."

22. "Son ilişkimde de, artık ilişki de diyemiyorum da ilişik diyorum. Onda da... Başta artık daha şey böyle sevgili olalım falan değil. Tamam hani işte düzenli bir cinsel hayat olsun. Belki işte bir yerlere gideriz ama sevgili dememize de gerek yok. Ben artık öyle yaklaşabilen bir yere ulaştım. Karşımdaki hani başta böyleyken yani işte bir isim koymaya gerek yok. Takılıyoruz, vakit geçiriyoruz. O zaman içinde "Senden arkadaşlarıma da bahsettim. İşte biz sevgiliyiz." de çekme.

You know, we always said "I love you so much," "I love you" with great confidence. Every fight we had ended that way. I'd say, "I don't feel good about this." I can't feel safe in this regard. This isn't the kind of relationship I had in mind. When I call you my boyfriend... I feel shy, both within myself and around others. Because you're not someone who takes it personally. He was saying, "We're practically in that place anyway, but... let's not put it that way, I just moved here. I can leave at any time." He's been living in Turkey for three years, almost four years now. Even though he had the intention of living here, he didn't show me that intention. "Don't let me get carried away." He kept me at arm's length. We've only communicated this seriously three or four times in six months. ²³ -Mert

While the vocabulary of dating violence has become more widespread in recent years, the presence of this language did not necessarily enable greater resistance. Many participants knew the relatively new terms of dating violence, such as “gaslighting” or “stonewalling”, but still felt bound to the relationship. Participants often used concepts of “manipulation” or “emotional manipulation,” which have recently become more mainstream through the popular psychology media, self-help/advice industry, and feminist activism.

When I saw the word stonewalling, I immediately thought: “Yes — that’s what she’s doing to me. She does this to me every single time.” In every argument, every fight. And because I grew up with somewhat emotionally unstable parents, stonewalling became something incredibly hard for me to deal with. Most of the time, I had grown up thinking that affection and approval were things I could lose at any moment — things I always had to earn — so this tied back to my childhood trauma. In a way, she started becoming like my mom and dad in some aspects. Stonewalling is deeply damaging because it makes you dependent. You start depending on the other person’s approval, on them re-entering the conversation. Because without that, nothing goes back to normal. And you keep waiting for things to feel normal again. So stonewalling wasn’t something I could handle. I was aware of it. I realized really early on — like around the second month of the relationship — that what I was

Ve sonra hiç de öyle davranmama aldatılma vs. onları da yaşadım. Ve hepsinde de yok hayır bu sefer dönmeyeceğim, bu sefer farklı olacak derken en başta böyle çok öfkeyle hatırlarken sonrasını da unutuyorum bir anda mesela”

23. “Hani ben seni çok seviyorum, seni seviyorum her zaman büyük bir özgüvenle söylendi birbirimize. Her kavgamızın sonu da öyle bitiyordu. Ben diyordum, bu bana iyi gelmiyor. Ben güvende hissedemiyorum bu konuda. Aklımdaki ilişki türü bu değil. Ben sana boyfriendim dediğimde... ..kendi içimde, çevremde çekiniyorum. Çünkü sen bunun üstüne alınan bir insan değilsin. O da diyordu ki zaten... ..pratik olarak zaten öyle bir yerdeyiz ama... ..öyle demeyelim, ben buraya daha yeni taşındım. Her an gidebilirim. [...]Üç yıldır, hatta neredeyse dört yıl olacak Türkiye’de yaşıyor. Burada yaşamaya niyeti varken de o niyeti bana göstermiyordu."Aman kapılmasın bana." Sürekli bir kol mesafesinde uzakta tutma yaşıtıyordu bana. Bunun iletişimini 6 ay içerisinde belki ciddi bir şekilde 3-4 kere yapabilmişizdir.”

experiencing was abuse. And the relationship lasted about 12 months. [...] So it became a constant cycle of fighting — and trying to resolve those fights with stonewalling or silent treatment, or turning them into something even more complex. I felt manipulated through all of that — not in the sense that she was consciously trying to make me do things, but more like... I turned into someone else during that relationship. Someone who, on one hand, couldn't tolerate even the slightest raise in voice — and on the other hand, couldn't protect their own ground or boundaries at all. ²⁴ -Efe

I also turned into a toxic person while I was with him. And I became extremely toxic myself. ²⁵ -Ezgi

Though recognition does not, and for these participants did not, mean a sudden shift into equal relations. Knowing, or naming what they have been subjected to, now more than easily with the prevalent use of dating violence terms, did not equip participants with the tools that help them escape violence. Without significant shifts in the gendered power structures that continue to marginalize and subordinate women and LGBTQ+ people and without sufficient resources of social support, naming harm may remain insufficient. In the Narratives of Justice and Injustice chapter, I will focus on these support mechanisms and how participants conceptualize justice.

This chapter has demonstrated that love is not simply a backdrop to IPV but a structuring force in how violence is endured, rationalized, and even romanticized. Participants' narratives revealed how deeply cultural ideals of romantic love and coupledness are internalized, often at the cost of emotional well-being. The theoretical tools provided by Illouz, hooks, Berlant, and others illuminate how fantasies of transformation and cultural scripts of endurance perpetuate attachment to harmful

24. "Stonewalling'i orada görünce şey dedim. Evet, ben... bana bunu yapıyor. Bana her seferinde bunu yapıyor. Her tartışmada, her kavgada. Ve yani çocukluğumda da biraz emotionally unstable parent'larla büyüdüğüm için stonewalling beni çok zorlayan bir şey oldu ya. Çoğu zaman o onayın, o sevginin kaybedilebilecek bir şey olduğunu düşünerek büyüdüğüm için — sürekli hak etmem gereken bir şey gibi — çocukluk travmalarına da bağlandı biraz. Yani bir nevi annem babam olmaya başladı o kişi bazı yönlerden. Stonewalling çok sıkıntılı, çünkü bir nevi bağımlı hale getiriyor. Neredeyse karşıdaki insanın onayına bağımlı oluyorsun. Onun tekrar iletişime geçmesine bağımlı oluyorsun. Çünkü bir şeyler normale dönmüyor, o olmadan. Ve sen de sürekli o normale dönüşü bekliyorsun. O yüzden stonewalling benim baş edebildiğim bir şey olmadı. Farkındaydım. Çok erken fark ettim — ilişkinin ikinci ayında falan şiddet gördüğümün farkına varmıştım. Ve ilişki yaklaşık 12 ay sürdü.[...] O yüzden sürekli bir kavgaya girme hali, kavgaların stonewalling ya da silent treatment ile çözülme çabası, ya da daha da karmaşık hale gelmesi... Bu şekilde manipüle edildiğimi hissediyorum. Ama bu sanki onun beni bilinçli olarak manipüle etmesi değil de, ben o ilişki içinde başka birine dönüşmeye başladım. Özellikle şöyle birine: Bir yandan ses yükselmesine hiç tahammülü olmayan biri, ama öte yandan da kendi sınırlarını, zeminini hiç koruyamayan biri oldum."

25. Yani ben de onunlayken toksik bir insana dönüştüm. VE ben de çok ağır bir toksik oldum yani.

partners. The discussion of relationship ambiguity and the gendered asymmetries it enables further illustrates how power operates subtly within intimacy. Finally, the chapter underscores a disjuncture between increased cultural awareness of dating violence and the persistent gaps in actual protection, resources, and recognition, particularly for women and queer individuals.

4. POWER, LOVE, AND THE MAKING OF SUBJECTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how intimate partner violence (IPV) shapes not only experiences of harm and endurance but also the formation of subjectivity. Subjectivity here is approached not as a fixed identity or as a linear transition from victim to survivor, but as a dynamic, processual phenomenon that unfolds through embodied experience, memory, and storytelling. It is shaped within conditions of constraint while also opening to critique, resistance, and reconfiguration.

Love plays an important role in this discussion, not simply as an affective tie, but as a social and political construct that mediates power relations and sustains normative gender scripts. As feminist theorists have shown (Berlant 2011; hooks 2000; Illouz 2012), love functions as a technology of power: it can obscure asymmetries, justify endurance, and bind people to harmful attachments, while also serving as a language for self-making and resistance. Rather than positioning love as the central anchor, this chapter situates it within broader processes of power and subjectivity. Participants' narratives reveal how love intersects with violence and endurance, and how its invocation reconstitutes their sense of self in complex and sometimes contradictory ways.

Power, in turn, is understood not only as domination but also as relational and productive. Drawing on Butler (2005; 2017), Foucault (1978), and Das (2006) this chapter treats subjectivity as simultaneously crafted by hegemonic orders of truth and capable of remaking itself through critique, relational encounters, and acts of narration. Participants' accounts are therefore read not only for what they say explicitly about power or agency, but also for how they rework positions of self in the aftermath of violence, oscillating between constraint and possibility, silence and articulation, victimhood and survivorship.

The following sections trace these negotiations in participants' stories: how some

struggled to name power yet lived its effects; how love functioned as both duty and justification; how queer survivors navigated invisibility within dominant frameworks; and how subjectivity was reconstituted through solidarity, professional roles, and the act of telling. Subjectivity after violence emerges here not as a destination but as an ongoing process, fractured, shifting, and relational, yet always in the making.

4.2 Naming Power, or Not: The Trouble with Language

When asked directly whether continuing, returning to, or forgiving the relationship altered the balance of power, most participants did not explicitly articulate the dynamics in terms of “power.” Some offered concrete descriptions of events or emotional states, but rarely adopted the vocabulary of hierarchy or control. This absence was not, I suggest, a sign of irrelevance, but rather an effect of the discursive limits within which narratives are formed. As Judith Butler (2005) argues, accounts of the self are given through the norms that make such speech intelligible; what cannot be easily placed within familiar frames may remain unspoken or be translated into less politicized terms. One reason for this absence could also be the way that I asked the question itself: the phrase “power dynamics” may not trigger a response as readily as more everyday language would. Sara Ahmed (2017), in *Living a Feminist Life*, shows how feminist terms can be “foreign” in intimate spaces, making it difficult to name everyday experiences as political or as power-laden. Especially since such a question requires a critical evaluation of the whole relationship in retrospect, doing so on the spot may have been challenging. Similarly, Ann Phoenix (2008) reminds us that narratives are relational and audience-specific, shaped in part by what the speaker assumes will be meaningful to the listener. In my data, this could be seen in moments where participants softened descriptions of conflict, framed controlling behaviors as mutual compromises, or emphasized personal resilience over structural inequality, choices that may have been influenced by how they perceived me, the interviewer, and the context of the conversation.

In heterosexual relationships, the gendered dynamics of power, rooted in patriarchal social arrangements, can help explain why asymmetries may be normalized or rendered invisible to those living within them (Bourdieu 2001; Scott 1990). Patriarchy not only enables men to treat women badly and escape accountability, but also encourages, and at times traps, women into believing that enduring mistreatment is right, even necessary, for the promise of happiness. That happiness is often framed through the ideals of love and marriage. Even when participants did not explic-

itly name the connection between being a woman in a heterosexual relationship and power dynamics, their narratives were still deeply shaped by these gendered hierarchies. These asymmetries operate not only through overt acts of control but through what Pierre Bourdieu terms symbolic violence, in which domination is misrecognized as mutuality or “just the way things are.” At the same time, woman-to-man violence, represented in one participant’s account, complicates the assumption that gendered asymmetry always follows a male-to-female direction, reminding us that individual circumstances can invert or disrupt expected hierarchies. Yet this framework, while crucial, cannot fully account for the violence and power struggles observed in same-sex relationships. Here, Foucault’s (1978; 1980) understanding of power as relational, dispersed, and productive, as operating through networks of knowledge, desire, and discipline rather than a fixed hierarchy, offers a more encompassing lens. Same-sex intimate partner violence cannot be reduced to a mirror of heterosexual gender hierarchies; instead, it emerges through other axes of inequality, internalized social stigma, and interpersonal strategies of control that operate beyond binary gender norms.

The reluctance to name “power” explicitly may thus stem from multiple sources: a lack of familiarity with academic or feminist terminology (Ahmed 2017; hooks 1989), the emotional difficulty of confronting asymmetry in intimate life, or the normalization of unequal arrangements within cultural scripts about love and commitment. To speak of power in one’s own relationship may be to risk disrupting the narrative coherence of that relationship or one’s identity within it. In this sense, the absence of the word “power” does not indicate the absence of power relations; rather, it highlights the trouble with language itself, the way it both enables and constrains the telling of certain truths.

4.3 Gendered Experiences of Love and Violence

Among cisgender heterosexual women participants, gender shaped not only how violence was experienced, but also how forgiveness, return, or endurance were narrated. Their accounts often reflected the enduring influence of traditional femininity, in which love is bound up with emotional labour, caretaking, and the belief that sustaining the relationship is both a personal responsibility and a moral good. As one participant, Bengisu, reflected:

So, what I’ve been asking myself about these issues is this: Why do we continue to stay in this relationship? I mean, why is this... This is

actually a social thing. It's a learned social knowledge, a collective one. I think this way of relating is actually a learned, imposed knowledge. Its prevalence can make one think it's normal... Don't stay and stay in this place surrounded by so much violence. It's sado-masochistic.²⁶-Bengisu

Her words point to the way societal norms and the learned collectivity of relational knowledge can normalise endurance, even in the presence of sustained harm.

Another participant, Asel, described how early family dynamics and gendered expectations shaped her role in relationships:

When I was growing up, there was such tension and conflict between my sister and mother after the loss of my father... And that's what my partners wanted from me. Lady. I'm easy-going, quiet, calm... And that easy-going, giving nature of mine really benefited those more narcissistic partners. Because what they were looking for was a lot of empathy, a lot of guilt, a willingness to give, and a level head. So, they could fit their toxic things like a puzzle. ²⁷- Asel

Her narrative reveals how the culturally celebrated ideal of being a lady (*hanımefendi*), quiet, accommodating, and generous, can, in practice, create conditions where accepting mistreatment becomes normalized.

Similarly, Damla connected her endurance to early exposure to violence: "I come from a home where domestic abuse was prevalent... So, for example, I felt like what you call a man was something like that and I felt like I couldn't really handle the job of comforting and managing these men." Nehir, too, linked her expectations to her upbringing: "As if he were a different man than her. Or the house I grew up in... I mean... as if it was a house where this wasn't forgiven. They expected the opposite from me." Nehir, too, linked her expectations to her upbringing: "As if he were a different man than her. Or the house I grew up in... I mean... as if it was a house where this wasn't forgiven. They expected the opposite behavior from me."

26. "Yani ben bu konularda biraz kendime sorduğum şey şu olmuştu. Bu ilişki içinde neden kalmaya devam ediyoruz? Yani neden bu... Bu aslında toplumsal bir şey. Öğrenilmiş bir toplum bilgi kolektif yani. Öğretilmiş, dayatılmış bir bilgi aslında bu ilişkilene şekli bence. Yaygınlığı normal olduğunu düşündürtebiliyor... Bu kadar şiddetin içinde kalıp ve kalmaya devam etmeyin orada ya. sado-mazoşist bir şey"

27. "İşte ben de büyürken ablamla annemin arasında böyle bir çatışma gerilim o baba kaybından sonra. Ev ortamı kaotikti yani. Sakin değildi. Ve ben annemle ablamın arasını bulan ve sorun çıkarmaması gereken uyumlu çocuk olmaya hemen böyle o evde hayatta kalabilmek için survival mode dedikleri tık diye uydum. Ve partnerlerim de benden bunu istedi. Hanımefendi. uyumlu işte, sessiz, sakin. Hep annemin de benden olmamı istediği, işte "sen ne kadar hanımefendi bir kızsın." ama hayır ben de büyüyüm değişiyorum ve artık bu kalıbın içine ben girmek istemiyorum. Ve o uyumluluğum, verici olmam çok işine yaradı o daha narsistik yapıdaki partnerlerin. Çünkü aradıkları şey yani fazlaca empati kurun, fazlaca suçlu hissedin vermeye çok istekli olun ve uyumlu olun. Ki onların da o toksik şeylerine böyle tık diye puzzle gibi uysun."

Sevval explicitly connected her experience to the gendered scripts of heterosexuality: “Being a woman means there’s that power imbalance in the first place... That’s the scenario that already exists. I think I’ve lived through it... He always wanted to establish that hierarchy, and he used the language of love to do it.” Her account illustrates how patriarchy can use the language of love to mask domination, making control appear as care.

In one part of the interview, I asked participants directly whether they thought being a woman and/or LGBTQ+ shaped their experience of violence. Some participants reflected more directly on this question. Many acknowledged that it did, though in different ways. Some, like Asya, were aware of the gendered imbalance yet struggled to pinpoint its exact operation: “I don’t know, but I don’t think a man would experience this... It might be due to a bit of a power imbalance then, you know?” Others expressed frustration and anger toward the expectation that women endure harm or comply with male authority. Conversely, some internalised these roles. Doğa, for example, described post-breakup changes in her appearance and routine, and how her former partner’s return was tied to reclaiming her: “...Then he saw that this woman had changed... There was love, but... I can say that certain things, that masculinity, that instinct, were always more dominant for him. In short, being a woman was also a reason for me to experience these things.” Doğa’s account naturalises aspects of gender hierarchy, accepting the expectation to maintain beauty while also recognising her partner’s discomfort with a “strong woman” image. Here, the power hierarchy was central to their relationship’s dynamic, and once it was disrupted, the relationship dissolved, reflecting patterns documented in the literature on heterosexual gender regimes (Connell 1987; Jackson 2006; Walby 1990).

For some, having a romantic partner also carried social capital, providing a sense of belonging, prestige, or perceived stability in the social world. Asel reflected on the pressure of this norm: “...in society, my friends, everyone is in a relationship. Am I going to be alone? It’s already very difficult to find someone. It’s so weird out there... Am I going to look for a partner for sex? Let there be a partner for regular sex” For others, the idea of being without a romantic partner was so unfamiliar that they likened it to an addiction, noting they had never been single in their adult lives. These perspectives suggest that the decision to endure or return was not only about emotional attachment, but also about maintaining a valued social position and avoiding the stigma of singleness.

Drawing on Carol Gilligan’s (1982) *In a Different Voice*, we can see how cultural ideals of feminine morality, centered on care, responsibility, and relational maintenance, position women to interpret ending a relationship as a moral failure, a reading that resonates with participants’ descriptions of feeling guilt or obligation

when considering leaving. This intersects with bell hooks' (2000) argument that patriarchal cultures make women the primary labourers of love, assigning them the work of nurturing even in contexts of harm. Taken together, these perspectives help explain why several participants framed endurance or return not merely as personal choice, but as fulfilling a socially inscribed duty.

For some, the decision to return or remain was framed as an act of devotion: a belief that love demanded patience, understanding, and the willingness to work through harm. For others, love became a retrospective justification, violence was recast as a test of endurance, and forgiveness as proof of commitment. Eva Illouz's (2012) work on the entanglement of love and suffering offers a useful frame here: romantic narratives often normalise the idea that pain can deepen intimacy, and that enduring hardship is part of what makes love "real."

In this light, love was not simply an emotion but a gendered practice: a repertoire of actions, beliefs, and sacrifices that shaped how participants interpreted violence and justified endurance. These narratives reveal how power and care become entangled, making it difficult to disentangle acts of forgiveness or return from the broader cultural scripts that link womanhood to the labour of sustaining love.

4.4 Queer Love and Invisible Power

LGBTQIA+ participants' accounts reveal dynamics that were often obscured by the absence of a dominant cultural script for same-sex or queer intimate partner violence. Without the familiar heteronormative framework, where male dominance is assumed and female subordination is culturally reinforced, many found it difficult to identify, name, or frame their experiences as abusive. This aligns with Harden et al. (2020), who note that queer survivors often lack a framework to recognise abuse, and may face additional barriers such as mistrust of law enforcement, fears of reinforcing heterosexism, and power dynamics shaped by intersecting factors like race, gender presentation, and parenthood.

For some participants, being closeted or partially out created a heightened sense of vulnerability. Disclosure of the relationship itself could be weaponised, and the need to protect privacy sometimes outweighed the desire to seek help. Mert, a gay male participant, described how his own closeted status compounded these challenges:

We are already in a queer relationship... It made my process difficult in the sense of... not being able to hold hands, not feeling safe... only

being able to share this with your chosen family... And your partner also refuses to be public, to call it a relationship... To keep himself safe, against society, etc.²⁸

His account shows how secrecy, sometimes mutual, sometimes one-sided, can become an additional layer of control and isolation.

Mert also reflected on how being queer had made him more vulnerable in ways that shaped the relationship: “After the end of this relationship... It made me realize how unsettled my character was... It is people pleasing. You know, growing up as queer... From that childhood, you live a life that pleases those people... My personality was unsettled, it had no boundaries.” His words illustrate how the social conditioning to avoid standing out as queer can erode boundaries, foster over-accommodation, and create openings for abuse.

Biphobia and binegativity also shaped experiences, particularly for bisexual participants whose partners used stereotypes of promiscuity or “indecisiveness” to question their commitment and legitimacy. Şevval described this as deeply symbolic: “Or maybe it’s because I’m queer... His rejection of my bisexuality is actually very symbolic. Because he was rejecting everything about me in general.” Her account shows how the rejection of bisexual identity can stand in for the denial of the self, more broadly, compounding the harm of abuse.

Yaren, another bisexual participant, spoke about the stigma she faced within queer communities for having relationships with men, to the point of victim blaming: “So, it’s because you’re dating men... Then what’s questioned isn’t what I’ve experienced, but my choices in that regard.” Her experience highlights how binegativity and community stigma can silence survivors, shifting the focus from the abuse endured to the perceived legitimacy of their sexual orientation and relationship choices.

Bengisu’s account illustrates the inadequacies of existing vocabulary to talk about violence in same-sex relationships. She attempts to frame her former partner as “the more masculine one” by calling her “erko,” but then hesitates and withdraws from this categorisation:

Her violence was like ‘erko’ men... Anyway, I couldn’t quite explain it... I just don’t know how to explain it.²⁹

28. “Zaten kuir bir ilişki yaşıyoruz... Benim sürecimi şu anlamda zorlaştırdı... el ele tutuşamama, güvende hissetmeme... Bunu sadece seçilmiş ailenle paylaşabilme... Bir de karşıdaki partnerin de public olmayı, bunun bir ilişki olarak adlandırmayı da reddediyor... Kendini güvende tutmak için, topluma karşı vesaire.”

29. “Erkolar gibi bir şiddeti vardı... Neyse, bunu tam anlatamadım... Onu nasıl açıklayacağım bilmiyorum işte.”

Her hesitation reveals how, in the absence of clear linguistic and conceptual tools, survivors may struggle to narrate power and harm without falling back on imperfect heteronormative analogies.

Mert's motivation to participate in this research further reflects these conceptual gaps: "I think we have a lot of gaps in queer relationships academically. That's why we need more specific experiences among queer people. I wanted to contribute to that." His reflection underscores the need for more nuanced, experience-based research on queer relationships to avoid over-pathologising and to provide frameworks that speak directly to the lived realities of queer individuals.

A recurring theme was the invisibility of violence in same-sex relationships. As Donovan and Hester (2014) argue, this invisibility is sustained by both societal heteronormativity and the reluctance within queer communities to acknowledge abuse for fear of feeding into homophobic narratives. Participants described how this made it harder to validate their own experiences, leaving them without the "scripts" available to heterosexual survivors for understanding and responding to IPV.

The difficulty many participants had in relating their experiences to patriarchy was telling. While some could identify coercive control, jealousy, or manipulation, they often did not connect these patterns to broader systems of gendered power. For some, patriarchy felt irrelevant because the abuser was not a man (for instance, in Efe's case, a queer participant who at the time identified as male and experienced violence from a woman); for others, its influence was indirect, shaping ideas of dominance, attractiveness, and relational roles through the pervasive reach of heteronormative culture. As Renzetti (1992) and Berlant (1997) suggest, power in queer relationships cannot be fully understood without accounting for these cultural inheritances, such as heteronormative ideals of dominance and submission, romantic scripts, and expectations of care, that continue to inform behaviors and relationship norms, even when they operate outside of traditional male–female hierarchies. Here, Foucault's conception of power as diffuse, relational, and embedded in everyday practices is particularly useful: rather than existing only in top-down, gender-binary structures, power circulates through interactions, norms, and self-regulation, shaping the possibilities for agency and resistance within queer relationships.

At the same time, Richie's (2012) work on intersectionality and violence underscores that queer IPV is not free from structural inequality, race, class, trans identity, and gender nonconformity all intersect to shape the risks, recognition, and responses to violence. In my participants' accounts, this meant that power could be negotiated through factors like economic dependence, community standing, or who was more "out," rather than through a simple gender binary.

These narratives challenge the adequacy of patriarchal scripts for explaining queer IPV, while also showing how elements of those scripts, such as control disguised as care, can persist in new forms. By situating queer survivors' experiences within both the gaps and overlaps of these frameworks, we can better understand the specific ways power operates when the dominant cultural map offers no clear path for naming harm.

4.5 Becoming a Subject Through Violence and Its Telling

This section examines how participants constructed themselves as subjects through both their lived experiences of intimate partner violence and the act of narrating those experiences in the interview setting. Naming oneself, whether as a "victim," a "survivor," or neither, is not merely descriptive; it actively shapes how people interpret what happened to them and who they are becoming in its aftermath. In this thesis, I use "survivor" as a general term, while recognising, in Antonsdottir's (2020, p. 719) words, that these positions "do not exist on a linear 'journey to be made from being a victim to being a survivor.'" Existing research recognises that the dichotomy between victim and survivor is not always clear-cut (Kelly, Burton, and Regan 1996; Mittal and Singh 2018). These are not fixed identities but shifting positions, and individuals may oscillate between them over time and across contexts.

The feminist movement of the 1970s popularized "survivor" as an alternative to "victim" (Orgad 2009), emphasizing resilience and countering the cultural coding of victims as passive or helpless (Minow 1992; van Dijk 2009). While survivorship suggests transformation, the persistence of the victim label can offer both recognition and resources, but also risks fixing people in a stigmatized identity that reduces them to what was done to them (Dunn 2005; Reich, Kramer, and Allen 2022). Participants' narratives showed that many moved between these identities depending on the context, the audience, or the moment in their own sense-making.

This tension was particularly visible for queer and feminist-identified participants, for whom enduring abuse clashed with political self-understandings. One queer woman expressed feeling she had failed herself and her ideals by not resisting or leaving sooner, avoiding the word "victim," yet speaking from a place of shame. Such accounts align with Delker, Salton, and McLean's (2020) observation that trauma narratives often negotiate between acknowledging harm and imagining future possibility. Adopting the "survivor" label can be a way to claim interpretive authority over one's story, but may also bring the pressure to conform to dominant resilience

narratives [Figley 1985, cited in][orgad2009survivor.

For participants in this study, the boundary between victim and survivor was neither clear nor stable. Their accounts resist binary framings, instead revealing subjectivity after violence as contradictory and shifting. In some cases, this was brought into focus when I asked toward the end of the interview, “Looking back, could you say that 19-year-old you could have done otherwise?”, meaning, could they have left immediately? By this stage, we had discussed motivations and the factors shaping those decisions (and whether they considered them as decisions or not), and participants’ answers varied widely. Some described feeling utterly constrained, unable to imagine leaving, while others reflected that they had in fact weighed options and made conscious calculations, even if these decisions later appeared troubling to them. This diversity of responses underscores that subjectivity was not about a single turning point but about an ongoing negotiation between constraint and choice, between past selves and present reflections.

In a similar way, I also asked toward the end whether they had any regrets. Some reported regretting the whole experience, saying they wished they had never allowed it, while others said they had done everything they could, and therefore felt no regret. These answers cannot be mapped neatly onto a victim/survivor binary. Rather, they functioned as moments of critique in the Foucauldian sense, instances where participants questioned the “truths” they had once lived under (patriarchal scripts, love as endurance, normative gender expectations) and tested alternative self-positions.. In Butler’s (2017, p. 11) terms, the subject is both “crafted and crafting”; regrets or refusals of regret were not mere admissions of fault but enactments of desubjugation, efforts to reimagine what kind of subject they might become.

Participants frequently repositioned themselves within their stories, sometimes resisting victimhood, framing endurance or return as deliberate choice; sometimes embracing survivorship, only to later question it. This reflects Butler’s (2005) concept of the non-sovereign subject, shaped through relationships, norms, and power structures. Butler (2017) further emphasizes that subjects “emerge in relation to an established order of truth,” invoking Foucault’s (1977, p. 32) claim that critique is the practice by which the subject grants themselves the right to question truth. This means that while individuals are shaped by hegemonic orders, they also possess the capacity to reshape themselves. The subject is thus both crafted and crafting, simultaneously constituted by norms and capable of resisting them. In the context of this study, participants’ acts of narration, sometimes framing themselves as resilient, sometimes as ambivalent, sometimes as refusing easy labels, can be seen as such practices of critique. Their self-narrations highlight what Zengin (2024, p. 6-7) calls the double force of violent conditions: they are sites of oppression but also

grounds for resilience, empowerment, and struggle.

At the same time, Veena Das (2006, p. 5) reminds us that “trying to locate the subject through the experience of such” violence is inherently difficult. Subjectivity here was variable and complex, shifting over time (Griffiths, Harrison, and Kelly 2013), and better understood, as Fox Keller (2007, p. 353-54) argues, as multiple, fractured, mobile, porous, and externally constituted rather than fixed or internally derived. Particularly in experiences of violence, Das (2006, p. 77) describes “a complex agency made up of divided and fractured subject positions.” In telling their stories, participants navigated this continuum, moving between asserting agency and recognising constraint, showing how subjectivity is contingent, sociohistorically situated, and produced in relation to others.

For some, these relational dimensions of subjectivity emerged in encounters with the experiences of others. Ezgi, for instance, first approached a feminist organization as an applicant after experiencing harassment, and later returned as a volunteer. Through participating in consciousness-raising meetings, she came to reinterpret past experiences and confront her friends about their failures to support her. As she explained, those meetings opened her awareness and helped her realise that what she had once framed as her own weakness was in fact a lack of solidarity: people should have held her hand, not abandoned her. In this sense, such spaces of solidarity are vital arenas for reconstituting subjects “through the enactment of different forms of being, acting, and building relationships” (Farías 2021, p. 323). As Gul Özyeğin’s *New Desires, New Selves* (2015) illustrates in the Turkish context, subjectivities are formed relationally and within collective settings; feminist organisations can thus serve as transformative arenas where gendered selves are reworked and reconstituted. In Ezgi’s case, participation in such networks of solidarity enabled her to renegotiate her own subject position in light of both personal experience and collective feminist discourse.

By contrast, Asel, a clinical psychologist working primarily with victims of domestic violence in Istanbul, reflected on how listening to the stories of women from very different class and cultural backgrounds mirrored back her own experiences. Despite her education and financial independence, she still found herself returning to harmful partners, leading her to question the boundaries between her professional role and her personal vulnerabilities. She described moments of deep discomfort in recognising herself in the women she counselled, women who were objectively more constrained by socioeconomic conditions than she was. This reflexive tension shaped how she narrated her own subjectivity: not only as a professional or a survivor, but as someone negotiating the dissonance between self-perceptions of strength and lived experiences of vulnerability.

Another participant, Deniz, a 24-year-old non-binary lesbian, further complicates these questions of power and subjectivity. Deniz described how cheating on her partner, though not the cause of the abuse, nonetheless altered the balance of power in ways she could only later articulate. After the cheating, she felt she had committed an unforgivable act, which made her more compliant and hesitant to voice her own concerns: “Because I had committed a very big crime ... I was now completely dependent on her. I was thinking that I had to agree with whatever she said about certain things.” This guilt not only deepened her partner’s control but also extended into the social realm, as shared friends sided against her. In narrating this experience, Deniz showed how subjectivity was shaped by occupying multiple and contradictory positions, wrongdoer and harmed, guilty and vulnerable. Her account highlights how selfhood in the aftermath of IPV cannot be understood through binary categories of victim and perpetrator, but must instead be seen as fractured and relational, constantly shifting under the weight of interpersonal dynamics and social recognition.

The act of narration itself was a site of subject formation. As Cvetkovich (2003) and Halberstam (2011) argue, affect and non-linear temporality complicate tidy arcs of harm and recovery. Participants often placed tenderness beside violence, empowerment beside uncertainty, illustrating how subjectivity is built through contradiction. The interview context shaped these portrayals: my questions, our rapport, and the silences all influenced what was shared and how. This co-production supports Riessman’s (2008) insight that narratives emerge from the interplay between teller and listener.

Subjectivity does not arise only from the bodily or lived experience of violence but also from the discursive frameworks through which that experience becomes intelligible (Das 2006). In this sense, the subject can be understood as the site where memory, experience, and storytelling converge (Ahmed 2021; Biehl 2017). Sharing one’s story thus becomes more than an act of recounting, it is constitutive of subjectivity itself. Rose (1990) notes that identities take shape in self-narration, where the reassembling of events into a seemingly coherent account is central to becoming a subject. Similarly, as Das and Kleinman (2001) observe, the articulation of suffering locates the subject in a position from which pain can be voiced and made socially legible.

By tracing these negotiations, resisting, reframing, and sometimes refusing dominant victim narratives, we can see subjectivity not as a fixed label but as a process of becoming. The selves articulated here were forged in the interplay of violence, love, cultural expectation, relational encounters, and narration: complex, situated, and marked by both constraint and possibility.

4.6 Conclusion: Subjectivity in Motion

Across the accounts examined in this chapter, subjectivity appears not as a singular or stable identity, but as something continually negotiated in relation to love, power, and violence. Participants' stories reveal how intimate relationships both constrain and create possibilities for agency, how cultural scripts of gender and sexuality shape endurance and forgiveness, and how selfhood is reworked in encounters with others, from friends and feminist collectives to patients and professional roles.

The difficulty many participants had in naming "power" explicitly underscores how language both enables and limits recognition of asymmetry. While some drew on feminist vocabularies, others relied on everyday terms, silences, or indirect framings. This reflects both the normalization of hierarchy within intimate life and the relational contexts of narration. Yet even in these constraints, moments of critique surfaced, through regrets, refusals, or rearticulations of love and responsibility.

The cases of Ezgi, Asel, and Deniz illustrate particularly well how subjectivity is reconstituted in relational arenas. For Ezgi, solidarity networks provided a space to reinterpret past experiences and claim a new position vis-à-vis her peers. For Asel, her professional encounters mirrored back her vulnerabilities, unsettling the boundaries between her roles as helper and harmed. For Deniz, the entanglement of guilt, harm, and social exclusion complicated any stable subject position, showing how power operates not only through domination but also through the internalization of blame. These examples show how subject positions are not forged in isolation, but through social fields that mediate recognition and critique.

Ultimately, participants' self-narrations point to subjectivity as both crafted and crafting, formed by structures of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and symbolic violence, yet reworked through acts of telling, reflection, and relational practice. Love, far from being external to these dynamics, emerges as a key terrain where power is both obscured and contested. In the aftermath of IPV, becoming a subject is not a matter of moving from victimhood to survivorship in a linear path, but of inhabiting shifting, fractured, and contingent positions. Subjectivity here is always in motion: constrained by violence, but also reconstituted through critique, solidarity, and the ongoing work of narration.

5. NARRATIVES OF JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE

In contexts where institutions repeatedly fail survivors of intimate partner violence, those failures are rarely isolated incidents. They often form part of a self-perpetuating cycle: as survivors lose trust in formal justice mechanisms and avoid engaging with them, underreporting increases. From the state's perspective, low usage can be interpreted as low need, which reduces political will, funding, and policy innovation. Over time, this lack of investment ensures that institutions remain ineffective, further reinforcing the very distrust that drives people away (Kirk and Papachristos 2011; Pierson 1993). This chapter does not seek to answer the policy-oriented question of whether we should continue to push institutions to become better at preventing and dealing with the issue at hand or to shift toward wholly community-based alternatives since addressing that would require a different methodology and disciplinary lens. Instead, I use this overarching tension to frame an inquiry into how institutional failure shapes survivors' narratives of justice, their framing of intimate partner violence, and their help-seeking behaviors both within and outside institutional contexts. Drawing on rich qualitative interview data, I explore how participants often reorient away from justice as a goal, focusing instead on forms of closure and healing they can initiate themselves. For some, forgiveness becomes one such tool for moving forward. Across these accounts, a recurring theme emerges: survivors' calls for greater community involvement in preventing violence, intervening early, and supporting those affected. These perspectives invite us to re-think how we, as communities, enact support, accountability, and prevention when formal systems fall short.

In this chapter, I examine how participants define justice in their own terms, navigate (or disengage from) justice pathways, and describe what forms of recognition or repair they find meaningful. Rather than assuming that justice is synonymous with state punishment or legal recognition, I explore how survivors locate justice in everyday relationships, communities, and acts of self-initiated closure, as well as in more formal processes when these are perceived as viable.

I begin by reviewing the main models of justice discussed in the literature, retributive, restorative, and transformative, outlining their promises and limitations, especially in responding to intimate partner violence. I then examine structural shortcomings in Turkey's legal system before turning to survivors' narratives: disillusionment with formal systems, calls for recognition and apology, and pragmatic turns toward self-initiated closure. These visions are then placed in dialogue with restorative and transformative justice frameworks. These visions are then placed in conversation with restorative and transformative justice frameworks, not as an evaluation of existing practice in Turkey, but as a prospective exploration of how such models might meet (or fail to meet) the needs voiced by participants. Finally, I reflect on who gets to define justice, arguing for the centrality of survivors' knowledge in reimagining justice when institutions fail.

5.1 What is Justice? Competing Frameworks

5.1.1 Retributive Justice

Retributive justice is one of the most dominant and institutionally ingrained models of justice in modern legal systems, particularly in Western liberal states. Emerging prominently with the rise of modern nation-states and the development of codified criminal law in the 18th and 19th centuries, retributive justice reflects a philosophical tradition rooted in Enlightenment rationalism and liberal legal theory (Duff and Garland 1994; Garland 1990). Central to this model is the concept of moral desert, which posits that wrongdoers ought to be punished because they deserve it, and that punishment should be proportionate to the harm they have caused (Moore 1987). Retributivism asserts that justice is achieved when the balance disturbed by the offense is restored through punishment, typically in the form of criminal prosecution, conviction, and imprisonment. This framework emphasizes individual accountability, legal objectivity, and the abstraction of harm into legal categories, often excluding emotional, relational, or structural dimensions.

One of the central claims of retributive justice, alongside the proportional punishment of wrongdoing, is its promise to prevent future harm. In this model, the punishment of offenders is expected to deter them from reoffending (specific deterrence) and to discourage others from committing similar acts (general deterrence). Formal sanctions are also expected to incapacitate offenders and reduce recidivism (Duff and Garland 1994; von Hirsch 1993).

Retributive justice continues to play a significant role in feminist legal and political advocacy around gender-based violence and intimate partner violence (IPV). Across many contexts, including Turkey, feminist organizations demand the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators, not because they view incarceration as a complete solution, but because impunity (*cezasızlık*) remains widespread in cases of male violence (Koğacıoğlu 2008; Şahin and et al. 2010). In a legal culture where offenders are frequently acquitted, minimally sentenced, or never prosecuted, calls for retributive justice function as a strategic and moral demand: a way to make violence legible to the state, affirm its seriousness, and challenge the normalization of harm. Some participants in this study echoed this position, expressing frustration that the person who harmed them faced no consequences, neither legal nor social, and noting that a formal acknowledgment or penalty might have signaled that what happened to them mattered.

At the same time, feminist scholars have long questioned whether retributive models which centered on punishment and legal closure, can adequately meet survivors' emotional, moral, or relational needs, especially in cases involving complex intimacies, ambivalence, or structural vulnerability. These critiques often focus on three interrelated concerns.

First, retributive justice individualizes harm, framing it as the wrongdoing of a singular offender, and thus obscures the broader structural and cultural conditions that enable gendered and sexual violence such as patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, or economic precarity (Bumiller 2008; Daly and Stubbs 2006; Smart 2002). In this way, the state's focus on prosecuting individual perpetrators can deflect attention from the systemic transformations needed to prevent harm.

Second, the adversarial and procedural nature of retributive systems often retraumatizes survivors through practices of cross-examination, evidentiary demands, and credibility assessments that rely on gendered and racialized stereotypes (Lees 1997; Ptacek 2010; Temkin and Krahé 2008). Feminist scholars have shown how these processes reproduce "secondary victimization" by shifting the focus onto the survivor's character or actions, rather than the harm itself (Madigan and Gamble 1991).

Third, retributive justice prioritizes legal closure, often in the form of sentencing, to prevent redivicism, over the relational and emotional dimensions of repair that many survivors value (McGlynn and Westmarland 2019). The binary logic of guilt and punishment leaves little room for the complexities of survivors' feelings toward the harm-doer, which may include ambivalence, ongoing relational ties, or pragmatic considerations about safety and well-being (Coker 2002; Herman 2015). Also, legal responses that rely primarily on arrest, prosecution, or incarceration often fail to

address the underlying dynamics of coercive control, and in some instances, contact with the criminal justice system can escalate rather than diminish the risk of further violence (Ptacek 2009; Stark 2007). This gap between the theoretical aims of retributive justice and its actual capacity to prevent future harm is highlighting the need to think beyond punishment when the goal is genuine safety for survivors.

Thus, while punishment matters where impunity is rampant, retribution alone cannot meet survivors' broader needs. Contemporary feminist justice work reflects this tension: some survivors demand prosecution, others seek acknowledgment or relational accountability. Retributive justice becomes one tool among many, to be evaluated in terms of its capacity to serve survivors' lived realities (Koss 2006; McGlynn, Westmarland, and Godden 2012).

While retributive justice primarily centers on punishment, it also includes mechanisms for financial redress through either direct compensation from the perpetrator to the survivor or state-administered funds. Feminist trauma theorist Judith Herman makes a critical distinction between these two models. In *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice*, she argues that direct compensation from perpetrators often makes survivors feel like they are being "bought off", or that their pain is being commodified. In contrast, survivors are more likely to accept and find meaning in indirect compensation models, such as monetary fines directed into community trust funds that support rape crisis centers, legal advocacy, and survivor services. A prominent example of this model is the U.S. Victims of Crime Act of 1984, which established a national trust fund supported by fines from convicted offenders. This fund is not only used to compensate survivors for tangible losses like medical expenses or time lost from work, but also to support survivor services, including legal advocacy and grassroots organizations (Herman 2024). As Herman notes, this approach often feels more just to survivors, precisely because it avoids the emotional complications of direct restitution while still holding perpetrators accountable in material terms. Still, as Herman emphasizes, "it takes money to get money." Even when compensation is technically available, accessing it often requires survivors to navigate complex, retraumatizing, or gatekept legal processes. According to Article 176 of the Attorneyship Law No. 1136 dated 19 March 1969, and under Law No. 6284, survivors of domestic violence in Turkey can request a state-funded lawyer through the legal aid offices of bar associations without having to pay legal fees. However, feminist organizations report that this right is not reliably enforced in practice. Survivors are sometimes misinformed about their eligibility or denied referrals altogether, especially when public officials question their financial need or provide misleading guidance (Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı 2023). What appears on paper as an accessible right is often obstructed by bureaucratic discretion, institutional

bias, and a lack of gender-sensitive training.

Still, Herman cautions that even these models present challenges: they require survivors to navigate bureaucratic systems, provide documentation, and in many cases reengage with legal processes that can be retraumatizing. As such, financial compensation, whether direct or indirect, should not be treated as a substitute for recognition, apology, or relational repair. Survivors in her research consistently emphasize that justice must be emotionally and ethically meaningful, not just materially compensatory (Herman 2024).

Thus, while retributive justice remains powerful, its limitations in IPV cases highlight the need for alternatives centered on survivors' emotional and relational realities. Critiquing retributive models is not the same as endorsing impunity, it is a call to ask what justice looks like where punishment is both uneven and insufficient. This complexity underlines the need to explore restorative, transformative, and survivor-centered frameworks.

5.1.2 Restorative Justice

Alternatives to the criminal justice system gained traction in the 1960s and 1970s, alongside struggles for prisoners' rights, Indigenous sovereignty, and feminist resistance to gender-based violence (Ptacek 2009). Restorative justice (RJ) emerged through community justice experiments and faith-based reconciliation programs, most notably in Kitchener, Ontario in 1974. These initiatives emphasized dialogue, accountability, and repairing harm rather than punishment (Zehr 1990). RJ understands harm as a rupture in relationships and community trust, shifting the questions from "what law was broken?" to "who was harmed, what do they need, and who is responsible for meeting those needs?" (Zehr 2002). Practices include victim-offender mediation, family group conferencing, and peacemaking circles (Ptacek 2009). Today, more than 100 countries use RJ in some form (Van Ness 2005).

This new thinking around justice gained traction in the United States and was mirrored by anti-colonial and rights-based movements in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and South Africa (Ptacek 2009). According to Herman, the RJ movement is diverse in its roots, "bringing together abhorrence of excessive punishment, radical pacifism and a Christian doctrine of forgiveness." (Herman 2024, p. 118).

Early legal scholars began writing about "informal" and "community justice," which included forms of mediation addressing interpersonal and structural conflicts. However, restorative justice in its current form grew primarily out of faith-based vic-

tim-offender reconciliation programs, first developed in Kitchener, Ontario in 1974 by Mark Yantzi, a Mennonite probation officer. These initiatives emphasized dialogue, accountability, and repairing harm rather than punishment. While these early models influenced restorative justice principles (Zehr 1990), they have not been without critique: advocates have questioned the emphasis on reconciliation and forgiveness (Ptacek 2009) and some raised concerns about the religious underpinnings and their appropriateness in cases of violence (McCold 2006 as cited in Ptacek 2009).

Restorative justice focuses on the idea that harm is not just a violation of law, but a rupture in relationships and community trust (Zehr 2002). It calls for a process of truth-telling, mutual recognition, and accountability, often involving the survivor, the person who caused harm, and members of the affected community (Zehr 2002). Ptacek identifies three common practices of RJ as: “victim-offender mediation, family group conferencing, and peacemaking circles” (2009, p. 25). All three focuses on holding perpetrators accountable, empowering victims, and reach an agreement at the end (Ptacek 2009). As Howard Zehr (2002) puts it, restorative justice is a shift in lens from asking “what law was broken?” and “how should the offender be punished?” to “who was harmed?”, “what are their needs?”, and “who has the obligation to meet those needs?”. It is estimated that over 100 countries use restorative justice practices to address crime (Van Ness 2005).

There are debates about whether or not the restorative justice approach is truly victim-centered. For instance, one of the core ideas often associated with restorative justice is “reintegrative shaming,” a concept developed by criminologist John Braithwaite (1989). Reintegrative shaming refers to publicly acknowledging wrongdoing while separating the harmful act from the person’s essential worth. The goal is to generate accountability without stigmatization, enabling the person who caused harm to accept responsibility and reintegrate into the community, provided they demonstrate genuine remorse and effort toward repair. This stands in contrast to disintegrative or stigmatizing shaming, which labels the person as inherently deviant and tends to exclude them from social life. In theory, reintegrative shaming supports a justice process that is both morally meaningful and socially healing. However, the applicability of this model to intimate partner violence (IPV) remains deeply contested. Feminist scholars like Herman have questioned whether the reintegration of the perpetrator should be a central concern, particularly when survivors are still emotionally entangled with the person who harmed them. Herman critiques such practices by saying “the person who needs to be welcomed back into the community, first and foremost, is the victim.” (2005, p. 598) where such approaches fail to do so. In some cases, calls for reintegration may unintentionally place pressure on survivors

to offer forgiveness, reconciliation, or even continued proximity, despite unresolved harm (Coker 2002; Daly 2002). There is also the risk that community-level reintegration efforts will reproduce the same power dynamics that allowed violence to be ignored or excused in the first place, especially in tightly knit or conservative social environments. As such, while reintegrative shaming may have potential in certain restorative justice contexts, it requires careful consideration of power, gender, and emotional labor in IPV cases. These concerns are reflected in legal frameworks such as the Istanbul Convention, whose Article 48 explicitly requires state parties to “take the necessary legislative or other measures to prohibit mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes, including mediation and conciliation, in relation to all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.” This clause underscores the risk of pressuring survivors into unwanted restorative processes, especially when such options are offered as cheaper or less confrontational alternatives to criminal prosecution.

In the United States, one of the most influential feminist strategies for addressing domestic violence has been the Duluth Model, developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) in Minnesota. Emerging from the recognition that individualised or purely victim-led approaches cannot adequately address patterns of abuse, the model frames domestic violence as a community-wide responsibility. Its core principle is that prevention and intervention require the active coordination of multiple actors, law enforcement, the courts, women’s advocacy groups, and social service providers, working together under consistent protocols and subject to oversight by organisations of survivors (Pence and Shepard 1999). The model’s batterers’ intervention programme, widely replicated in different contexts, is perhaps best known for the “Power and Control Wheel,” a visual framework that has been translated into more than a dozen languages, including Turkish, and adapted for varied cultural settings (Pence and Paymar 1993). Beyond its tools, the Duluth Model has contributed to a shift in thinking about accountability, positioning community agencies, not victims, as the ones responsible for confronting and changing abusive behavior. Its training programs have reached practitioners in North America, Europe, Latin America, New Zealand, and Australia, shaping domestic violence policy and practice well beyond its origins (Shepard and Pence 1999).

Empirical findings have shown mixed results in the success of restorative justice in gendered violence cases. A review study by Kathleen Daly (2006) notes that although both victims and offenders often report the process as fair, it rarely leads to shared understanding, and even less often to meaningful apology. In IPV contexts, where relationships are often emotionally entangled, ongoing, or unequal, this gap between procedural fairness and emotional closure may be particularly pro-

nounced. In the United States, programs like Circles of Peace have demonstrated reduced recidivism among IPV offenders compared to traditional batterer intervention programs (Mills, Barocas, and Ariel 2013). In Australia and the UK, restorative conferencing has been piloted for sexual and domestic violence, with some survivors reporting satisfaction when the process is survivor-centered, voluntary, and includes robust preparation and trauma-informed facilitation (McGlynn, Westmarland, and Godden 2012).

Within feminist scholarship, critiques of restorative justice (RJ) focus on the dangers of re-traumatization, entrenched power imbalances, and insufficient facilitator training, particularly in contexts of coercive control or ongoing harm (Daly and Stubbs 2006; European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) 2019). Also, feminists like Coward stated that practices of RJ does no better of a job in addressing the underlying power dynamics and the context in which violence against women is produced (Coward 2000). Other critiques warn that without careful attention to women's safety and the structural realities of gender inequality, restorative justice interventions, particularly those involving direct meetings between survivors and offenders, risk shifting responsibility for change onto survivors themselves, thereby relegating their protection to a secondary concern (Ptacek 2009). The Aboriginal Women's Action Network in Vancouver has explicitly opposed the use of RJ in cases involving violence against women and children, stating that despite systemic racism in the legal system, many Aboriginal women still want access to formal interventions (Polios 2002). Similarly, the organization Incite! has highlighted how these practices may place Native women in unsafe situations, reflecting broader feminist concerns about informal mechanisms failing to protect survivors or hold offenders meaningfully accountable (Ptacek 2009). Questions also remain about whether informal restorative processes can genuinely ensure offender accountability. Coker (1999) warns of the danger of "cheap justice," in which such processes may be overly lenient, easily manipulated, and ultimately both ineffective and unjust. Additionally, informal mechanisms may fail to deliver a strong public denunciation of violence against women. From a broader political perspective, some feminists fear that diverting these cases away from the criminal legal system could undermine hard-won feminist gains in making gender-based violence visible and publicly condemned (Ptacek 2009).

5.1.3 Transformative Justice

While retributive and restorative justice represent established frameworks for addressing harm, transformative justice (TJ) emerges from a different genealogy, grass-

roots activism, especially within queer, feminist, and abolitionist movements. It is not a formalized justice system, but rather a political and community-based approach, emerging largely from abolitionist, queer, and BIPOC feminist activism, that seeks to address harm without relying on state institutions. TJ frameworks aim to transform the conditions that enable violence, holding individuals and communities accountable while dismantling intersecting systems of oppression such as patriarchy, racism, and heteronormativity (Kaba and Hassan 2021; Mingus 2019). In this model, the goal is not just individual accountability, but structural change: building community practices of care, prevention, and collective responsibility that do not rely on the state, police, or carceral punishment (generationFIVE 2007; Kaba and Hassan 2019). Transformative justice is particularly relevant in contexts where survivors experience the legal system itself as a source of violence or exclusion, as is often the case for queer, trans, racialized, or undocumented individuals.

Feminist theorist Ruth Morris, who popularized the term, has argued that even restorative justice “does not go far enough” because it focuses on repairing a single incident while leaving unaddressed the social and structural causes of harm (Morris 2000 as cited in Harris 2006, p. 557). From this perspective, the goal is not to “restore” individuals to the conditions that existed before the violence, which may themselves have been shaped by inequality and risk, but to transform both the consequences of harm and the broader context in which it occurred. This includes tackling systemic inequities and historical conditions that contribute to violence, rather than isolating it as an aberration.

In practice, TJ initiatives focus on survivor safety, community intervention, and prevention, often through collective agreements, peer accountability processes, and mutual aid networks. While restorative justice centers repair between specific parties, TJ broadens the frame to address structural inequalities that shape interpersonal violence in the first place.

In the context of Turkey, no sustained or institutionalized TJ practices currently exist, and none of the participants in this study explicitly invoked TJ frameworks in their accounts. However, introducing TJ here is not to suggest that it represents a readily applicable “solution” to IPV in Turkey. Rather, it serves to map the range of justice imaginaries that feminist and queer activism has produced globally, frameworks that resonate with participants’ repeated calls for more engaged, proactive, and accountable communities. This mapping will provide the backdrop for the following section, which examines how the limitations of Turkey’s formal legal and institutional systems shape, constrain, and sometimes foreclose survivors’ visions of justice. Despite their liberatory aims, both restorative and transformative justice models are subject to feminist debate. Critics question whether these frameworks

can truly meet the needs of survivors, especially in cases of ongoing intimate partner violence, where survivors may still be emotionally entangled with the person who harmed them, or where abuse is ongoing, subtle, and psychological. Others warn against romanticizing community, noting that the same social networks asked to enact justice are often complicit in enabling abuse or silencing survivors (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2006). Additionally, the emotional, logistical, and ethical labor required to hold such processes is often disproportionately carried by women and marginalized individuals.

Still, many feminists have embraced restorative and transformative justice not as perfect replacements for state justice systems, but as necessary experiments in survivor-centered accountability. These frameworks create space for thinking about justice beyond punishment, as recognition, as change, as care, and as the reconstruction of safety. For survivors who do not, or cannot, turn to police or courts, these models offer a way to reclaim justice on their own terms, even if imperfectly.

While these models offer important theoretical frameworks, they are also shaped by epistemic authority that often lies outside the lived realities of those most affected by violence. Decisions about what counts as “justice,” and how it ought to be pursued, are typically made within institutions and discourses that marginalize survivor perspectives, especially those of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Feminist epistemology has long argued that knowledge is socially situated, and that standpoints formed through lived experiences of oppression can reveal dimensions of injustice that dominant perspectives overlook (Collins 1990; Harding 1991). In the context of IPV, this means that institutional justice models risk reproducing epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) by failing to recognize survivors as credible knowers of their own needs, priorities, and safety. This study builds on that insight by not only assessing the fit of existing justice frameworks for IPV, but also by taking survivors’ situated knowledge as a vital starting point for understanding what justice could mean in practice.

5.2 Limitations of Formal / Legal Systems in Turkey

In Turkey, multiple national and international mechanisms aim to combat violence against women and domestic violence. Turkey has been a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) since 1986. CEDAW addresses the structural conditions of gender inequality and obliges states to eliminate them. General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) defined gender-

based violence as discrimination that restricts women's rights and freedoms, framing male violence as a violation of human rights such as life, liberty, security, health, and equal protection under the law.

The Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, signed in 2011 and enforced in 2014, represented a major feminist achievement. Its domestic counterpart, Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women (2012), obliges the state to combat discrimination, prevent violence, provide protection, compensate survivors, and punish perpetrators. Law No. 6284 applies to all individuals at risk of or subjected to violence, women, children, other family members, and victims of stalking, regardless of gender, marital status, or financial capacity.

Specialized mechanisms were developed to implement these protections: Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (*Şiddet Önleme ve İzleme Merkezleri, ŞÖNİM*) provide integrated legal, psychosocial, and shelter services; family courts (*aile mahkemeleri*) and "protective courts" (*koruma mahkemeleri*) handle cases; specialized prosecutor bureaus for Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Crimes (*Aile İçi ve Kadına Yönelik Şiddet Suçları Soruşturma Büroları*) and police units investigate; and the Directorate of Judicial Support and Victim Services (*Adli Destek ve Mağdur Hizmetleri Dairesi Başkanlığı*) and provincial Victim Support Directorates (*Adli Destek ve Mağdur Hizmetleri Müdürlükleri*) support survivors in judicial processes. Bar associations' Women's Rights Commissions (*Baro Kadın Hakları Komisyonları*), NGOs, and parliamentary bodies such as the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men (*Kadın Erkek Fırsat Eşitliği Komisyonu, KEFEK*) also monitor gender-based violence. Additional human rights oversight is carried out by the *Kamu Denetçiliği Kurumu* (Ombudsman) and the *Türkiye İnsan Hakları ve Eşitlik Kurumu* (TİHEK), which work to ensure equality and prevent discrimination on various grounds, including gender. Although these frameworks expanded institutional capacity, persistent implementation problems remain.

Turkey's earlier Family Protection Law No. 4320 (*Ailenin Korunmasına Dair Kanun*, 1998) was gradually replaced by reforms in the 2000s. In parallel, constitutional reforms in the 2000s strengthened gender equality: amendments to Articles 10, 41, 66, and 90 enshrined the principle of equality between women and men, recognised positive discrimination in favour of women to achieve de facto equality, and gave precedence to international human rights treaties such as CEDAW over conflicting domestic law. Revisions to the Turkish Civil Code, Labour Code, and Penal Code further reflected these commitments. For instance, the 2005 reform of the Turkish Penal Code reclassified sexual offenses from "Crimes Against General Morality and Public Order" to "Crimes Against Bodily Integrity," replacing honor-based definitions and criminalizing acts such as marital rape, marking a formal shift toward

recognizing bodily autonomy (Kırbaş Canikoğlu 2013; Yokuş Sevük 2015). Yet, in practice, patriarchal norms within the judiciary and the evidentiary difficulties in sexual violence cases continue to limit protection for survivors and allow impunity to persist (Koğacıoğlu 2008; Kırbaş Canikoğlu 2013; Smart 2002).

Law No. 6284 allows protective orders to be issued quickly by courts, administrative chiefs (*mülki amirler*), or police, with violations punishable by coercive imprisonment. Electronic monitoring (*elektronik kelepçe*) has also been introduced. ŞÖNİM centers expanded after 2013, offering integrated survivor services. Nonetheless, Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 signaled a regression, justified by officials as rejecting “the normalization of homosexuality.” Yet this was not an isolated event; it formed part of a broader anti-gender policy turn. Over the past decade, gender has become a constitutive pillar of the AKP’s populist politics, operationalized both ideologically and strategically to sustain its antagonistic stance against “corrupt” elites (Arat 2022; Cindoglu and Ünal 2017; Kandiyoti 2016; Unal Abaday 2023, 2024). This shift includes escalating bans and police suppression of Pride events since 2015, indefinite administrative bans on LGBTI+ gatherings in Ankara during and after the state of emergency (2017–2020), and systematic repression of civil society through criminalization, lawsuits, and inspections targeting feminist and LGBTI+ associations. Further examples include the anti-abortion initiative in 2013, repeated attempts to legalize underage marriage or pardon sexual assault perpetrators, the enforced closure of numerous women’s organizations, particularly in Kurdish regions after the 2016 coup attempt, and lawsuits such as the 2022 case seeking to shut down the We Will Stop Femicide Platform. These attacks are complemented by proactive AKP strategies that build new epistemic institutions and GONGOs, such as KADEM or Big Family Platform, family studies centers designed as alternatives to women’s studies centers, and proposals for women’s universities that reinforce gender-segregated higher education (Cumhuriyet 2021; Unal Abaday 2024). Collectively, these measures illustrate how anti-gender politics in Turkey extend well beyond the Istanbul Convention withdrawal, embedding themselves into institutional, legal, and epistemic domains.

Withdrawal eliminated accountability to Council of Europe mechanisms such as GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) and built a climate that discourages collaboration with LGBTQ+ organizations. While Law No. 6284 remains, feminist groups report ongoing enforcement failures (Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı 2023; Mor Çatı Women’s Shelter Foundation 2017). They point out that despite its comprehensive scope, many protective and preventive measures are inconsistently applied, particularly in relation to provisions under the Turkish Penal Code (*Türk Ceza Kanunu*) concerning sexual autonomy,

bodily integrity, and protection orders. This gap highlights how, even where legal instruments exist, patriarchal interpretations within the judiciary and weak institutional accountability continue to undermine survivors' access to justice.

Survivors often face systemic barriers: being turned away from police stations, pressured not to file complaints without physical evidence, or finding that psychological abuse and coercive control are dismissed (Ergöçmen, Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, and Jansen 2013). Queer and trans survivors encounter additional erasure, including misgendering, denial of shelter, or delegitimization of non-marital partnerships (Kıvılcım 2019). These exclusions reflect broader epistemic and moral hierarchies about whose harm counts. For many, the legal system becomes a site of secondary violence, retraumatization, or neglect.

Thus, while Turkey's legal framework appears comprehensive on paper, survivors' experiences reveal gaps between formal rights and actual protection. Laws often fail to recognize the complexity of non-physical abuse or non-normative relationships. For many survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV), particularly those whose experiences involve psychological, emotional, or non-physical harm, legal frameworks fall short not only in practice, but in imagination. Survivors often report feeling that what happened to them is "not serious enough" or "not the kind of violence the law recognizes", a reflection not of the absence of harm, but of the law's limited capacity to register the complexity of lived experience (Ergöçmen, Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, and Jansen 2013; Koğacıoğlu 2008). Many also report being pressured to reconcile or stay silent, reinforcing cultural narratives that frame disclosure as shameful. These failures explain why many turn to informal strategies and community networks. Such choices do not signal disengagement from justice, but instead expand its meaning, toward recognition, emotional truth, and relational safety when the law falls short.

5.3 Toward a Survivor's Justice

5.3.1 Narratives of Injustice and Legal Disillusionment

I asked participants, "What does justice mean to you? Looking back, do you feel justice has been secured? How? If not, why and what would make you feel that way?" and followed up with referencing some terminology that can be included in the seek of justice, saying "What do the concepts I will now mention evoke in you when you think about them based on your own experience: compensation (*telaifi, tazminat*), punishment, acceptance of the truth/declaration of guilt, acceptance of

guilt by society/condemnation of guilt?"

Many participants reflected on the fact that they had not thought about their experience with the terminology of justice. Justice was thought to belong to the courtrooms, rather than intimate relationships. Some participants expressed a limited or ambiguous understanding of what justice could mean in this context. For example, a few described it as unattainable, reasoning that "what happened, happened," and that nothing could undo the past. Others equated justice with retribution, imagining it as doing to their former partner what had been done to them, in order to restore a sense of balance. For the vast majority of participants in this study, the formal justice system did not appear as a viable or meaningful option. None of the participants reported making an official complaint, majority of them stating the reasons as not viewing their experiences as "legally actionable" or explicitly distrusting the capacity of institutions to respond to their harm. Their accounts reflect a pervasive sense of legal disillusionment, not rooted in apathy or ignorance, but in lived knowledge of how gendered violence is (mis)recognized, minimized, or outright ignored by institutional mechanisms.

So, if justice is to be served, how could it be? I think it's unfair that it affected my mental state so much. I don't know how justice can be served for this, but something like that could have happened. Or, regarding that matter [Bengisu's former partner wanted and got a considerable amount of money from her, claiming that Bengisu owes her where in fact it was not true]. At that time, for example, I could have said, "File a lawsuit against me." That could have happened. As I said, because there's nothing concrete about this violence, it's hard to prove. I mean, from a legal perspective. If I sued her for, I don't know, emotional abuse, they'd probably look at the file in about 10 years. ³⁰ -Bengisu

Bengisu's disinvestment to the concept of justice results from not only the irreversibility of harm she was subjected to but also the lived reality of ignorance of emotional violence in legal settings. Like Bengisu, several participants described feeling that what they endured; emotional manipulation, psychological abuse, gaslighting or cycles of breaking up and reconciling, as not the "types" of violence that police or courts would take seriously. This sense was reinforced by the perception that institutions charged with protecting them, universities, law enforcement, even

30. "Yani adalet sağlanacaksa nasıl olabilirdi? Benim ruhsal durumuma bu kadar etki etmesi bence bir haksızlık. Onun da adaleti nasıl sağlanır onu bilmiyorum ama öyle bir şey olabilirdi. Veya o şey konusunda [borcu olmadığı halde borcu varmış gibi yüklü bir miktar para almış]. O sırada mesela bana dava aç diyebilirdim. O olabilirdi. Yani dediğim gibi bu şiddetin çok görünür somut bir tarafı olmadığı için kanıtlamak da zor. Yani hukuk açısından diyorum. Bana ne bileyim, bana duygusal şiddette bulundu gösterdi diye dava etsem herhalde 10 sene sonra falan bakarlar dosyaya."

community services, either ignored, mishandled, or minimized their experiences, a pattern that scholars describe as institutional betrayal (Freyd and Smith 2013). Such inaction and inappropriate responses can constitute a form of secondary victimization, whereby survivors are retraumatized not only by the original abuse but also by the very systems meant to support them (Campbell 2002). Nehir's case illustrates this clearly:

I wish, as I said, if my mother hadn't stopped me, I would have gone to the gendarmerie and found those tapes and videos and given them to them. It wasn't just my mother or my father. I don't know, the department head also blocked us because, as I said, it was exam week. Can you believe it? I went and said to the department head, "I got beaten up. Could you let me take the exam on another day with another classmate of mine?". And he [her former partner] because of the incident, didn't take the same exam, but they put us in the same classroom. I mean, how could something like this happen? They made us take the make-up exam in the same classroom.³¹-Nehir

Despite experiencing physical violence, her university's decision to schedule her make-up exam in the same classroom as her former partner demonstrated a failure to take her safety seriously or to implement even minimal protective measures. This shows that institutional neglect is not limited to cases of emotional abuse; it can extend to situations where the harm is undeniably physical, leaving survivors feeling unprotected and further endangered by the very structures meant to safeguard them. Participants like Asya and Efe explained why they do not see their experience as something worthy of looking through the eye of justice due to their position on the hierarchy of power in their relationships. Asya's account reveals how she refuses the helplessness narrative, saying that "I could leave but chose not to." and only if there was some 'binding' factor like marriage present, justice lens would be useful.

When I look at this from my own concrete experience, I don't see it as something big enough to have such an expectation. I don't really view larger incidents of psychological violence that way. Absolutely, I think everything, both material and spiritual, should be met. But in terms of my own experience, like, you know? I think a little bit like, this man is on the path of growth. I think mine was an experience, you know? Because I've made mistakes too. I could have walked out of this

31. "Çok isterdim zaten dediğim gibi yani annem falan engel olmasaydı ben o jandarmalığa gitmiş o kasetleri videoları bulmuş onları vermiş sadece annem babam değil. Ne bileyim bölüm başkanı falan da engelledi çünkü orada biz dediğim gibi sınav haftasıydı. Ya şuna inanabiliyor musun ya ben gittim ben dayak yedim bölüm başkanına ben dayak yedim aynı dönemdeki başka bir arkadaşım beni sınava başka bir gün sokar mısınız dedim. O da aynı yani olaydan dolayı aynı sınava girmeyip, bizi ikimize aynı sınıfta sınava soktular. Yani böyle bir şey nasıl olabilir ya?"

whenever I wanted. There wasn't anything binding me, actually. I didn't have to stand by and watch while he was mistreating me. You know, it was kind of my choice. Here, you know, things like considering this as a crime, being known by society, or compensation. I think this reflects something more. You know? Bigger, maybe, or things with no chance of escape. For example, you're married, and yes, then it absolutely has to happen. Because you're already incredibly worn down mentally, and there's nowhere you can go. It's your home, and I don't know, it's never safe from the wheel where you want to be safe or where you need to be safe. I think this is a huge thing. I mean, if I had lived through this in a marriage, yes, I definitely think it should be compensated in every way, or yes, I think it should be recognized as a crime by society.³² -Asya

So Asya does not view her relationship as between two parties that have asymmetric power relations, but rather equal at will. In the Power and Agency chapter, I reflect more on how accounts like Asya's function as a way to reclaim agency through narrative building. One other thing worth mentioning here is that Asya also refers to her former partner's being young and juvenile as a factor that diminishes the issue's seriousness in her eyes. In the interview she also talked about how her former partner has been diagnosed with personality disorders which only became known to him after their relationship ended. Such factors diminishes the perpetrator's agency in the eyes of the survivors, making the issue at hand not invaluable to talk about but at least not worthy of seeking any retribution that may come from the side of the perpetrator.

Efe is also one of the participants who does not necessarily engage with the idea of retribution. Though he found the idea of sincere apology coming from his partner as comforting, his disinterest in the justice lens results from the fact that his partner is a woman and that he sees as her as potential comrade. In a way, what he have gone through is minimal in his eyes compared to what she is going through as a woman and there are 'bigger issues' like 'patriarchy' and 'capitalism' that deserves attention.

32. "Bu benim kendi somut olayım açısından baktığımda böyle bir beklentim olacak kadar büyük bir şey olarak görmüyorum. Daha büyük psikolojik şiddet olaylarına bakış açım asla böyle değil. Kesinlikle yani maddi manevi her şey karşılanmalı bence. Ama kendi olayım açısından yani şey gibi hani? Birazcık ben şey gibi düşünüyorum, bu adam büyümenin yolunda gidiyor o. Tecrübeydi bence benimkisi yani hani? Çünkü benim de hatalarım oldu. İstedğim her zaman bunun içinden çıkıp gidebilirdim yani. Beni bağlayan herhangi bir şey yoktu aslında. He şimdi ki bana kötü davranırken durup izlemek zorunda değildim yani. Hani bu bu biraz da benim tercihimdi. Burada bunu hani dediğiniz kapsamda suç olarak değerlendirilmesi toplum tarafından bilinmesi ya da tazmin edilmesi gibi şeyler. Bu daha çok bence şeye reflekt ediyor. Yani hani? Daha büyük, belki de ya da işte kaçma şansı olmayan şeylere. Yani mesela evlisindir ve evet o zaman kesinlikle olması gerekiyor. Çünkü zaten manevi olarak inanılmaz derecede yıpranıyorsun ve gidebileceğin hiçbir yer yok. Senin evin orası ve işte ne bileyim güvende olmak istediğin yada güvende olman gereken tekerden asla güvende. Bence bu çok büyük bir şey. Yani bunun bir evlilik içerisinde yaşamış olsaydım evet kesinlikle her şekilde tazmin edilmesi gerektiğini düşündüm ya da işte bunu toplum tarafından suç olarak bilinmesi evet gerekiyor bence."

Efe's conceptualization of power dynamics here, I believe, reflects the inadequacy of theorisation of violence in romantic relationships where the perpetrator and victim is not a man and a woman, respectively.

[...] I don't really look at it that much, as I said, either he or she is at a disadvantage in society. I mean, he's someone I see as a comrade, a potential comrade, in many ways, or we are. We have bigger issues. I think he's someone I can talk to. I mean, let's first destroy capitalism and patriarchy, then we'll solve our problems, etc. Maybe there's a privilege like that; it was something that calmed me down more easily than someone who dated someone with more social privilege and experienced violence. [...] Now, violence is a very strong word. I mean, it can even go as far as removing a close friend from their life. That's why I have to be careful. So, legal things and stuff like that, seriously, I generally try to stay a little bit distant from the legal side of things. But of course, if something were to happen, as I said, I'd say it was a rich white man. I'd probably feel a lot different. ³³-Efe

In the Power and Agency chapter I dived more into how the lack of frame of reference considering violence in same-sex relationships and heterosexual relationships where the woman is the perpetrator affects participants. Here though, I want to stress that such a deficiency in the language may be one of the reasons why Efe did not invest in the idea of justice. In fact, the dominance of the narratives that views intimate partner violence (or similar concepts of domestic violence, gender-based violence and the likes) as extensions of patriarchy, therefore placing man at perpetrator position, affected Efe's demands from his former partner. He says "Of course if she was a white rich man I'd feel differently." He also says how he feels distanced to making legal demands, due to the gendered hierarchy between him and his former partner.

In both Asya and Efe's narratives, we see reasons for disinterest in seeking justice that go beyond the misrecognition, minimization, or ignorance of legal and institutional mechanisms often documented in intimate partner violence cases. Neither invests in the idea of justice even through non-institutional or interpersonal mechanisms: Asya does so by diminishing the perpetrator's power and foregrounding her

33. "[...]çok şey bakmıyorum cidden dediğim gibi ya o da o da toplum içerisinde dezavantajlı bir konumda birisi. Yani ister istemez birçok konuda yoldaşım gördüğüm potansiyel bir yoldaşım gördüğüm birisi olduğu için ya bizim. Bizim daha büyük meselelerimiz var. Diyebileceğim biri olduğunu düşünüyorum. Yani gel önce şu işte kapitalizmi patrikaryayı yıkalım, sonra çözeriz mevzumuzu falan gibi. Belki böyle bir ayrıcalık vardır, cidden şeye kıyasla daha toplumsal ayrıcalıklara sahip birileriyle dateleşmiş ve şiddet görmüş birine kıyasla benim içimi daha kolay sakınleten söndüren bir şey olmuştur bu. [...]Şimdi şiddet dediğimiz de çok kuvvetli bir kelime. Yani yakın bir arkadaşının hayatından çıkaracağı kadar bir şeye bile gidebilir. Benim de dikkatli olmam gereken bir kelime o yüzden. O yüzden yani legal şeyler falan cidden şey ya ben ben işin hukuki kısmına biraz mesafeli durmaya çalışıyorum genelde. Ama tabi bir şey olsaydı dediğim gibi zengin beyaz erkek olsaydı diyorum. Çok daha başka hissedirdim muhtemelen."

own agency, while Efe does so by reframing his experience as minor in comparison to broader structural injustices such as patriarchy and capitalism. Such accounts echo what Herman (Herman 2015) describes as survivors' tendency to orient towards what is available and attainable, reframing, reclaiming power, forgiveness, and focusing on healing, when formal justice routes feel alienating, unsafe, or irrelevant. Feminist legal scholars such as McGlynn and Westmarland (2019) argue that these are not retreats from justice but reconfigurations of it, forms of what they call "kaleidoscopic justice" that prioritize safety, dignity, and continuity of life over punitive outcomes. Efe's emphasis on solidarity with a marginalised partner also underscores the inadequacy of prevailing gendered frameworks in IPV discourse, which tend to assume male perpetrators and female victims (Donovan and Hester 2014). In this sense, both participants' narratives illuminate the complex interplay between agency, identity, and the available cultural scripts for violence and justice.

But what does justice mean to me? In relationships, sometimes, pursuing justice for everything doesn't seem very beneficial to me. Because at the end of the day, there are two people. We're not things with different power dynamics. There are two equals, mutually. If we're talking about justice in a relationship... Or if we're talking about general justice... This conversation could stretch to four hours, but... Justice in a relationship isn't something that can always be achieved, in my opinion. It depends on many factors. The other person's... ...fairness, their ability to see things fairly and see things fairly, in other words. Their ability to see whether something is fair or not. Whether an action they've taken is fair to the other person, and so on. Sometimes, try to express this as much as you can. In other words, try to express your own experiences, the other person. If it doesn't register with the other person, it really doesn't. That's why I don't think justice in relationships is something that can be achieved very often. And if it doesn't happen, if we have enough... ...things, if we have enough data... ...that proves it won't happen... ...I think pursuing this... ...is actually self-destructive. ³⁴ -Efe

34. "Ama ya adalet benim için ne ifade ediyor? İkili ilişkilerde bazen her şey için, her şeyin adaletini koalamak bana çok yararlı gelmiyor. Çünkü her şeyin sonunda iki insan var. Güç dinamiği farklı olan şeyler değiliz. İki eşit insan var karşılıklı olarak. İlişkide adalet konuşuyorsak... Yoksa genel adalet konuşuyorsak... Bu görüşme 4 saate uzar ama... İlişkide adalet her zaman sağlanabilecek bir şey değil benim kafamda. Bu birçok faktöre bağlı. Karşıdakinin... ...adil, bir şeyleri adil olup görüp, yani buna yetisi. Bir şeyin adil olup olmadığını görme yetisi. Yaptığı bir hareketin karşısındakine adil olup olmadığını vesaire. Bazen bunu dilediğinde... ...ifade etmeye çalış bir taraftan. Yani kendi yaşadıklarını, karşısındakini ifade etmeye çalış. Bu kişiye register etmiyorsa etmiyor gerçekten bir noktada. Ondan dolayı çok sağlanabilen bir şey olduğunu düşünüyorum ilişkide adaletlerin. Ve bunu olmuyorsa da, olmayacağına dair... ...artık yeteri kadar... ...şey varsa elimizde, veri varsa elimizde... ...bunu koalamanın... ...aşlında insanın kendisine zarar veren bir şey olduğunu düşünüyorum."

5.3.2 Demands for Recognition and Apology

For many participants, justice did not take the form of legal punishment or public retribution but instead began with the hope for recognition that the harm they endured would be named, remembered, and acknowledged by the person who inflicted it. Some described wanting a direct apology from their former partner, not merely as a social ritual, but as a meaningful act of accountability. This desire for acknowledgement often reflected a need to validate their experiences and regain a sense of dignity that had been eroded during the relationship. Yet many participants once again were distanced from the idea of wanting an apology, since they think such an incident will never be realized, emotional investment is avoided. Thus, while acknowledgement and apology emerged as central elements of justice for some, they were also complicated by the reality of “probably never going to happen”.

Some participants, on the other hand, received an apology. Efe received an apology, only to have it retracted later; Mert, Asya, and Arjin received apologies, but only after they contacted their former partner, saying, “I want to forgive you.” This is a turning of the expected sequence of events, considering forgiveness. However, if we frame their forgiving as a way of reclaiming their agency in the retrospective of events and a desire to have closure and move on through not a perspective of justice but something else, which is forgiveness here; we can say that this is the exact order we expect events to unfold in. We will never know but probably their former partner would never apologize if they had not contacted them. Mert’s, Asya’s and Arjin’s forgiveness allowed the former partners to recognize what they have done and apologize for it.

The question of what counts as a genuine or true apology was central to participants’ reflections. Many were wary of apologies that felt strategic, manipulative, or insufficient, apologies that aimed to restore peace or absolve guilt without addressing the actual harm done. In *Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed (2004), borrowing from J. L. Austin treats apologies as speech-acts and deals with important questions of “what does apology do?” and “what would a happy apology -one that is the conditions of realized and therefore can be a performative act- look like?”. These conditions “relate mainly to the emotions of the speaker: the speaker must feel sorry” and “the other must be willing to receive the utterance as an apology”. Participants’ accounts enrich these conditions. Many included the acknowledgement of what has been done and how it harmed them, the initiation of an apology from the wrongdoer themselves, and some kind of a change or at least an intention of change in the ways that perpetrator behaves for an apology to be a true apology.

I wish she had contacted that person instead of me. I literally forced her to confront me. I wish she had contacted me first. I would like that. [...] That phone call didn't last very long. It wasn't always about the events, but about the general situation. For example, I did bad things to you, but what kind of bad things did you do? That wasn't discussed much. So maybe confronting her directly on the events would make her feel a little better.³⁵-Arjin

Although none of the participants chose to engage with the legal system, this did not mean they were all indifferent to justice. On the contrary, participants often articulated strong emotional and ethical expectations not necessarily in the form of formal punishment, but for recognition, repair, and public accountability. These desires frequently surfaced as longings for apology, expressions of regret, or the wish that someone would finally say: "what happened to you was wrong."

For example, I'd like to, I mean, there was a story one of my sisters told me. An ex-partner texted her after 17 years, saying, "I must be cursed by the cruelty I imposed on you (*ahımı aldım da herhalde*), but this is how bad karma has hit me. Nothing is going my way. Please forgive me wholeheartedly." in a message. I waited a long time for that. I waited for years for him to send that message. But whatever he says now sounds empty. I don't think he'll say anything like that can... Because I don't really believe these people can change.³⁶-Ezgi

5.3.3 Calls for Public Accountability, Community Accountability and Action

I asked participants with whom they had shared their experiences during those times. Participants varied in how much of their experience they shared, when they began disclosing it, whom they chose to tell, and the extent of support they received in response. Their accounts revealed how isolating the experience of being subjected to intimate partner violence is, surrounded by emotions of shame and guilt. Many participants reported a deterioration in their relationships with friends, mainly due

35. "O kişiyle keşke iletişime ben değil de kendisi geçmiş olsaydı. Ben resmen zorla artık yüzleş benimle dedim. Keşke o ilk iletişime geçmiş olsaydı. Bunu isterdim.[...] O telefon konuşması çok uzun sürmedi. Hep olaylar üzerinden değil de genel durum şey gibiydi. Ben sana kötü şeyler yaptım ama ne kötülükler yaptın mesela bu konuşulmadı çok fazla. O yüzden direkt olaylar üzerinde onunla yüzleşmek belki bir tık daha iyi hissettirebilirdi."

36. "Bir eski bir partneri tam 17 yıl sonra ondan mesaj atıp herhalde senin ahımı aldım da bu şey bu kadar yani karma bu kadar vurdu bana hiçbir işim yolunda gitmiyor. Yani ne olur beni gönülden affet diye bir mesaj atmıştı bir ablama bir eski partnere. Onu çok uzun süre bekledim yani. Senelerce bekledim o mesajı atmasını. Ama şu an ne söylese boş gibi. Hiç öyle sanmıyorum söyleyeceği bir şey. Çünkü bu insanların ben değişebileceğine çok inanmıyorum."

to decreased time spent together and the discrepancy resulting from not taking their friends' advice to leave the relationship. For others, friends and family functioned as support mechanisms that helped them get through this experience.

As participants reflected on their experiences, many began to question the role of communities, both their and their former partner's friends and families. Although some participants reported having a supportive circle of friends during those times, some described feeling abandoned or silenced by those around them. They were critical of their social circle's way of handling the issue, the issue being a friend getting subjected to violence, saying that they were inadequate in supporting them and wrong in distancing from the friendship. Some criticized the response of friends and families of the perpetrators, in which sometimes were also participants' friends, and accused them of enabling the abusive behavior and even being complicit in it. Such conceptualizations of the context of harmful behavior, calls for a different understanding of justice, one that does not prioritize singling out the only perpetrator and punishing him, but one that calls for a community involvement in both the way we think of "wrongdoing" or "crime" and maybe even serving of justice.

The gap between what survivors experienced privately and how the perpetrator was perceived publicly produced a powerful emotional dissonance. In response, some participants described moments of social disclosure, telling mutual acquaintances, colleagues, or communities what had happened, either directly or indirectly. These disclosures were not only acts of protection or warning, but also symbolic efforts to reclaim truth and credibility, particularly in a context where their harm was minimized or dismissed.

Because when I first experienced it, I wanted to scream out loud in every environment I entered that this person was a perpetrator. You know, you defend this person, especially against their friends, because, for example, after the relationship ended, I contacted a few of their friends and said, "I went through this, and now I'm not getting any response." Because after the relationship ended, I said they were trying, and I was also ghosted during that time. I experienced all of this, and I don't expect anything in return. I just wanted to know what kind of person this person you were very close friends with was, a perpetrator, and frankly, these people didn't really care. I forgot about not caring. There were people who said I was wrong, like, "It's not like that," or something like that. That's why I wanted that too. That's why I always do this. Of course, these feelings have cooled now, but there was the environment I was in. I was always saying that this person was a perpetrator. I couldn't reveal it like that, but at least I did this. ³⁷-Arjin

37. "çünkü ilk yaşadığım dönemde içine girdiğim her ortamda o kişinin bir fail olduğunu bas bas bağırarak istedim. Hani işte sizin kişiyi savunuyorsunuz, özellikle de onun arkadaşlarına karşı

Even those who had not yet disclosed publicly often spoke of the fantasy or internal debate about doing so, wondering whether naming the harm in a public space would finally give them the sense of justice they had been denied elsewhere. However, these fantasies were often tempered by fear: of retaliation, of not being believed, or of being socially punished themselves.

Nehir, a 37-year-old woman, shared her experience with IPV from when she was a university student. Her partner was very controlling and 'jealous' from the beginning, bothered by her friendships with other men. One day he physically abused her in public, leaving her with many bruises. She had some women friends supporting her but their common friends and his family stood with him, saying that she should stay away from him. Her family supported her to some extent, such as calling the boy's family to say that "look out for him else we'll make a complaint"; however, they hampered Nehir's seek of justice through university or police. Nehir's relationship with her former partner first ended there. She stated not having the social support she needed from her friends after this saying that "they got bored easily". Nehir and her friend group with her former partner, those who stood with him, were active in political activist groups in campus and Nehir states that they became even more active after the incident. Their care for political equality and the fact that they did not stand with her, a victim of male violence, created a disturbing discrepancy:

I remember thinking, I wish I could go up to that cafeteria table, pointing fingers and yell 'These people done this and that to me,'". We're all sitting in the same cafeteria. They're handing out flyers that says "peace protest, freedom protest, equality protest." They're also leaving them at my table. I literally felt like throwing up. How could these people do this to me? I felt so humiliated. ³⁸-Nehir

Nehir stated that the fact that the focus of this research being those who surround

çünkü mesela ilişki bittikten sonra onun birkaç arkadaşıyla iletişime geçip hani ben bunları yaşadım ve hani şu an bununla ilgili hiçbir şekilde karşılığını alamıyorum. Çünkü ilişki bittikten sonra ben hani çabaladığımı söyledim ya, o dönemde ghostlandım bir de. Hani ben bütün bunları yaşadım, hani bir karşılık beklemiyorum sizden. Sadece çok yakın arkadaş olduğunuz insan nasıl biri, bir fail yani bunu bilin istiyorum dedim ve bu insanlar çok umursamadı açıkçası bunu ya da böyle hani umursamamayı geçtim. Hani benim yanlış düşündüğümü falan söyleyenler oldu. Hani böyle değildir ya falan gibi. O yüzden bunu da isterdim. O yüzden hep şey yapıyorum. Şu an tabii bu hislerim soğudu ama içine girdiğim ortam vardı. O kişinin bir fail olduğunu hep söylüyordum da yani. Böyle ifşalayamadım ama en azından bunu yaptım."

38. "Yani şey diye düşündüğümü hatırlıyorum, çıkayım şu kantinin masasına, bana bunlar böyle parmakla göstererek böyle böyle yaptılar diye bağırırsam keşke diye hayal ettiğimi hatırlıyorum. Hepimiz aynı kantinde oturuyoruz. Bunlar böyle yok barış eylemi, yok özgürlük eylemi, yok eşitlik eylemi diye broşür dağıtıyorlar. Bir de benim olduğum masaya da bırakıyorlar. Böyle gerçekten kusacak gibi hissediyordum. Ve bu insanlar bana bunu nasıl yapar? Kendimi çok aşağılanmış hissediyordum."

the experience of forgiveness and IPV, made her want to participate, showing how central she sees the role of others in such experiences. Her wish to name not only the perpetrator but also those who enabled him reflects an understanding of justice that assigns responsibility to the wider community. This aligns with research on “secondary victimization,” which shows that social neglect or disbelief can intensify trauma and erode trust in collective ideals (Campbell and Raja 1999; Maier 2008). She puts how she sees the issue into words quite skillfully:

Yes, because that perpetrator didn’t beat me alone. That perpetrator did it, and then got a pat on the back. Why? That boy who slept with me, why didn’t anything happen to him? It feels like I’m repeating the same thing. Why didn’t their girl friend stand next to those two boys and not befriend me, or ask if I was okay? Because it’s a system. You... I mean, that’s how it is. You’re *disposable*. If you make a mistake, you can be beaten and thrown away. It’s completely at the mercy of the man, the one who holds power there, and they ostracize you from society. His nervous breakdown becomes a big deal. People come from, I don’t know, out of town. They seek justice for him. You just stare blankly at them.
39 -Nehir

In response, Nehir founded an anonymous online page where students could report harassment and violence, not to “vent her anger, but to intervene in things” she “knew were wrong”. “Knowing that an institutional structure wasn’t for that, but I tried to use existing methods” she said, working with a feminist collective to investigate and take action. Here, her justice practice moved beyond punishment toward community intervention and prevention, principles resonant with transformative justice approaches (Mingus 2019).

Şevval is another participant who sees the role of community central to her experience and understanding of justice. Şevval’s relationship was with a friend whose family is also known to her family, and they shared a common group of friends. This complicated and worsened her experience. They were not in an official relationship, and both of their families and their common friends knew them as just friends. The fact that Şevval was staying in the dormitory of the university, though, helped with the isolation, as she reported fighting with her partner on phone, which made her experience visible to the other students staying there. With their support,

39. "Evet çünkü o fail tek başına beni dövmedi. O fail onu yaptı, sonra sırtısı vazlandı. Neden? O benimle yatan çocuk, niye ona bir şey olmadı? Aynı şeyi tekrar ediyordum gibi oluyor da. Niye onların kız arkadaşı o iki oğlanın yanında durdu da benimle iyi misin diye sorup sormadı, arkadaşlık etmedi. Çünkü bu bir sistem yani. Sen... Yani bu böyle. Sen disposable’sın yani. Sen yanlış hareket yaptığında dövülüp atılabilirsin. O tamamen erkeğin yani orada gücü elinde tutanın insafına kalmış bir şey ve toplumdan seni dışlar. Onun geçirdiği sinir krizi olay olur. İnsanlar bilmem şehir dışlarından gelir. Onun için adalet ararlar. Sen böyle bön bön bakarsın yani."

she reported having managed to disclose what she was going through to one of their common friends. Unfortunately she did not get what she anticipated though, an acknowledgement for start and an intervention of some kind to the perpetrator.

Those friends are still his friends. And even though they know what he did to me, he's still their friend, and I can only achieve justice in my own life by removing those people from my life. I said, "I can only achieve this for myself, but there are a lot of men in that group." It's not like anyone in that group knows what they've done, and it's not like someone who's okay with it wouldn't do it in their own lives. Maybe he'll do it himself if he gets the chance. He might be doing other things anyway, but knowing that this could still exist in that community, in that environment, makes me think justice hasn't been served. Because I raised my voice. I said something, but nothing changed at the end of the day.⁴⁰-Şevval

In Şevval's case, her friends were supportive of her but her calling their common friends to action did not work. They continued to have a relationship with the perpetrator which makes her think the justice has not been served. Cutting those friends out became her own form of justice, a strategy of boundary-setting when collective accountability failed. Her emphasis on "justice in my own life" mirrors findings that survivors often turn to self-defined acts of closure when institutional or community responses are absent (Goodmark 2018).

Deniz's experience is similar in the sense that she and her partner also had a common group of friends. Her account is a great example of how guilt arises in such situations:

A mutual friend of ours, all our friends, they were mutual friends, made me feel very guilty, feeling like I was talking down to her. Anyway, whenever I shared something, even after this relationship, by the way. I think this habit continued for a year and a half. Whenever I said something bad about that relationship, even if it was from one of my friends, I'd be like, "No, she's a good person, but she didn't mean to do that." I constantly felt so guilty. When I said something bad. And for example, that conversation ends. When I get home, it comes back to me. At night, I think, "How could you say something like that about her?" etc. Besides that, there's the... Besides, I've been guilty of this all along, like, you cheated on me, and all of this happened. I didn't want

40. "O arkadaşları hâlâ onun arkadaşları. Ve bana neler yaptığını bilmelerine rağmen, hâlâ arkadaşları ve ben bunu mesela kendi hayatımda adaleti sağlamak, o insanları da hayatımdan çıkarmakla oldu. Ben bunu sadece kendim için sağlayabilirim ama o grupta birsürü erkek var dedim. O gruptan mesela kimin neler yaptığının bilindiği ve buna okey olan bir insanın kendi hayatında da bunu yapmayacağı gibi bir şey söz konusu değil. Fırsatı olursa belki kendisi de yapacak. Belki başka şeyler yapıyor zaten ama bunun mesela hani o toplulukta o ortamda hala var olabileceğini bilmesi adaletin sağlanmadığını düşündürüyor bana. Çünkü ben sesimi yükselttim. Ben bir şey söyledim ama hiçbir şey değişmedi günün sonunda."

to share this guilt with anyone. ⁴¹-Deniz

Deniz later reveals that all of her friends were also her partner's friends, whereas her partner had separate friends of her own. This arrangement was not incidental: Deniz described her partner's restrictive behavior, explaining that she did not want anyone she didn't know or approve of to be friends with Deniz. Such tactics are common in abusive dynamics, where partners undermine potential support mechanisms by belittling them or, as in this case, by limiting access altogether (Stark 2007). For Deniz, the fact that the only friends she could turn to were also her partner's friends created an acute barrier to seeking help. Speaking critically about her partner to these mutual friends felt like a betrayal of the group's loyalties, compounding the guilt she already carried from having cheated on her. This dynamic may also be understood through the lens of her being in a same-sex relationship: for sexual and gender minorities, peer networks often function as primary sources of emotional, practical, and identity-based support. Losing such a network, even one that functioned only minimally in practice, can mean losing a key buffer against stigma, depression, and other negative outcomes (Brewin, Andrews, and Valentine 2000; Davidson et al. 1991). Research shows that sexual and gender minorities may choose to keep experiences of IPV to themselves for fear of losing these connections, even when the network is intertwined with the abusive partner (Bonanno et al. 2007; Lopez 2015). In this way, Deniz's reluctance to seek support cannot be read simply as the product of guilt or emotional ambivalence, but also as a strategic attempt to preserve a fragile but symbolically vital social safety net.

Asya, who reported being in a secret relationship, reflected on the isolating nature of such relationships. Being in such a state not only meant she and her partner were not sharing their enjoyable moments with friends and family but also being stripped of emotional support mechanisms. She felt ashamed of being in a secret relationship with a man who had another partner:

And it was a bit like ... I mean, what happened was a little embarrassing for me. That's why I didn't want to tell everyone. Because, I mean, what are you supposed to tell people? I'm with someone, but he has a girlfriend. What are you doing then? Okay, they'd say that, and

41. "Bir ortak arkadaşlarımız, hani bütün arkadaşlarımız, ortak arkadaşlarımızdı ve bu yüzden de onun kötülüyor gibi hissetmek bana çok suçlu hissettiriyordu. Zaten ne zaman bir şeyi paylaşsam ki bu ilişkiden sonra da bu arada yani. Sanırım bir buçuk sene devam etti bu huyum ne zaman o ilişkiye dair kötü bir şey yaban söylesem bir arkadaşlarımdan gelse ama hayır o iyi birisi ama işte o öyle yapmak istemedi falan gibiydim. Sürekli ya çok suçlu hissediyordum. Kötü bir şey söylediğimde. Ve yani mesela işte o konuşma bitiyor. Ben eve gittiğimde tekrar aklıma geliyor. Gece işte şey diye düşünüyorum. Yani nasıl böyle bir şey söylersin falan onun hakkında falan gibi. Onun dışında işte şey kısmı, bir de zaten bunun suçlusu benim başından beri benim işte sen aldattığın için bunlar oldu falan gibi. Bu bu suçlulukla da paylaşmak istemiyordum yani kimseyle."

rightfully so. What would I say to anyone else if it were me? So, a little bit? I couldn't really tell them because of the shame it caused, but I think I didn't want to tell the people around me, so I pushed them away a little.⁴²-Asya

Shame is a well-documented barrier to disclosure in IPV contexts, often leading to social withdrawal and reduced support (Overstreet and Quinn 2013). Her shame is not only due to being in a secret relationship with a man with another partner, though. Being subjected to intimate partner violence itself results in participants feeling shame. People who return to or stay in abusive relationships are reported to feel shame and guilt. So, Asya's experience was challenging on multiple levels. Luckily, she had reported sharing her experience with her cousin, though they could speak only on the phone due to living in separate cities, her support made Asya feel understood and seen to some level.

Although Deniz and Asya did not explicitly call out their friends or families for failing to act, their experiences reveal vulnerabilities created by the absence of a functioning social support system. For Deniz, guilt compounded by being in a same-sex relationship where her only available friends were also her partner's, created an acute barrier to disclosure. For Asya, shame rooted in being in a secret relationship with a man who had another partner, as well as the stigma of experiencing IPV, led her to withdraw from friends. In both cases, the result was minimal or no support, which compounded the harm they experienced. Their accounts highlight how social dynamics of guilt, shame, and network dependence can effectively silence survivors, even in the absence of overt hostility. These dynamics set the stage for Ezgi's reflections on what genuine, non-judgmental support might look like.

Ezgi is also one of the participants who described losing friends during the time she was experiencing IPV, as they distanced themselves when she chose to remain in the relationship. Years later, she confronted them directly:

So, you knew about my family life at the time, a slippery slope, and you could see it from an outside perspective. Okay, you were very young too, but you could see it. Or you could have been supportive. Or maybe you could have been supportive right after the breakup, instead of not talking to me for two years. You could have gotten back to me when I messaged you. You weren't supportive in any way, so I talked about it,

42. "Bir de biraz şeydi. Yani hani olan şeyler benim için biraz utanç da vericiydi. O yüzden bunu herkes anlatmak da istemiyordum. Çünkü yani insanlara ne anlatacaksınız ki işte biriyle beraberim ama sevgilisi var. Ne yapıyorsun o zaman yani. Tamam, bunu diyecek de haklı olarak diyeceklerdi. Ben olsam ben ne derdim başkasına yani? O yüzden hani birazcık? Verdiği utançla çok anlatamıyordum da zaten etrafımda hani belki de var olabilecek insanlara da anlatmak istemeyip onları da biraz uzaklaştırıyordum bence."

and having that conversation was a huge relief for me. There's also a bit of a thing about people. You know, if I shared these ideas as if they were my own, they might have been controversial. But everyone around me respects the feminist association [I volunteer at]. We talked about these things at there. A psychologist was facilitating that day, and when I say she mentioned it, that idea is non-negotiable for them. So, it was very good for me, and I felt very relieved at the time. Because when people around us still ask why we've not talked for two years, my girlfriends say, "Well, Ezgi sold us out because she's in love with her boyfriend." ⁴³

– Ezgi

Her experience underscores that the harm caused by a lack of support does not necessarily fade with time; instead, it can leave lasting fractures in relationships, prompting survivors to seek acknowledgment even years later.

Her own later experiences supporting others made her think critically about how to help without alienating the person at risk. She deliberately avoided confronting friends with statements like “you are being subjected to violence,” instead choosing gentler methods that invited conversation rather than retreat. She also stressed the importance of not “guiding” or prescribing a course of action, noting that even therapists refrain from such directiveness, but instead offering steady presence, listening, and affirmation.

Ezgi's account aligns with Judith Herman's (2005) insistence that recovery from trauma is not only an individual process but a profoundly social one. For Herman, “the community” is not an abstract ideal but a concrete network of relationships capable of providing recognition, validation, and sustained solidarity. Survivors' calls for friends, families, and peer networks to “stay”, even when they do not follow expected scripts of leaving, echo this emphasis. At the same time, Şevval's and Nehir's experiences resonate with Howard Zehr's (2002) “relational view of justice,” which locates wrongdoing within a web of relationships and responsibilities. Both perspectives shift the focus from punitive measures against a single perpetrator toward building and repairing the social conditions that make safety, accountability, and dignity possible.

43. "Yani o dönem aile hayatımı biliyordunuz, bir kaçış noktası, siz dışarıdan bir gözle bunu görebilirdiniz. Tamam, sizin de yaşamız çok küçüktü ama görebilirdiniz yani. Ya da hani destek olabilirdiniz. Ya da böyle iki yıl küsmek yerine belki ayrıldıktan hemen sonra destek olabilirdiniz. Size mesaj attığımda dönebilirdiniz. Bir şekilde destek olmadınız yaniyi konuştum ve çok rahatlattı bu konuşmayı yapmak beni için. Bir de insanlarda biraz şöyle bir şey var. Hani bunları kendi fikirlerimmiş gibi paylaştığımda belki tartışılabilir bir fikir olurdu. Ama herkes feminist derneğe saygı duyuyor çevremdeki.Feminist Dernek'te biz bunları konuştuk. Bir psikolog kolaylaştırıcıydı o gün, o bahsetti dediğimde o fikir onlar için tartışmaya kapalı oluyor. O yüzden çok iyi oldu benimle ve çok ferahladım o zamanlarda. Çünkü hala çevremizde siz niye iki yıldır küssünüz, küstünüz diyen insanlar olduğunda kız arkadaşlarım şey diyordu, işte Ezgi bizi sattı çünkü erkek arkadaşı için"

Ultimately, these narratives point to a form of justice that is relational, moral, and reputational. Survivors were not only seeking personal closure; they were calling for truth-telling, ethical witnessing, and shifts in collective perception. In a system that often denies symbolic justice, these demands reflect a broader feminist critique: that justice cannot be reduced to verdicts or sentences, it must also include belief, dignity, and acknowledgment.

5.3.4 Healing as Self-initiated Closure in the Absence of Justice

For many participants, the decision to focus on personal recovery was not rooted in a belief that healing is itself a form of justice. Rather, it emerged from a recognition that formal legal processes, institutional mechanisms, or even interpersonal accountability efforts were unlikely to deliver meaningful outcomes. Knowing that pursuing justice through legal mechanisms would likely end in disappointment, re-traumatization, or further harm, they redirected their energy inward.

This orientation toward healing was, in that sense, pragmatic. Participants spoke of “moving on” or “closing the chapter” as work they could begin immediately and control themselves, without waiting for an external authority to validate their experience or compel change. Healing, here, was not imagined as a justice process but as a form of closure that could be initiated unilaterally and sustained without external cooperation.

This distinction matters. Whereas many restorative and transformative justice models position healing as a central aim of justice (Herman 2015; McGlynn and Westmarland 2019), participants’ accounts reveal a form of healing that is detached from justice altogether, a survival strategy rather than a justice outcome. In this framing, healing is not contingent on recognition, apology, or repair from others; it is an act of reclaiming agency in a landscape where justice feels unavailable.

In these narratives, justice was not a matter of accountability or punishment, but a process of making peace with what happened, regaining a sense of agency, or simply moving forward. Participants often described this as a slow, nonlinear journey, marked by ambivalence, contradiction, and emotional labor.

These reflections resonate with trauma-informed and survivor-centered approaches to justice, which emphasize emotional safety, choice, and non-linearity as foundational values. As Judith Herman (1992) notes, recovery from trauma is rarely about resolution through punishment; it is often about reclaiming control over one’s narrative and body, on one’s own timeline. Feminist thinkers have similarly warned

against pressuring survivors into narratives of closure, emphasizing that justice may lie in refusing to engage, in pausing, or in remaining undecided (Ahmed 2004; Cvetkovich 2003).

5.4 Conclusion: Reimagining Justice through Survivors' Eyes

This chapter has demonstrated that justice, as imagined, resisted, or redefined by survivors of intimate partner violence, rarely fits neatly into the dominant categories of retributive, restorative, or transformative justice. Instead, it emerges as a relational, emotional, and epistemic practice shaped by survivors' lived experience, affective labor, and situated knowledge. Participants did not dismiss justice altogether; rather, they recast it, not as punishment, but as recognition, moral repair, and ethical witnessing.

Survivors' accounts foregrounded recognition: the need for their harm to be acknowledged by perpetrators, communities, and institutions. Many described closure not in terms of verdicts or sentencing, but in receiving validation from those around them. Justice here is less about retribution than about moral accountability and relational repair. These visions resonate with feminist and abolitionist calls for survivor-defined justice, justice built from survivors' goals, contexts, and needs rather than institutional templates (Goodmark 2018; Kim 2013).

A crucial theme throughout participants' narratives was the role of community. For some, friends and family failed to intervene, enabling or ignoring abuse and deepening isolation. For others, abandonment by social networks compounded harm. Yet participants still articulated community responsibility as central to their vision of justice: to remain present, to act without judgment, and to refuse complicity. This framing highlights justice not only as a state function but as a collective obligation; neighbors, peers, and networks all share responsibility for recognition and support. As Judith Herman (2005) notes, recovery from trauma depends on communities that affirm survivors' reality and worth.

Feminist epistemologies help clarify why these narratives matter. Survivors are not simply recounting trauma; they are producing knowledge about violence, power, and survival (Collins 1990; Fricker 2007; Haraway 1988; Harding 1991). Their accounts expose the epistemic limits of legal frameworks and point to alternative moral and relational logics of accountability. Survivors remind us that emotions, ambivalence, and contradiction are not weaknesses in justice claims but integral to understanding harm and imagining redress.

What emerges is a plural and situated vision of justice: one that accommodates contradiction, sustains complexity, and reimagines accountability beyond punitive frameworks. In contexts where institutions fail, justice is not absent but relocated, pursued through recognition, community solidarity, and alternative practices of care. To take these accounts seriously is to affirm survivors as epistemic agents and theorists of justice in their own right, whose visions must shape any meaningful rethinking of justice in Turkey and beyond.

6. CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore how women and LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey narrate experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV), forgiveness, endurance, and justice in non-marital, financially independent relationships. Drawing on fifteen in-depth interviews, it has traced how survivors name violence, negotiate endurance, seek justice, and articulate subjectivity in ways that both challenge and complicate dominant theoretical and political frameworks.

The first chapter demonstrated that naming violence is neither immediate nor inevitable. For many participants, experiences that would later be recognized as psychological, emotional, or coercive violence were at the time interpreted as signs of love, conflict, or even personal weakness. This resonates with feminist trauma theorists such as Judith Herman (1992), Liz Kelly (1988), and Nicola Gavey (2005), who argue that recognition is socially and politically mediated rather than purely psychological. Participants' delayed recognition underscores how cultural scripts of love, femininity, and endurance, as well as intergenerational normalization of violence, shape the thresholds of what can be called "violence." Importantly, some participants described offering forgiveness before recognition, illustrating how temporalities of endurance, reconciliation, and naming do not follow the neat sequence implied by the Cycle of Abuse or by therapeutic survivor narratives.

The second chapter demonstrated that love and intimacy were not simply background contexts to violence but active forces that sustained survivors' attachments to their partners. Participants described how gestures of affection, promises of change, and the symbolic value of being in a relationship often outweighed experiences of harm, making departure difficult. This echoes feminist scholars such as Eva Illouz (2012), Lauren Berlant (2011), and Sara Ahmed (2004), who show how romantic attachments and cultural scripts of love shape endurance and tether individuals to harmful relations. For LGBTQ+ participants, the threat of outing and the scarcity of socially legible relationships further deepened this ambivalence. Survivors' reluctance to leave was thus not reducible to weakness or denial but con-

stituted a relational negotiation in which love, fear, hope, and vulnerability were inseparably entangled. In highlighting these dynamics, the chapter complicates the binary of leaving versus staying, showing how intimacy itself can be a site of both harm and survival.

The third chapter explored power, love, and the making of subjects. Here, participants' narratives illustrated how forgiveness, endurance, and even reconciliation could be practices of ambivalence: neither purely empowering nor entirely passive. Love and attachment often coexisted with harm, leading to decisions to stay, return, or reconcile that cannot be reduced to irrationality or weakness. In this context, self-forgiveness emerged as a crucial practice, enabling survivors to reframe their past decisions not as failures but as situated responses within constrained conditions. Through this narrative work, participants crafted subject positions that rejected the binary of victim versus agent, instead embracing contradiction and complexity. Theorists such as Judith Butler, Lauren Berlant, and Sara Ahmed remind us that subjectivity is forged not in spite of ambivalence but through it, a point vividly illustrated in participants' accounts.

The final chapter turned to how participants articulated justice. Rather than framing justice primarily through legal or punitive lenses, survivors highlighted recognition, apology, and relational repair as central to what might be called "survivors' justice." While some were deeply skeptical of courts or the state, others emphasized the importance of community spaces, feminist networks, and therapy in fostering acknowledgment and solidarity. This complicates both formal justice systems, which often retraumatize or marginalize survivors, and restorative justice models, which risk reproducing unequal power dynamics. By situating justice in everyday relations, participants expanded the conceptual terrain of what justice might mean after IPV, pointing toward alternative forms of accountability that privilege relationality and survival over punishment.

Together, these chapters challenge dominant linear frameworks of IPV, whether in the form of the Cycle of Abuse, restorative justice models, or feminist scripts of victimization and empowerment. Survivors' narratives emphasize that endurance is not simply resignation, that forgiveness can precede recognition, and that justice may be found outside courtrooms. Their stories highlight how IPV is entangled with cultural norms of love and endurance, structural vulnerabilities such as threats of outing, and broader political contexts that constrain possibilities for recognition and redress.

The study makes several contributions to the literature. By centering non-marital and financially independent relationships, it challenges the Turkish research

paradigm that equates “domestic violence” with marriage and family (Akyüz and Ergur 2021). It also foregrounds LGBTQ+ experiences of IPV, which remain marginalized in both local and international scholarship (Donovan and Hester 2014). Finally, it critiques explanatory models that privilege linear progress—whether cyclical (Walker 1979) or therapeutic (Herman 1992) by showing how survivors narrate violence in recursive, ambivalent, and relational ways. In doing so, the study shifts the field away from binaries of victim/agent or resistance/endurance, and toward recognizing survivors’ interpretive practices as forms of knowledge production in their own right.

The consequences of these contributions are twofold. Theoretically, they expand feminist and queer understandings of IPV by emphasizing ambivalence, contradiction, and affect as central to survivors’ lived experiences (Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2011; Butler 2004). Practically, they underscore that survivors’ sense of justice often lies outside the courtroom—whether in recognition, apology, or community support—suggesting the need to rethink justice in survivor-centered rather than punitive terms.

The study also has limitations. Its sample is small, urban, and relatively privileged, limiting the applicability of its findings to rural or less connected populations. Moreover, while it destabilizes existing frameworks, it does not offer a unified alternative. Instead, it opens conceptual and empirical ground for further work.

Future research could extend this inquiry in two directions. First, comparative studies across rural and urban Turkey, or across different cultural contexts, could shed light on how structural inequalities mediate recognition and endurance. Second, and more urgently, studies could investigate community responses to IPV: how feminist networks, queer groups, and collective practices of care and accountability might support survivors and interrupt cycles of violence (Coker 2002; Kim 2021). Exploring these questions could bridge feminist theory and praxis, contributing not only to understanding IPV but also to developing survivor-centered strategies for justice and change.

APPENDIX A Interview Questions

1. Kendinizi tanıtabilir misiniz? (yaş, cinsiyet, eğitim durumu, meslek, yaşanılan şehir)
2. Bu araştırmaya katılmaya sizi çeken neler oldu?
3. Partnerinizle yaşadığınız şiddeti kısaca anlatabilir misiniz?
4. Devam eden/ döngüsel bir şiddet miydi? Tekrarlanıyor muydu?
5. Hâlâ birlikte misiniz? Veya ne kadar süre ilişkiyi sürdürdünüz?
6. İlişkiyi devam ettirme kararınızı ne gibi faktörler etkiledi? İlişkiyi devam ettirmeye dair motivasyonlarınız neler oldu?
 - a. Özür beklediniz mi? / Özür diledi mi?
 - b. İlişkiyi devam ettirme isteği karşılıklı mıydı?
 - c. Yaşadığınız şiddet olayı/döngüsü ilişkinizde herhangi bir değişime yol açtı mı?
 - d. Partnerinizden istekleriniz, beklentileriniz ya da öne sürdüğünüz şartlar oldu mu?
7. İlişkide neleri değiştirdi? İlişkide güç dengesi değişti mi?

8. (Eğer olduysa) İlişkiyi devam ettirmeye dair çekinceleriniz neler oldu?
9. Psikososyal yardım aldınız mı? (Terapi, destek grupları, vb.)
10. Hukukî/resmî bir başvuruda bulundunuz mu? (Emniyet, savcılık veya ŞÖNİM)
11. Herhangi bir derneğe başvurdunuz mu?
12. Bu süreçte yaşadıklarınızı kimlerle paylaştınız? (Aile, yakın arkadaşlar, arkadaş çevresi) Olaya dair tepkileri ne oldu? Buna dair siz neler hissettiniz/düşündünüz?
13. Sizi eleştirenler oldu mu? Bu süreçte sizi kim anladı, kim anlamadı?
14. Eleştiriler/olumsuz görüşlerle nasıl baş ettiniz/ bunları nasıl aştınız?
15. Sizin için “af” / “affetmek” ne ifade ediyor? Bu deneyimden sonra partnerinizle ilişkiye devam etmeniz aynı zamanda bir “af/affetme” içeriyor muydu?
16. (Eski) partnerinizde bir değişim oldu mu?
17. Sizin için adalet ne ifade ediyor? Adaletin sağlandığını düşünüyor musunuz?
 - a. (Evet) Nasıl?
 - b. (Hayır) Neler olsaydı adaletin (daha iyi) sağlandığını düşünürdünüz?
Kavram çağrışımları: Telafi, tazminat, ceza, hakikatin kabulü/suçun ilanı, suçun toplum tarafından kabul/kınanma.
18. Bütün bu süreçte size iyi gelen şeyler/kişiler neler/kimler oldu? Daha iyi olmanıza ne hizmet ederdi? Partnerinizin yapabileceği bir şey var mıydı? İyileşme sizin için adaletin bir parçası mı?
19. Kadın ve/veya LGBTİ+ olmanız sizce deneyiminizi etkiledi mi? Etkilediyse nasıl?

20. Bu deneyim ve sonrasında yaşadıklarınız şiddete ve ilişkilere dair görüşlerinizi etkiledi mi? Nasıl etkiledi?

21. Bu deneyim ve sonrasında yaşadıklarınız adalet kavramına dair görüşlerinizi etkiledi mi? Nasıl?

22. Affetme deneyiminize dönüp baktığınızda pişman olduğunuz anlar oldu mu? Neden?

23. Affetmekle ilgili bir stigma olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz? (Örn. affeden kadınlar/kişilerin özgür iradeleriyle karar vermediklerine yönelik anlatılar). Siz bunlarla karşılaştınız mı? Nasıl tepki verdiniz?

24. Ekleme istediğiniz bir şey var mı?

APPENDIX B Informed Consent Form

BİLGİLENDİRİLMİŞ ONAM FORMU

Değerli Katılımcı,

Bu araştırma Sabancı Üniversitesi Kültürel Çalışmalar programında yüksek lisans eğitimine devam eden Soner Cem Gür tarafından tez çalışması kapsamında yürütülen projenin bir parçasıdır. Projenin amacı, romantik ilişkilerinde partnerleri tarafından şiddete maruz bırakılmış ve partnerlerini/eski partnerlerini affetme/bağışlama deneyimi yaşamış kadın ve LGBTİ+'ların deneyimlerini incelemektir.

Siz katılımcılardan görüşmede sorulan sorulara kendi deneyiminizden hareketle yanıtlar vermeniz istenmektedir. Tüm soruların yanıtlanması yaklaşık olarak 60–90 dakika sürmektedir.

Sonuçlarının yalnız bilimsel amaçlarla kullanılacak olan bu çalışmaya katılımınız tamamen sizin isteğinize bağlıdır. Araştırmada yer almayı reddedebilir, herhangi bir aşamada çalışmadan çekilebilirsiniz. Çalışmaya katılımınız için size ödül verilmeyecek ya da karşılığında herhangi bir şey istenmeyecektir. Vereceğiniz bilgiler tamamen gizli kalacaktır.

Araştırma kapsamında görüşmenin ses kaydı alınacak ve bir yıl içerisinde ses kayıtları ve transkripsiyonlar imha edilecektir. Araştırma kapsamında kullanılacak olan bilgiler tamamen anonimleştirilecektir.

Genel sorularınız veya endişeleriniz için bana e-posta adresim

cem.gur@sabanciuniv.edu ile ulaşabilirsiniz.

Eğer haklarınızın herhangi bir şekilde ihlal edildiğini düşünüyorsanız, lütfen Sabancı Üniversitesi Araştırma Etik Kurul Başkanı Prof. Dr. Mehmet Yıldız ile (216-483-9010, meyildiza@sabanciuniv.edu) iletişime geçiniz.

Anketlerde yer alan sorular için doğru ya da yanlış cevap yoktur. Araştırma sonuçlarının sağlıklı olması için soruları eksiksiz ve içtenlikle, sizi tam olarak yansıtacak şekilde cevaplamanız çok önemlidir. Katkılarınızdan dolayı teşekkür ederim.

Uygulayıcının Adı: Soner Cem Gür

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Katılımcının Beyanı

Yukarıda okuduğum çalışma ile ilgili bilgiler bana sözlü olarak da iletildi. Bu çalışmaya gönüllü olarak katılmayı kabul ediyorum.

Katılımcının Adı Soyadı ve İmzası:

Uygulayıcının Adı Soyadı ve İmzası:

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