

FROM PLEASURE TO PAIN:  
A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION OF SELF-HARM

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A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION OF SELF-HARM**

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## ABSTRACT

### FROM PLEASURE TO PAIN: A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION OF SELF-HARM

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The current study aims to explore the self-harm behaviors through a psychoanalytic lens. For this purpose, two research questions are investigated: “What are the experiences of individuals engaging in self-harm?” and “How do individuals engaging in self-harm evaluate their family dynamics and the narratives surrounding their conception and birth?”. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants, all under the age of thirty, who engage in a diverse range of self-harm behaviors. Qualitative data gathered from the interviews is analyzed by employing reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis revealed four superordinate themes: (1) Unspoken experiences behind self-harm, (2) Inter-subjective dynamics of self-harm, (3) Chaotic family dynamics and their impact on self-harm, (4) Birth narratives and their impact on self-harm. Each theme is discussed in greater detail, employing Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective and other psychoanalytic perspectives.

**Keywords:** Self-harm, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Qualitative research, Thematic Analysis

## ÖZ

### ZEVKTEN ACIYA: KENDİNE ZARAR VERMENİN PSİKANALİTİK BİR İNCELEMESİ

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Bu çalışma, kendine zarar verme davranışlarını psikanalitik bir mercekten incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla iki araştırma sorusu ortaya çıkmıştır: “Kendine zarar veren bireylerin deneyimleri nelerdir?” ve “Kendine zarar veren bireyler aile dinamiklerini ve kendi doğumlarını çevreleyen anlatıları nasıl değerlendirmektedir?”. Çeşitli kendine zarar verme davranışlarında bulunan ve otuz yaşın altında olan altı katılımcı ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmelerden elde edilen nitel veriler, refleksif tematik analiz kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Analiz sonucunda dört üst tema ortaya çıkmıştır: (1) Kendine zarar vermenin ardındaki dile getirilmemiş deneyimler, (2) Kendine zarar vermenin özneler arası dinamikleri, (3) Kaotik aile dinamikleri ve bunların kendine zarar verme üzerindeki etkisi, (4) Doğum anlatıları ve bunların kendine zarar verme üzerindeki etkisi. Her bir tema, Lacancı psikanalitik perspektif ve diğer psikanalitik perspektifler kullanılarak daha ayrıntılı olarak tartışılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kendine zarar verme, Lacanyen psikanaliz, Nitel araştırma, Tematik analiz

To my family  
Durna, Yılmaz & Hüseyin



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Conceptualization and Background

Self-harm is a behavior of non-fatal deliberate pain or injury to oneself, usually emerges as coping with distressing feelings and thoughts and may include attempted suicide. Over the decades, the conceptualization and terminology surrounding self-harm have evolved significantly, which may be related to nuanced ways in which individuals engage in such behaviors. In the 1950s, self-harm was often viewed as attempted suicide (Sahlin, 2018). However, researchers and clinicians realized that many instances of self-harm did not include suicidal intent. This change in perspective led to various conceptualizations. Even though they carry distinct connotations and implications, researchers interchangeably use the terms parasuicide (Kreitman et al., 1969), self-mutilation (Walsh & Rosen, 1988), self-injury (Herpertz, 1995), and deliberate self-harm (Mangnall & Yurkovich, 2008).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) did not categorize self-harm as a distinct category of pathology until recently through the Fifth Edition of DSM (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Fourth Edition of DSM (DSM-IV) mentioned self-harm only as a symptom within the broader diagnosis of borderline personality disorder (BPD) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). However, literature regarding self-harm displayed that it is prevalent across various samples, including other diagnoses and non-clinical sample (Klonsky et al., 2003). Therefore, research with varied samples challenged the assumption that it is primarily associated with BPD. This challenge necessitated a deeper understanding of self-harm as an independent phenomenon instead of merely a symptom of underlying disorders. Eventually, a specific form of it is now included in the DSM-5, namely “Non-Suicidal Self Injury (NSSI)”. NSSI mainly addresses self-harm

behaviors performed without suicidal intent and typically involves direct damage to the skin (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

The term “deliberate self-harm” (DSH) has been predominantly used in European research (Hawton & Fagg, 1992; Michel et al., 2000). Moreover, since the mid-1970s, European studies have built substantial evidence around DSH, contributing to developing clinical guidelines (Hawton et al., 2016). DSH describes non-fatal actions aimed at self-injury, regardless of whether suicidal intent is present or not, and it explicitly refers to intentional self-injury, unlike other behaviors that might cause harm indirectly, such as substance abuse or risky behaviors to health (Hawton et al., 2000). Researchers recommend including both suicidal and non-suicidal motivations within the scope of DSH. This recommendation is related to the inability to define clear-cut boundaries between the motivation of self-harming individuals. In other words, the intent behind self-harm can fluctuate or coexist within the same individual over time (Kapur et al., 2013; Linehan & Nielsen, 1981). Hence, this study did not attempt to distinguish the motivation of suicidal or non-suicidal self-harm.

Although DSH is widespread use, recent discourse has suggested dropping the term “deliberate” from self-harm terminology in order to reduce stigma. Some argue that deliberate implies a level of control and intention; however, many individuals experiencing self-harm do not feel that way. Some of these behaviors occur during dissociative states or from experiencing an overwhelming compulsion to self-harm, which challenges the notion of deliberate action (NICE, 2022). Therefore, for this study, the conceptualization of self-harm is used in order to define a range of non-fatal behaviors wherein individuals inflict physical harm upon themselves with or without intending suicide (Sahlin, 2018). Typical forms of these behaviors include cutting, burning, hitting oneself, and interfering with wound healing (Tuna, 2017).

## **1.2. Overview of Self-Harm**

The section delves into more detailed information regarding self-harm through its prevalence, demographic characteristics, psychological correlates, underlying functions, and effective treatments. This overview synthesizes critical research findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of self-harm.

Research based on age prevalence revealed that self-harm is most common among adolescents and young adults. Approximately 14-15% of adolescents have engaged in self-harm behavior at least once is reported by studies conducted in the US and Canada (Laye-Gindhu & Schonert-Reichl, 2005; Ross & Heath, 2002 as cited in Klonsky & Muehlenkamp, 2007). As for the young adult sample, university students commonly engage in this behavior, but how they inflict harm can differ. The most common form of self-harm is cutting, followed by burning and severe scratching (Klonsky & Muehlenkamp, 2007; Whitlock et al., 2006). Gender difference is also a topic of considerable debate when determining prevalence. Some studies suggest that women are more likely to engage in self-harm compared to men (Morgan et al., 2017), whereas others argue there is no significant difference across genders (Briere & Gil, 1998; Whitlock et al., 2006). However, there are some studies regarding gender differences, making itself visible in the methods of self-harm. It is argued that men tend to burn or hit themselves, while women tend to cut themselves (Claes et al., 2006; Laye-Gindhu & Schonert-Reichl, 2005). Moreover, among LGBT+ youth, there is an increased risk of self-harm, suicidal attempts, and suicide in comparison to cis and heterosexual youth (Jadva, 2023).

The research focused on psychological characteristics heavily leans onto the idea that individuals engaging in self-harm often experience high levels of negative emotionality and emotion dysregulation. In other words, they frequently exhibit intense negative emotions and experience hardship in managing and expressing these emotions (Gratz, 2001; Klonsky, 2007). Furthermore, common psychological traits revealed self-critical experience and self-directed anger as contributors to these behaviors (Klonsky & Muehlenkamp, 2007). The motivations behind self-harm are diverse, which is intriguing for the researchers. Klonsky (2007) categorizes the functions of self-harm into several primary motivations. Affect regulation is described as the most prevalent function where self-harm is used for reducing overwhelming negative emotions. Self-punishment as another motivator is a means to express self-directed anger for punishing themselves, which is often related to low self-esteem. Anti-dissociation helps individuals to feel real and bear against dissociative episodes. In some cases, interpersonal influence is related to demanding care, support, or attention from others. Sensation seeking, as not a common



motivator, is related to self-harm, providing a form of excitement. Anti-suicide is a final motivator that defines these behaviors as an avoiding mechanism for suicidal thoughts and actions. In addition, there is another motivation defined as an attempt to avoid unwanted internal experiences in which self-harm, along with other psychopathologies, provides a temporary escape despite, in the long run, contributing to further emotional dysregulation and sustaining the cycle of self-harm (Hayes et al., 1996)

As for the psychological correlates of self-harm, high levels of depression and anxiety are commonly associated, indicating they are at risk for engaging in self-harming behaviors (Klonsky et al., 2003; Muehlenkamp & Gutierrez, 2004). Also, there is evidence suggesting a link between childhood sexual abuse and self-harm (Klonsky & Moyer, 2007). However, it was argued that this association may be influenced by other psychological risk factors that are common to both self-harm and childhood sexual abuse. It was noted that many who have been abused do not engage in self-harm, and many who self-harm have not been abused (Klonsky & Muehlenkamp, 2007). On the other hand, family dynamics play a critical role in the development and endurance of self-harm behaviors. Dysfunctional family interactions, defined as high levels of conflict in the family, lack of emotional support, and history of abuse or neglect, are reported among individuals engaging in self-harm (Gratz, 2003), which will be elaborated more in the following sections.

In the literature, effective treatments for self-harm are frequently suggested as psychotherapies that address emotion regulation, cognitive restructuring, and problem-solving skills. These involved cognitive-behavioral therapies (CBT) and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) (Muehlenkamp, 2006; Linehan et al., 2006). The psychodynamic approach in the treatment of BPD and self-harm, specifically object relations theory, effectively transforms split representations of self and others into integrated, realistic ones through structured sessions and transference analysis (Levy et al., 2007). Research on pharmacotherapy, on the other hand, is limited regarding self-harm, and current studies primarily focus on treating co-occurring mental disorders rather than self-harm directly (Bridge et al., 2007). As for the psychoanalytic approach, which constructs the theoretical framework of this study,

there are a few articles addressing the clinical approach to self-harm. Moreover, there are some publications on case studies from a Lacanian perspective. This study aims to fill this gap in the field of psychoanalysis by offering theoretical and practical implications for clinical practice.

### **1.3. Recent Qualitative Research on Self-Harm**

Due to qualitative research gaining significant popularity in recent years, there is a notable amount of qualitative research on self-harm. This review of the recent literature summarizes the results of qualitative research on various samples differentiated by age, gender, and cultural context. There are studies employing a broad perspective in order to investigate self-harm behavior and the reasons leading to it. One of the studies revealed that participants used self-harm to cope with emotional distress, emphasizing control as a central theme (Davies, 2020). A systematic review focusing on reasons for self-harm identified eight significant themes derived from the frameworks by Suyemoto (1998) and Klonsky (2007). Most commonly explored themes included “managing distress, self-harm as a means of enforcing interpersonal influence, punishment and managing dissociation.” On the other hand, less frequently addressed reasons included “preventing suicide, sensation-seeking, and defining personal boundaries, expressing or coping with sexuality.” The review argued that the dominance of affect regulation theories in studies of self-harm may arise from clinical sample biases or limited quantitative measures. It highlighted the importance of qualitative studies (Edmonson et al., 2016, p. 114).

Studies targeting adolescents and young adults are common since these behaviors are prevalent in this age range (Klineberg et al., 2013). A qualitative study exploring the perceptions of self-harm through undergraduate students emphasizes the role of cultural influences and the stigma associated with these behaviors. It was asserted that self-harm is often associated with emotional pain. They also assessed that participants held negative judgments about those who self-harm. Thus, they offered anti-stigma campaigns and educational interventions within academic settings to foster empathy and understanding (Fox & Flower, 2021). Expanding on the

adolescent demographic, another study draws attention to secrecy and help-seeking aspects of self-harm. It is discussed that some participants were resistant to accepting help and normalized their self-harming behavior. Specifically, the participants kept these behaviors a secret, and others later discovered them. However, after receiving help, some participants viewed disclosure more positively. When they asked for help, in addition to their injuries treated, adolescents valued respect and wanted their feelings, problems, and opinions to be acknowledged and considered (Klineberg et al., 2013).

Gender and sexual orientation are also important factors regarding self-harm, as demonstrated by a meta-analysis that LGBTQ+ people and females are considered high-risk groups for suicidality and self-harm (Richardson et al., 2023). Regarding gender, there are some similarities between motivations, yet there are also significant differences between genders. The differences imply that it is critical to consider participants' genders when conducting qualitative research on self-harm. It is suggested that such studies focus exclusively on one gender or include an adequate number of participants from each gender to examine similarities and differences. In the second case, it is crucial to clearly note that the results might only apply to the gender under study and not necessarily to the other genders (Miller & Johnson, 2021). Some examples employ the idea of focusing exclusively on one gender. For instance, a study discussed that adolescent girls use self-harm to handle emotional pain and trauma. The research identified three superordinate themes, which are self-punishment, the desire to escape overwhelming emotions, and the expression of trauma. These themes revolved around the role of emotional regulation and self-identity exploration of self-harm, suggesting a treatment addressing the individual's emotional needs and self-exploration process (Woodley, 2020). Similarly, another study was conducted focusing on adolescent girls. The study concluded that self-harm behaviors have multiple purposes, including expressing mental distress and regulating intense emotions. The participants emphasized the compulsive nature of the behavior and compared their behaviors to addiction. This study offered supportive relationships as a reduction of these behaviors and suggested interpersonal relations as key to managing self-harm (Miller & Johnson, 2021). For the LGBTQ+ youth risk group, a study highlighted the difficulties in self-acceptance

while articulating societal, familial, and peer rejection. They also brought up issues of internalized transphobia and homophobia that contribute to self-harming behavior. The suggestion made for prevention was inclusive education on LGBTQ+ issues of professionals in order to navigate their identities and improve mental well-being (Williams & Green, 2021).

The qualitative research also highlighted the significant cultural impact on self-harm behaviors. Kiran and colleagues (2021) investigated self-harm from a clinician's point of view in Pakistan. The study emphasized a variety of factors as motivators, including mental health conditions, financial difficulties, and cultural pressures, especially those related to marriage and family honor, which primarily affect women. Effective intervention is disrupted by the criminalization of self-harm under Pakistani law, societal stigma, and religious beliefs. The study suggests decriminalizing self-harm and addressing sociocultural obstacles to enhance prevention. Another study exploring Thailand's context addressed the association between self-harm and adverse childhood environments, such as maltreatment and bullying. The participants reported negativity, poor parental responsiveness, and a lack of emotional availability in their childhood. Furthermore, high academic expectations also influence self-harming behaviors among Thai individuals (Limsuwan et al., 2023).

In conclusion, recent qualitative literature on self-harm is conducted across various samples while collectively highlighting the critical role of interpersonal relationships, professional intervention, and the cultural context in addressing this issue. To the best of our knowledge, there are no qualitative studies based on self-harm conducted in Türkiye. Furthermore, despite the extensive literature, underlying mechanisms of self-harm, which contain unconscious motivation, remain to be explored.

#### **1.4. Family Dynamics of Individuals Engaging in Self-Harm**

A notable amount of studies demonstrated a clear correlation between high levels of conflict, lack of emotional support, dysfunctional communication patterns, insecure attachment in a family environment, and an increased risk of self-harm among adults

and adolescents. For instance, one of the studies on this topic demonstrates that lack of emotional connections and resistance to change in the family, concern about family communication, and low satisfaction with family functioning were positively correlated with the frequency, duration, and severity of self-harm among adults (Halstead et al., 2014). In another study, family criticism and emotional over-involvement are associated with the presence and frequency of self-harm in adolescents (Wedig & Nock, 2007). A review article on family dynamics examined factors such as childhood sexual and physical abuse, neglect, parental separation or loss, security of attachment to parents, and emotional reactivity and intensity. This article demonstrated the contributions of the factors as risk factors to self-harm tendencies (Gratz, 2003).

Wagner (1997) delves into family risk factors for child and adolescent suicide behavior, demonstrating that the families of the participants display poor communication and problem-solving skills, leading to chronic stress and crises. Moreover, they commonly engage in secretiveness and avoid direct verbal communication, which prevents the effective resolution of conflicts. Parental psychopathology and associated factors that are inconsistent or harsh parenting styles also elevate the risk of suicide and suicidal behavior. Disturbances in attachment, such as insecure attachments or early parental loss, are significant risk factors. High levels of marital distress, contributing to an unstable family environment and a struggle to find emotional support, along with marital problems and the effects of parental separation or divorce, have been identified as significant risk factors for self-harm (Fortune et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2019; Wagner, 1997). Further studies displayed that other risk factors include maladaptive parenting and childhood maltreatment, which may result in interpersonal difficulties, unhealthy relationships, and an increased risk of self-harm during adolescence. On the contrary, a supportive environment, good communication, and family members' involvement may be protective factors against these behaviors (Beautrais, 2000).

An important finding regarding the family dynamics concerning self-harm was that adolescents perceive it as a way to create closeness within the family. It suggests that self-harm can be an attempt to positively influence family dynamics as well as create

connectedness despite using negative means. The study further identifies that self-harm in adolescents is deeply connected to triadic relational dynamics. In other words, self-harming behavior cannot be viewed in isolation but rather as a product of ongoing interactions among the adolescent, each parent, and the relationship of the parental couple. The study highlights the mutual influences of family members and how attachment issues and systemic relational patterns contribute to the emergence and continuation of self-harm (Karamat Ali, 2020). Similarly, a case study presented an example and reported that a self-harming individual named Harry stated he was frustrated with his constantly fighting family and wanted to punish them. By refusing to join his children for Christmas dinner and engaging in self-harm, Harry was punishing not just his family but also himself for what he perceived as his “bad” behavior (Nathan, 2006).

Yakeley and Burbridge-James (2018) reviewed suicide and self-harm through psychodynamic approaches, pointing out that a child's early experiences with abusive, depriving, or absent parents lead to internalizing reduced ability to express and regulate feelings. Freud (1917) mentions in *Mourning and Melancholia* how mourning is blocked when ambivalence and hostility dominate feelings towards the lost object, resulting in a state of melancholia. The hated object becomes part of the self, which is attacked as if the object is within. While the self is targeted in acts of self-harm, unconsciously, these attacks can be associated with someone or something the person has hated and lost. In other words, identification with the external object results in the object being perceived as part of the self, or identification with the object results in the object being introjected into the self (Menninger, 1938, as cited in Canbolat, 2018). Hence, self-harm may contain an unconscious attack on the internalized or introjected object as well as the victim self. Children exposed to abuse, depriving, or absence often internalize the abuser, depriver, or absent person as a dangerous figure with whom the child is deeply involved and hard to escape, especially when the abuser was once trusted and loved, like a parent. Hence, self-harming individuals' distinction between good and bad, self and other, inner and outer, is blurred. Moreover, they rely on primitive defense mechanisms such as splitting, projection, and projective identification to avoid painful feelings. Considering these early childhood experiences with family dynamics, self-harm may

act as a way to regain a sense of control or power in the face of helplessness and powerlessness (Yakaley & Burbridge-James, 2018).

In summary, the existing body of research showed that the presence of negative family dynamics and the absence of positive or supportive interactions within the family have a significant impact on self-harm. The psychoanalytic perspective highlights the role of early relational experiences and dysfunctional family environments in the development and maintenance of self-harm. Hence, investigating family dynamics may provide critical perspectives by shedding light on the complex interplay between family dynamics and self-harming behaviors.

### **1.5. Birth Narratives of Self-Harming Individuals**

Birth stories are crucial in shaping one's life narrative by providing valuable insights into the identity and perspective of the individuals (McAdams, 2001). They mark the beginning of the person's entry into the world and the family, and these narratives hold a unique position as they convey received knowledge. Individuals' articulation of their birth stories derives from how they were narrated and how they internalize these narratives. Therefore, birth stories act as a bridge between family history and personal stories, and they convey great theoretical interest (Andrews et al., 2015). While birth stories are frequently studied from the parents' perspective (Antoniak et al., 2019; Corner et al., 2023; Downe et al., 2018), the child's viewpoint is often overlooked.

Birth narratives can be considered as a form of received knowledge. These narratives can be registered in symbolic and imaginary orders in a Lacanian sense, and they serve as indicators to comprehend the child's entry into the family, with family circumstances elaborated in the child's fantasies. For instance, birth narratives encompass primal scene fantasies related to how they were conceived and how their existence is closely associated with their parents' relationship (Aron, 1995). In other words, these fantasies of the child shed light on their place or lack of place in the family. Furthermore, birth-related fantasies reflect the individual's ideas about how their birth affected the family system within which they arrived. These fantasies are

closely connected to the parent's desires and beliefs about their offspring. For instance, it can determine whether the child is perceived as wanted or unwanted (Aron, 2014). Fantasies embedded in birth narratives are the indicators of critical unconscious materials since they repeat and have ongoing relevance in the individual's life and relations. Therefore, the psychoanalytic exploration of the origin of birth narratives can reveal significant aspects of individual and family development, character, and psychopathology (Arlow, 1991; Aron, 2014).

In the literature, there is no direct research regarding self-harm behaviors and birth narratives. However, it is concluded that the relationship between parents and their children is deeply impacted by parents' perceptions and experiences surrounding the child's birth. In other words, these factors can have profound effects on the parent-child dyad, shaping the emotional and psychological well-being of both parties. Most of the studies are conducted from the parent's perspective, indicating that women with birth-related traumatization reported adverse maternal and infant outcomes, such as child-related fears, sexual problems, and impaired bonding (Martini et al., 2022). Maternal PTSD is often the result of such traumatic events, which can severely impact the mother's ability to form a secure attachment with her infant. Literature has highlighted that a traumatic childbirth experience represents a significant risk factor for the development of a warm and close attachment bond between a mother and her newborn (Thiel et al., 2019; Church & Scanlan, 2002). Furthermore, maternal prenatal attachment has a direct and impactful effect on postnatal mother-child attachment. The quality of prenatal attachment represents a protective factor for enhancing the childbirth experience, promoting a higher quality of postnatal attachment bond. In other words, the emotional bond, which starts in the womb as the mother forms a mental image of a future child, fosters the mother's desire for closeness and proximity to the child (Ponti et al., 2020). Although there are not many studies discovering the childbirth experience and self-harm behavior, a significant risk factor for self-harm is the attachment style with the parents (Gratz, 2003; Wagner et al., 2003). For instance, based on clinical experience, Raes (2001) examined Lacan's hypothesis of unwanted children being more prone to commit suicide. The article argued that breaking up the death drive is the result of the subject's demand for love repeatedly responding negatively.



In summary, birth stories are essential in shaping one's life narrative, offering insights into identity. These stories connect family history with personal tales, influenced by how they were initially told and internalized. Birth narratives as an important part of the personal tales may provide more insight into the harm inflicted on the self.

### **1.6. Psychoanalytic Approach to Self-Harm**

The psychoanalytic perspective offers significant insights into the psychological mechanisms and underlying dynamics. This literature review integrates theoretical discussions of the articles to explain how psychoanalytic concepts apply to the understanding of self-harm behaviors. While examining self-harm, it is crucial to investigate the development of the self that is exposed to the act of harm. Another focal point is that both suicide and self-harm are aimed at the body. The relationship between self and body is central to understanding self-harm. Skin and early attachment experiences play an important role in the development of the self since skin-to-skin contact is critical for early bonding and the development of an integrated self (Yakeley & Burbridge-James, 2018; Motz, 2010). From infancy, the physical experience of being held, fed, bathed, soothed, and having one's needs met plays a role in forming a cohesive sense of self. Nevertheless, early care disruptions may lead to an impaired sense of internal integration, which may emerge as self-harming behaviors (Grossman & Grossman, 1981).

Bick (1968) highlights the “holding function” of the skin, which provides a boundary between what is experienced internal and what is external. Through the act of self-harm, a breach of this boundary becomes apparent, involving a transition between internal and external. These acts function as an expression of internal conflict, similar to the behaviors observed in infants. Infants lacking language communicate anxiety-provoking experiences through physical manifestations, such as crying. Hence, self-harm may be viewed as a primitive form of communication, where the breach of the skin imitates an infantile attempt to externalize internal experiences. This breach also communicates an unconscious material to eliminate bad feelings, involving a skin violation, where blood flow, for instance, helps eliminate bad parts

of the self. (Yakeley & Burbridge-James, 2018). Therefore, self-harm emerged as a mechanism of communication, and instead of being spoken through words, it is written on the body (Adshead, 2010). Also, Motz (2010) suggested that self-harm symbolizes psychic pain, making private suffering a public one and expressing the unspoken. Moreover, these behaviors inscribe a meaningful narrative on the body, hoping for an understanding and response from others. Freud's (1914) concept of acting out, which refers to a discharge by action instead of verbalization, represents this notion of self-harm. In brief, unprocessed emotions agonizing to the subject will manifest in behavior if they cannot be symbolized or represented in the mind. The maintenance of self-harm is related to repetition compulsion, repeated exposure of the self to physically or emotionally painful situations experienced in the past. It may give an illusory sense of mastery of the unprocessed early traumas (Freud, 1920).

Other aspects of self-harm or suicide, when viewed within the psychoanalytic framework, are manifestations of complex internal conflicts and object relationships (Bick, 1968; Nathan, 2004; Sabbath, 1969). Although it is essential to emphasize the distinction between suicide and self-harm in the theoretical frame of psychoanalysis, naturally, these categories are not rigid, and patients can fluctuate between different states of mind (Nathan, 2004). Freud (1917) first conceptualized the idea that such extreme behaviors are perceived through object relations, and his formulations led to the famous phrase "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego" (Freud, 1917, as cited in Nathan, 2004). While listening to his melancholic patients, he realized that verbal attacks on themselves (being worthless, stupid, etc.) could be displaced aggression towards loved ones. These patients internalized the loved object instead of confronting it and became the object themselves. From this internal position, they can aggressively attack the hated object. This process allows individuals to express their hostility safely while preserving the relationship with the external object. In self-harm, the conscious intention is to get rid of bad feelings, while the unconscious aim is to attack the bad object or part of themselves. It is emphasized that self-harm is an effort to eliminate the bad object that has polluted the body, which enables a sense of relief (Nathan, 2004). It is better understood with the work of Klein (1935). The conscious intention in self-harm may be to preserve good, which has a life-affirming aspect since subjects often articulate the compulsion to get rid of the bad

feelings inside themselves. In other words, the conscious wish in self-harm is to preserve the body rather than destroy it by getting rid of bad and evil blood out of their system; they experience a short relief period (Nathan, 2004). Even though it might seem paradoxical, this hurting functions as healing; it involves pleasure in the pain (Motz, 2010).

Self-harm includes the struggle between life and death instinct, initially conceptualized by Freud (1920). Klein (1933) expanded this theorization and suggested a constant struggle between the urge to destroy and the desire to preserve that set on at birth. As the infantile ego is immature when dealing with internal struggles, it externalizes this by projecting its good and bad self to outside sources, mainly its primary caregivers, to make it more manageable. When the infant encounters a good object (or caregiver) that gives nurture and love, it is introjected into the self, reinforcing the life-enhancing elements to combat the tendency to destruct. However, in the context of self-harm, this dynamic between life and death instinct is disrupted, and individuals fail to introduce good objects, which leads to the dominance of the destructive self. Self-harm becomes a way to manage the overwhelming anxieties of the unresolved split within the self (Nathan, 2004).

It is argued that self-harm arises from dissociative experience, involving at least two dissociated self-states, that are an abused and an abuser. Individuals who engage in self-harm become prey and predator, masochist and sadist at the same time. The inner predator arises from split-off identification with the aggressor, sustaining a connection to the abusive or neglecting but beloved parent (Yakeley & Burbridge-James, 2018). It is stated that self-harming subjects usually experience this inner predator as alien and feel an external voice urging them to self-harm (Bromberg, 1998). When penetrating, marking, or bruising the skin, a violent intrusion comes from the external world, contacting the internal world and leaving the subject damaged. Implementing harm to self would imply that the subject's body essentially becomes other to oneself, with a split of the self, an attack from an alien or outsider. Cutting the skin expresses a division between the skin and self; in a sense, it reflects the earliest relationship between self and another. On the other hand, nursing after harm resembles the infantile experience of being tended to and cared for by another.

It represents the other part of the divided self: attending, caring, and nurturing (Motz, 2010). This perspective emphasizes the importance of addressing the relational patterns of self-harming individuals.

In conclusion, the psychoanalytic view provides a rich understanding of self-harm, emphasizing the complex interaction between self and body relation, acting out, repetition compulsion, object relation aspect, and life and death instincts. It is also important to note the communicative function of self-harm. These insights highlight the importance of addressing the patient's internal world and relational experiences.

### **1.7. Lacanian Approach to Self-Harm**

To investigate self-harm from a Lacanian perspective, it is crucial to explore some key concepts he introduced to psychoanalysis, namely the three orders: imaginary, symbolic, and real. The self, subjected to harm, can be understood through the imaginary order. Lacan describes the formation of the “I” during the mirror stage, where the subject gains a sense of self by identifying with their image (Homer, 2005). To comprehend the communicative aspect of self-harm, one must delve into the symbolic order. Symbolic encompasses language, law, and structures regulating desire (Evans, 2006). Exploring the relation with symbolic enables an interpretation of what individuals engage in self-harm communicate and what remains unspoken. Self-harm aims to the one's body, which can be discussed with the real order. Real is outside of language and resists symbolization, representing the raw, unmediated experience of the body (McLaughlin & Daffron, 2021).

Although there is no wide-ranging mention of self-harm in Lacan's theory, he offers valuable insights into the suicide phenomenon, which can be applied to the understanding of self-harm. Lacan occasionally addresses suicide, embedding his ideas within broader concepts such as the death drive (Canbolat, 2018). Lacan highlights the death drive's centrality to psychoanalytic theory, diverging from other psychoanalysts. Adding on to Freud's theorization of the death drive, he introduced the concept of *jouissance* as a mode of painful pleasure (Lacan, 2006b), which can be applied to self-harm experience. At last, Lacan's concept of “acting out,” derived

from Freud, is important in understanding self-harm. Acting out involves expressing unconscious thoughts and emotions through actions rather than words (Evans, 2006). Integration of these Lacanian concepts helps gain a deeper insight into the complex phenomenon of self-harm.

### **1.7.1. Three orders: imaginary, symbolic and real**

The imaginary order is characterized by the formation of the “I” or the ego, which occurs during the mirror stage. This well-known concept describes a stage in which the child identifies with their specular image. However, Lacan extends this idea beyond a literal mirror, emphasizing the importance of the gaze of the Other (Homer, 2005; Verhaeghe, 2001). Lacan (2006a) asserts that the mirror stage imposes fantasies of unity and wholeness upon the infant despite their fragmented bodily experiences. However, identification with the specular image results in a fundamental misrecognition since the infant identifies with the image in the mirror or the perceived gaze of the Other. The Other is another subject in their unique alterity and symbolic order that mediates the subject’s relations, initially embodied by the primary caregiver who retroactively interprets the primitive cries of the infant into meaningful messages (Evans, 2006).

The symbolic order is the order of the law, structure, and language, specifically the signifiers. It is the realm of radical alterity, often referred to as the Other. The unconscious is considered the discourse of this Other and thus belongs entirely to the symbolic order. This domain represents the law that regulates desire within the Oedipus complex. While dual relations characterize the imaginary, the symbolic is defined by triadic structures (Evans, 2006). Metaphorically speaking, the dyadic relationship between the mother and infant is fundamentally disrupted by the intervention of the Name-of-the-Father. This intervention is the process of symbolic castration, a necessary transition for the child to enter the realm of language and culture. Symbolic castration involves the child's recognition of the limitations imposed by the paternal function (Soler, 2014, as cited in Gürsoy, 2023). Due to this characteristic of a triadic structure, *jouissance* is limited; that is a painful pleasure that will be explained in more detail in the following section. Lacan famously stated

that “jouissance is forbidden to him who speaks, as such,” highlighting the inherent limitation language imposes on pleasure (Evans, 2006, p. 93).

The order of the real is linked with the body's physicality, especially within biology. For instance, the real father is the biological father instead of its symbolic and imaginary functions (Evans, 2006). Though Lacan links the body and the real, the subject's understanding of their body is not innate but acquired through interactions with others and broader social and cultural contexts. An example is the mirror stage, where the infant acquires his image through interaction with the Other (McLaughlin & Daffron, 2021). Unlike computers and machines that can be programmed, the human body resists symbolic direction (Vanheule, 2011). Hence, Lacan introduces the real order to emphasize our bodies' incomprehensible and enigmatic aspects that defy understanding (McLaughlin & Daffron, 2021). It represents lack or absence, the impossible, the unspeakable force of trauma, and the indescribable needs of the body. This idea is consistent with Freud's concept of the “death drive,” suggesting that the real is associated with the unconsciousness of the body and the active but inexpressible stirrings of organic needs (Boothby, 1991), which will be explained further in the following section.

As for the imaginary counterpart, since self-harm is an attack on “I” or self, it is important to investigate the relationship between the self-harming individual and the Other due to the Other's critical function in the mirror stage. As for the symbolic counterpart, acquisition of language, intervention of the Name-of-the-father, or the paternal function (all referring to symbolic castration) requires letting go of a particular subjectivity. Lacan (2006b) discussed this as the alienating effect of language, and he emphasizes letting go of particular subjectivity, enabling access to a broader social context of communication or meaning. For those who self-harm, language is felt as having failed in its promise to deliver a shared meaning or at least the illusion of it (Straker, 2006). As for the real counterpart, in the context of self-harm, where there is no limit to the overwhelming emotions and experiences, subjects may physically impose a cut in the order of the real to manage these sensations. When these limitless, overwhelming emotions and experiences resist entering symbolic order due to the absence of a paternal function, this acting on the

body enables an expression and speaks the unspeakable (Aron, 1998). Furthermore, the agent that harms is not usually experienced as the real self; there is a dissociation involved in some cases. Dissociation may be functioning because the subject may be experiencing “a third” bringing the law: harming self, self that is exposed to harming, and the (m)Other. In other words, self-harm might be an unconscious attempt to triangulate the relationship. Even though self-harm provides a short period of relief, it cannot create the triangle that paternal function posits. This is due to the unavailability of inter-subjectivity in this illusory triangle (Straker, 2006).

### **1.7.2. Death drive and jouissance**

Unlike Freud, who conceptualized death instinct as a fundamental tendency to return to an inorganic state and closely associated with biology, Lacan highlighted it as a death drive and stated that death drive is the symbolic order’s fundamental tendency to create repetition (Boothby, 1991). Lacan further diverges from Freud, who situates the death drive as an opposition to sexual drives, stating that “every drive is death drive.” It is due to each drive pursuing its extinction, involving repetition, attempting to transcend the pleasure principle into a mode of excess jouissance (Evans, 2006). The pleasure principle imposes a limit to enjoyment, yet the subject constantly attempts to transgress these limitations and seeks to go “beyond the pleasure principle.” (Freud, 1920). According to Lacan, what lies beyond pleasure is not more pleasure; it is pain since there is only a certain amount of pleasure the subject can bear. Beyond the limit, pleasure transforms into pain, and he describes this painful pleasure as jouissance, stating that “jouissance is suffering” (Lacan, 2006b). Lacan also states that jouissance is essentially phallic, referring to it as not relating to the Other, yet he states there is also another form, namely feminine jouissance or Other's jouissance (Lacan, 1999). However, in this study, jouissance refers to the phallic nature of it.

Symbolic function brings the castration where the subject gives up an attempt to be the imaginary phallus for the mother. Name-of-the-father prohibits the enjoyment in the Oedipus complex, yet this enjoyment was already impossible; hence, it sustains the illusion of neurotics as enjoyment would be available if it is not forbidden by the

paternal function (Evans, 2006). Jouissance attempts to transgress this limit created by this illusory prohibition; hence, at its core, jouissance is transgressive. Jouissance also represents the bodily expression of the real, an enjoyment beyond our comprehension and closely linked to drives (McLaughlin & Daffron, 2021). The death drive is the constant attempt to transgress the pleasure principle towards an excess jouissance and a “path towards death” (Evans, 2006). Vanheuele (2011) refers to this link between jouissance and death drive by suggesting that gratification is found in excitation and agitation beyond pleasure.

Engaging in self-harm may provide a temporary sense of integration, moving away from suffering to a more stable sense of self. For some people, seeing their blood provides a concrete confirmation of their feelings and existence since it is a raw representation of the affect. Self-harm representation of the affect comes with a representation of a need to limit these affects (Straker, 2006). In other words, in self-harm, agonizing feelings are not articulated yet acted out, highlighting a way to cope with jouissance (McLaughlin & Daffron, 2021). Although Lacan (1960) did not theorize affect, he focused on how subjects face structure and limit feelings through entry to the symbolic order. Language presents an arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, yet Lacan (1993) emphasized the need for an anchoring point, a point de capiton, in which signifier and signified knotted, and meaning and subjectivity emerge. This point is provided by the paternal function, or with the “no” of the father, to cut dyadic relations between child and mother. It limits and interrupts jouissance, freeing the child from the dyad of subject and object, which emerges subjectivity (Skater, 2006). Therefore, self-harm may function as a temporary emergence of subjectivity and a way to cope with jouissance since it can be considered as an attempt to create a thirdness. However, this strategy has not succeeded (Straker, 2006). Without the inter-subjectivity provided by the paternal function, self-harm is doomed to be a form of jouissance.

### **1.7.3. Acting out and passage to the act**

Acting out, initially introduced by Freud, is that repressed experiences from memory would return as actions without the subject knowing they are repeating them (Evans, 2006). Hence, Freud (1914) conceptualized acting out as a way of remembering by



repeating. Lacan sustains this aspect of acting out as a failure to recollect the past; he further emphasizes the inter-subjective aspect of recollection. Acting out involves communicating with the Other; however, the Other has become deaf to the messages conveyed in words, and the subject is forced to express the message in actions. It is important to note that the content of the message is unconscious, and even the subject is unaware that their actions express a message (Evans, 2006). Acting out is associated with suicide (Bion, 1959), along with the passage à l'acte (passage to the act), since they are both final measures against anxiety (Lacan, 2014). However, Lacan establishes the difference by stating that acting out is a remain in the scene, while passage to the act is an exit from the scene. Passage to the act is an escape from the Other into the realm of the real, yet acting out is a symbolic message directed to the Other (Evans, 2006). In that sense, self-harm can be a form of acting out rather than a passage to the act since subjects remain within the scene, signaling through their actions that something is not right.

The desire of the Other is particularly significant to self-harm and acting out. When a child is unable to secure a place within the desire of the Other and their demand for love is met with unresponsiveness, they are more susceptible to suicidal tendencies. It may be related to identifying with what they perceive as the Other's desire, which is their death (Raes, 2001). Furthermore, this unresponsiveness of the Other may lead to acting out, as the subject becomes desperate to convey their message. The unresponsiveness can be understood as a void; subjects may feel the urge to act out through self-harm in this void while seeking to externalize their internal suffering. This aspect of self-harm also relates to the self-harm literature where it is suggested that individuals engaging in self-harm often avoid direct verbal communication and adopt a secretive or hidden manner (Wagner, 1997). Hence, self-harm can be viewed as an attempt to validate and reaffirm their attachment to the Other despite its' painful nature.

### **1.8. The Aim and Scope of the Study**

Self-harm is becoming a significant concern; in a recent paper, it was defined as an epidemic of recent years (Papadima, 2019). While extensive qualitative research investigated the phenomenon of self-harm, motivations and experiences, particularly

those rooted in the unconscious, remain to be explored. This study aimed to address this gap by investigating self-harm through a psychoanalytic lens. Hence, the first research question posits (1) What are the experiences of individuals engaging in self-harm?

The reviewed literature displays the impact of early relational experiences and family dynamics on developing and maintaining self-harming behaviors (Wagner, 1997; Yakeley & Burbridge-James, 2018). By examining these elements through a psychoanalytic perspective, this research seeks to illuminate the complex interplay between family dynamics and self-harm. Furthermore, birth narratives, an integral aspect of identity (McAdams, 2001), provide an important perspective into the unconscious motivations behind self-harm. By examining birth narratives, the object of the harm that is self, inherent in self-harming behaviors, can be better understood. In a more Lacanian sense, birth narratives and family dynamics are a pathway to investigate the subject's relation to the Other and the Other's desire, which covers the subject's interpersonal relations. These aspects in the subject's narratives are important since self-harm is considered a way of communication across psychoanalytic and non-psychoanalytic studies. Therefore, the following research questions include (2) How do individuals engaging in self-harm evaluate their family dynamics and the narratives surrounding their conception and birth?

This study adopted a reflexive inductive thematic analysis approach since qualitative methodology maintains the complexity inherent in social reality. The inductive approach allows the research questions to evolve organically through the coding process, while the reflexive approach emphasizes the researcher's interpretative engagement with the data. The research method employed in this study will be discussed more in the following chapter. The findings are elaborated with the insights of Lacanian psychoanalysis into psychological processes involved in the process of self-harm. There are a few articles addressing self-harm from a Lacanian psychoanalytic approach through case studies or theoretical discussions. However, to the best of our knowledge, no qualitative research from a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective has been conducted on this topic. Furthermore, there is no research examining self-harm through a psychoanalytic perspective in the context of Türkiye.

Hence, this study aims to contribute to the field of psychoanalysis by offering theoretical and practical implications for clinical practice.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1. Qualitative Research

Qualitative research deeply engages with individual experiences and the meanings they hold within them through the lens of inter-subjectivity. Qualitative research aims to provide rich descriptions and potential explanations for phenomena without aiming for predictive outcomes. Thus, qualitative researchers focus on understanding the meaning people attribute to their experiences and how they navigate various situations (Willig, 2013). Rather than numerical measurement, qualitative researchers rely on language, which is qualitative data, as the primary tool to emphasize the subjective nature of human experiences. In other words, qualitative researchers examine reflective narratives from individuals to reveal broader patterns and themes. Furthermore, qualitative methodology acknowledges that researchers are positioned within the world they study. Qualitative data is constructed within the participant-researcher relationship, and therefore, it cannot be considered independently of the researcher's presence and influence (Biggerstaff, 2012; Willig, 2013). Unlike quantitative research, which prompts confirmation or rejection of a predetermined hypothesis, qualitative research revolves around analyzing and comprehending a specific phenomenon through the perspective of a small group. While constructing research questions, qualitative studies utilize open-ended questions that provide detailed descriptions and explanations rather than simple yes or no answers. These research questions allow for exploring individual experiences and shared understandings (Riessman, 2008).

The utilization of qualitative research among European social scientists traces its origins back to the 1960s. Nevertheless, psychology studies did not embrace this

research methodology until the 1990s. This delay might be related to psychology's close alignment with the natural sciences that embrace a singular conception of the scientific method with a strong inclination towards quantification (Howitt, 2010). Even though qualitative research was recognized as a methodology for the academic field of psychology, it dealt with resistance in academic circles during the 1990s. The primary reason for this resistance might be related to the fact that it challenges the conventional understanding of science, existing methodological foundations, and the knowledge it generates. Despite its idealization of objectivity, psychology is criticized for its male-dominated, middle-class-oriented, and Western-centric biases, and it is argued that instead of discovering "truth," psychology research constructed it (Willig, 2013). In Türkiye, while qualitative research remains limited, there is a noticeable increase in interest among researchers, particularly graduate students (Tanyaş, 2014).

Psychoanalysis and qualitative research align in terms of their view of science. Lacan (1977, as cited in Vanheule, 2002) stated that psychoanalysis can attain scientific foundations for its theories and techniques by formalizing its fundamental aspect of experiences. In other words, Lacan emphasizes the importance of structuring and articulating the core dimensions of psychoanalytic experiences to establish scientific credibility. Applying qualitative research methods ensures that the complexity inherent in the social reality is maintained in the data, indicating that it adequately grasps the authentic structure of the data. Moreover, psychoanalytic considerations are integrated through all research steps, including psychoanalytic questioning and data interpretation (Vanheule, 2002).

## **2.2. Thematic Analysis**

With its theoretical freedom and flexibility, thematic analysis is a powerful research tool that offers the advantage of a detailed and complex data account. This approach allows for exploring emergent themes without being constrained by pre-existing theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006), aligning well with the unpredictable and varied nature of narratives surrounding self-harm acts. To ensure clarity, thematic analysis was later categorized into three distinct schools: coding reliability,

which employs a post-positivist approach; reflexive, which prioritizes the researcher's subjectivity and reflexivity; and codebook that situates between the reflexive approach and coding reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This study aligns with the reflexive thematic analysis approach, emphasizing the researcher's interpretative engagement with the data, and the interpretative engagement is colored with a psychoanalytic perspective.

The thematic analysis involves several choices that should be explicitly considered and discussed. These considerations should begin before data collection and continue as an ongoing reflexive dialogue throughout the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first choice maps how and why the data is coded and can be identified in inductive or deductive ways. Deductive, theoretical, or top-down thematic analysis is driven by the researcher's theoretical interest, resulting in a more detailed analysis of specific aspects of the data rather than a detailed overall description. In contrast, an inductive, or bottom-up, approach identifies themes strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990). With this approach, the themes are not driven by the researcher's theoretical interests. Instead, inductive analysis involves coding the data without fitting it into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions, making it a data-driven process. However, researchers cannot entirely detach themselves from their theoretical and epistemological commitments, meaning data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, inductive coding is utilized to ensure that themes emerge organically from the data rather than imposing predefined categories, allowing the research questions to evolve through the coding process.

Another key decision in thematic analysis is determining the level at which themes will be identified: semantic or latent. With a semantic approach, themes are identified based on the explicit meanings of the data, with no search for underlying meanings. The process involves organizing and summarizing the data to show patterns in semantic content, followed by an interpretation to theorize the significance, often in relation to existing literature. In contrast, a latent approach goes beyond surface meanings to identify underlying ideas, assumptions, and ideologies shaping the data. In other words, the semantic approach describes the surface, while

the latent approach explores underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations that shape the data (Boyatzis, 1998). Coding at the latent level is particularly compatible with researchers using a psychoanalytic framework of interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study utilized both semantic and latent-level analyses since latent analysis captures unconscious elements, and semantic analysis provides a clear and straightforward understanding.

### **2.3. Sampling Method and Participants**

Purposive sampling is frequently utilized in qualitative research. This method is chosen when researchers want to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or, particularly with small and specific populations, instead of making statistical generalizations. To ensure the effectiveness of purposive sampling, it is essential to establish clear criteria and reasoning for selecting participants (Obilor, 2023). Therefore, a set of inclusion criteria was established: 1) history of multiple self-harm, 2) last self-harm that occurred within a year or less. While the requirement for a history of multiple intentional self-harm aims to capture participants with a more established pattern of behavior, the criterion of self-harm within a year enables exploring the most contemporary patterns. All types of self-harm are included in this study in order to encompass a broader range of experiences.

One of the methods to decide on participant numbers while conducting qualitative research is saturation. According to Guest and colleagues (2006), saturation includes two components. The first one, data saturation, occurs when new information gathered no longer produces significant change to the codebook. The second one, thematic exhaustion, occurs when no new themes emerge from the data, suggesting a range of insights has been exhausted. This understanding of saturation is grounded in a realist ontology, where the meaning is inherent in data, and the researcher's position as an archaeologist scoops out meaning from data. Especially for those who adopt a reflexive approach to thematic analysis, where meaning is centered at the intersection of the data and the researcher's contextual and theoretical interpretations, the "saturation" concept is challenged (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Sim et al., 2018). This approach to thematic analysis situates meaning as a concept requiring interpretation;

hence, new meanings are theoretically always possible. In other words, when knowledge construction is reflexive and theoretically embedded, the potential for new insights or understanding is always possible (Low, 2019; Mason, 2010). In that sense, saturation is a decision made by the researcher based on the adequacy and richness of the data to cover the research question rather than an absolute endpoint. An alternative concept to saturation is information power, which means that if the sample holds more relevant information for the study, fewer participants are needed. The final sample size is evaluated on factors beyond mere numbers, including the richness and complexity of the information gathered from the sample, as well as the quality and variability of the data (Malterud, 2016). For the current study, the information power approach is utilized to decide participant size since it allows a more flexible approach to the research process. Six participants were recruited for the study based on moving back and forth between coding and theme development, which was needed to determine the complexity of the information gathered.

The demographic information of the participants is displayed in Table 1. It includes their onset age of self-harm, current age, gender, and types of self-harm. Information about types of self-harm was gathered directly from participant interviews merely based on their descriptions of their behaviors. This approach was taken without referring to pre-existing lists of self-harm types to encourage them to articulate what they considered self-harming. Participants' names are edited and changed to codenames to pursue anonymity. Furthermore, it is worthy to note that only one of the participants is identified as a cis man. It aligns with previous findings, which indicate that self-harm is more prevalent in women than in men (Morgan et al., 2017), and it is more prevalent among LGBTQ+ (Jadva, 2023; Richardson et al., 2023). While the relationship between symptoms and gender is complex and beyond the scope of this study, it remains an important point to acknowledge.

**Table 1.** Demographic information of the participants

Participants	Onset age/Present age	Gender	Types of self-harm
Toprak	23/26	Cis man	Cutting his arms, scratching his arms, throwing up, misusing pills



Table 1. (continued)

Deniz	12/25	Non-binary	Misusing pills, cutting their wrists
Lale	12/25	Cis woman	Cutting her elbows and arms
Bahar	22/22	Cis woman	Cutting wrists and ankles
Yonca	15/29	Cis woman	Scratching arms, punching walls, severely squeezing her arms, eating until having abdominal pain
Kuzey	12/23	Trans man	Cutting his wrists and arms, burning his wrists and arms

#### 2.4. Procedure

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Middle East Technical University (METU) Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol number: 0220-ODTUIAEK-2024). Following the approval, the study was announced on several social media platforms, including LinkedIn, Facebook groups, Instagram, and Twitter’s communities section. The announcement included the aim of the study as “This study investigates how individuals with tendencies towards self-harm evaluate their own birth narratives.” and there was no definition of self-harm (see Appendix B). The intellectual choice behind not explicitly defining self-harm behavior in the announcement is to acknowledge the subjective nature of self-harm and allow for a broader range of self-identifications. Furthermore, the study was designed to investigate the experiences of those who perceive themselves as self-harming rather than those who might come to this realization through the definition in the announcement.

Participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire to confirm whether they were within the study's inclusion criteria and to schedule an interview date (see Appendix C). Sixteen people filled out the short questionnaire within nearly two months; six did not meet the inclusion criteria, and four did not answer the mail regarding scheduling an interview. These six people were informed that they would not be interviewed. However, they were provided information about METU AYNA Listening Point (ODTÜ AYNA Dinleme Noktası) as well as the other four people who met the criteria but did not respond. METU AYNA Listening Point is an

emergency hotline for psychological crises, and its contact number is shared with ten people who filled out the questionnaire but were not interviewed. The other six people who met the inclusion criteria were contacted via email or telephone based on the contact information they provided. Prior to the interview, participants received an informed consent form (see Appendix D), which they signed either electronically or with a pen, depending on the interview format (either online or face-to-face). Semi-structured interviews were utilized to gather detailed information from participants while they shared their experiences and thoughts (see Appendix E). For three participants living out of town, interviews were conducted online through Skype, whereas for those who could attend in person, three participants were interviewed at METU AYNA Listening Point. Three participants were interviewed once, and the other three were interviewed twice. Each of the first interviews lasted around one hour. Interviews are audio recorded for data analysis, which was explained to participants verbally and in the consent form, to which all participants gave permission. After the interviews, all participants were provided with information about the METU AYNA Listening Point. During the coding process of the interviews, in a meeting with my co-advisor, we decided to have an additional interview with three participants: Bahar, Yonca, and Kuzey. We decided to conduct additional interviews, particularly with these three participants, lasting between fifteen to thirty minutes, to further explore their speech and their use of free association and metaphorical language when describing self-harm in relation to birth.

## **2.5. Data Analysis**

Reflexive thematic analysis provides a flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data, enabling the exploration of complex patterns and themes. The data analysis process of this study was guided by the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), with an understanding that these steps are not strictly linear but rather repetitive, allowing for movement back and forth as necessary.

The initial phase involved familiarization with the data, a crucial step in understanding the depth and extent of the information collected. Given that the data was gathered through interviews, that is an interactive mean, the analysis began with

prior knowledge and initial analytic thoughts about the data set. Listening and reading through the entire data set at least once before starting the coding process was employed to deepen this understanding. This comprehensive review helped shape ideas and identify potential patterns within the data. As suggested, the transcription process served as an excellent opportunity to become intimately familiar with the data (Riessman, 1993). Each interview was transcribed, allowing for a detailed and nuanced analysis of the participants' narratives.

The next step involved generating initial codes from the data. As this study is data-driven, the coding process was primarily informed by the content of the data rather than existing theoretical frameworks. Coding was conducted using MAXQDA 2024 (VERBI Software, 2024), a qualitative data analysis software that facilitated the systematic coding of the entire data set. Each data item received equal attention to ensure that interesting aspects were not overlooked, allowing for the identification of repeated patterns across the data. Following initial coding, the process of identifying themes began, which involved organizing the codes into potential themes and considering the relationships between them. Visual representations, such as mind maps, were used to sort and refine the codes into coherent themes. This step required a detailed examination of how codes interacted and related to one another, both within and across distinct levels of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Once potential themes were identified, they were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately captured the essence of the data. It involved going back to the data items for each theme and organizing them into a coherent and internally consistent narrative. It was important to ensure that themes were neither too diverse nor overly complex, maintaining a balance that allowed each theme to convey its unique contribution to the overall analysis (Patton, 1990). In this phase, themes are named and defined. This involved identifying the core essence of what each theme represented and determining what aspect of the data each theme included. The final phase involved writing the report and integrating the themes into a coherent narrative that provides a detailed and insightful account of the findings. Throughout the analysis, reflexive engagement was maintained, recognizing that coding quality in reflexive thematic analysis stems from an in-depth engagement with the data and a

situated, interpretative approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This process-oriented and evolving method allowed for a dynamic analysis that was responsive to the complexities of the data, ensuring a thorough and meaningful exploration of self-harm tendencies and birth narratives among the participants. At the end of the data analysis stage, the finalized list of superordinate themes included (1) Unspoken experiences behind self-harm, (2) Inter-subjective dynamics of self-harm, (3) Chaotic family dynamics and their impact on self-harm, (4) Birth narratives and their impact on self-harm.

## **2.6. Trustworthiness of the Study**

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in ensuring reliability and validity. Quantitative research approaches these concepts from a quantifiable perspective, whereas qualitative research provides other techniques. As expected in quantitative research, there is an attempt to limit and control the researcher's subjectivity. However, interpretive and critical theorists suggest that researchers embrace subjectivity and use it as data (Morrow, 2005, as cited in Demir, 2023).

A key role that is equally important as the participants who provide the data is embraced by the researcher since they have the role of deciding on a research question to interpret the data. In other words, qualitative research is a process where the researcher actively participates in every step. Hence, to ensure the trustworthiness of the research, qualitative researchers should take into account their experiences, sociocultural background, and theoretical foundation (Finlay, 2002). Qualitative research suggests reflexivity as a tool for self-reflection to prioritize awareness of the researcher about their impact on the process. Clarke (2006) suggests that keeping a diary or supervision meetings enables a heightened awareness of the researcher regarding their subjectivity and its effect on the research. Additionally, including a dedicated section on reflexivity could offer readers a clearer understanding of the researcher's approach and perspective throughout the study (Hewitt, 2007). In this respect, the current study regards subjectivity not as a concept to be limited or controlled but as a natural aspect while conducting research.

This section investigates the researcher's interest and motivation for the research, along with theoretical knowledge and research assumptions. From the beginning of my master's degree, I struggled to choose a research topic. I could not decide for a long time and kept jumping from one idea to the other. It was not until February 2024 that I finally settled on a topic with the help of my co-advisor. She gave me a deadline to make a decision and start working on it. I had always admired her research on suicide, and although I was inspired by her work, I never thought of studying suicide or anything related to self-destructiveness when I first approached her for collaboration. However, looking back, I see that I wanted to work with her because I was drawn to studying self-destructive behaviors. This realization was so deeply buried that it took me two years to uncover what I truly wanted to study. As you read through this thesis, you will frequently come across how failures in communication can manifest as behavior and how unspoken struggles, desires, anxieties, happiness, anger, etc., cannot be expressed through symbolic by the individuals engaging in self-harm. For me, the journey of deciding on a research topic was similar to this experience, which is why I feel a strong connection to this study. Throughout my life, I have found it difficult to voice my feelings, thoughts, and desires, often leading to constant anger. However, this personal and professional journey in psychoanalysis has allowed me to think more deeply and speak more openly about myself. Even when conducting this research, I have also created a space for self-expression and articulation. I consider myself incredibly lucky to have found a place in the field of psychoanalysis. It has helped me navigate my own self-destructive patterns, and now, instead of repeating this cycle, I am able to write hundreds of pages.

In the process, I have to admit that repeatedly reading detailed descriptions of self-harm in transcripts was emotionally draining. Meetings with my advisor and co-advisor, along with discussions with peers, provided crucial support and helped me navigate the emotional challenges of this research. As I stated, from the beginning of my master's degree, I experienced significant personal and professional growth as a psychoanalyst in training. Embracing the psychoanalytic perspective has an important influence on all aspects of my life, from personal to professional. At the beginning of this thesis, it was challenging to differentiate my role as a

psychoanalyst from that of a researcher. However, during the process, I realized that my psychoanalytic knowledge was a useful tool, especially when conducting interviews. Hence, I have come to an understanding of utilizing my identity both as a researcher and as a psychoanalyst. This realization aligned with my choice of conducting reflexive thematic analysis. I believe all research is influenced by the researcher's theoretical and personal background, whether they acknowledge it or not. It reminded me of the quote from the famous song “Human” by Rag'n'Bone Man, “I'm only human after all.”. As researchers, we need to acknowledge we are only human after all, and our subjective perspective is not necessarily something to be rid of; at times, it might help the study to flourish.

My thesis initially focused on investigating the relationship between birth narratives and self-harm, as my theoretical knowledge and clinical practice suggested that these narratives could reveal important insights into the connection between self-harming individuals and their relation to the Other. However, through extensive literature review and discussions, my research expanded to address additional questions. Family dynamics emerged as a critical area of exploration, along with understanding how self-harming individuals experience and articulate their behaviors. In the process, this study evolved into a multifaceted exploration of self-harm. Hence, the interplay between my psychoanalytic background and research approach enriched the depth and scope of the research.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

In this chapter, themes that emerged through thematic analysis were displayed. At the end of the analysis, four superordinate themes were identified. Emerging themes included (1) Unspoken experiences behind self-harm, (2) Inter-subjective dynamics of self-harm, (3) Chaotic family dynamics and their impact on self-harm, and (4) Birth narratives and their impact on self-harm. Superordinate and subordinate themes were also listed in Table 2. Each superordinate theme is explained in detail, with each subordinate theme accompanied by direct participant quotations. The participants who referred to the subordinate theme during the interviews are listed before the quotations, yet each theme is illustrated with three quotations to exemplify the relevant theme while ensuring compact information.

**Table 2.** Superordinate and subordinate themes of the study

- 
1. Unspoken experiences behind self-harm
    - 1.1. The role of anger
    - 1.2. The dual presence of guilt and shame
    - 1.3. Dissociation from responsibility and negative experience
    - 1.4. Physical pain turning into pleasure or a soothing feeling
  2. Inter-subjective dynamics of self-harm
    - 2.1. The need for visibility and concealment in self-harm
    - 2.2. Other people as a mechanism to stop self-harming
    - 2.3. Reference to suicide
  3. Chaotic family dynamics and their impact on self-harm
    - 3.1. Reference to domestic violence
    - 3.2. Problems in the relationship between parents
    - 3.3. Absence or inconsistent presence of a parent
  4. Birth narratives and their impact on self-harm
    - 4.1. Perceived unwantedness
    - 4.2. Complications during birth
    - 4.3. The metaphorical need to release what is inside
-

### **3.1. Unspoken experiences behind self-harm**

The superordinate theme illustrates the unspoken experiences behind self-harm that point out a struggle with articulating experiences. This struggle is portrayed through emotions such as anger, guilt, and shame. Additionally, dissociation was described, which includes detachment from actions or life events, especially negative ones, which leads to avoidance of responsibility. Another theme was deriving pleasure and soothing sensation from physical pain, which offers insight into the temporary release of stress.

From a Lacanian understanding, this superordinate theme is related to disruption in the symbolic function of the participants. Symbolic function enables one to articulate one's emotions and experiences through words or other symbolic means. The disruption often results in an inability to process and communicate emotions, which may facilitate self-harm. Through these behaviors, participants may attempt to externalize their internal chaos and gain control of their experiences and emotional state.

#### **3.1.1. The role of anger**

The subordinate theme focuses on how anger plays a part in self-harm. Toprak, Deniz, Lale, Bahar, and Yonca were among the participants who reported feeling angry prior to engaging in self-harming behaviors.

Toprak's experience highlighted the relationship between self-directed anger and self-harm. Toprak's dissatisfaction with his physical appearance leads to self-directed anger. One of the ways Toprak acted on this anger was by throwing up, which is related to a form of self-punishment along with control over his physical appearance.

My self-harm situations increased when I was very angry at both myself and life. When I engage in vomiting behaviors to the point of burning my throat, it usually happens when I eat or feel bad, and I become overly concerned about my body.

*Original*

*Kendime zarar verme durumları aynı zamanda çok hem kendime hem hayata öfkeliyken daha çok oluyordu. Böyle boğazımı yakacak kadar kusma*



*davranışları şeyde biraz daha böyle yemek yediğim zamanlar ya da kötü hissettiğim zamanlar vücudumu çok taktığım zaman oluyordu.*

Deniz's narrative illuminated the overwhelming events in their life and how these contributed to a sense of powerlessness and eventual self-harm. Deniz described a period when things accumulated, making them feel unable to control their life. This sense of helplessness leads to several days of crying out of anger. Deniz reached out to their mother, who generally offers comfort during difficult times. However, this time, the effort to calm down was unsuccessful, resulting in Deniz misusing pills as a form of self-harm.

Things had piled up in my life; I was sexually harassed. Later, I went through some political difficulties[...]The biggest problem was that bad things were happening, and I couldn't change anything, couldn't do anything[...]I was using antidepressants. It had been a few days since I had forgotten to take my antidepressants[...]I couldn't control anything in my life at that moment, and maybe realizing that I don't know, I had been crying out of anger for a few days. Things were constantly making me cry; I was affected by things. Then I called my mom because when something affects me a lot, when I feel really bad or very angry or unhappy, my mom is usually the person who calms me down. I knew something was different, but I couldn't calm down.

*Original*

*Ya bir şeyler çok üst üste gelmişti hayatımda işte şey bir tacize uğradım. Daha sonra işte şeyle siyasi olarak sıkıntı yaşadığım birkaç süreç yaşadım[...]En büyük problem şeydi, yani kötü bir şeyler oluyor ve hani bunu değiştiremiyorum hiçbir şey yapamıyorum[...]Antidepresan kullanıyordum. Antidepresanlarımı almayı unuttuğum birkaç gündü[...]Hayatımdaki hiçbir şeyi kontrol edemiyordum o an ve onu fark etmek midir nedir bilemiyorum işte sinirden zaten ağlıyordum birkaç gündür. Bir şeyler beni sürekli ağlatıyordu, bir şeyleri, etkileniyordum falan. Sonra annemi aradım çünkü bir şeyler beni çok etkilediğinde beni en çok yani bir şeylere karşı kendimi çok kötü hissettiğimde ya da çok sinirli olduğumda mutsuz olduğumda annem genelde benim o sakinleştirici kısmım kişimdir. Hani bir şeylerin farklı olduğunun farkındayım ama sakinleşemiyorum.*

Lale provided an example of how internal anger results in self-harm. Unlike outward expressions of anger, Lale highlighted that her anger was inside. She mentioned a particular instance in which she and her mother got into an argument where she felt misunderstood. After this argument, she felt the need to let out all of her anger, and she cut her arms with scissors to release anger.

In the eighth grade, I especially started getting very, very angry. Not in a way that I attacked people or anything like that, but I was very very angry inside, very angry. I remember one day very well when I had a small argument with my mom. The topic, believe me, wasn't something very important[...]I guess my mom was angry at me, I couldn't explain my problem, and I felt misunderstood by my mom. Somehow, that anger, that rage needed to come out, so I took the scissors in my hand and made cuts[...]Anger has never been good for me. Being angry isn't good for anyone, and I need to get rid of it immediately. I don't know why, but I need to get rid of it because it makes me uncomfortable, like nausea. It has to go away; it has to come out of somewhere, so I did this.

*Original*

*Sekizinci sınıfta özellikle çok büyük çok sinirlenmeye başladım. İnsanlara saldırma vesaire gibi değil ama içimden çok çok sinirlendim çok sinirliydim. Bir gün de çok iyi hatırlıyorum annemle ufak bi atışma yaşadık. Konusu inanın çok önemli bir şey değildi[...]İşte herhalde annem bana kızdı, derdimi anlatamadım, anlaşılamadım annem tarafından. Ya bi şekilde o öfkemin sinirimden çıkması gerekiyor o şekilde aldım makası elime çizgiler kestim[...]Sonuçta öfke hiçbir zaman benim için iyi değil. Öfkeli olmak sinirli olmak hiç kimse için iyi bir şey değil ve ondan hemen kurtulmam lazım. Neden bilmiyorum ama hemen kurtulmam lazım çünkü beni rahatsız ediyor. Biraz mide bulantısı gibi bir şey rahatsızlık veriyor orada bana. Onun gitmesi gerekiyor onun bir yerden çıkması gerekiyor. O yüzden de böyle bir işlem yaptım.*

The participants mentioned anger as a primary emotion that often triggered self-harming actions. In the end, anger led to acts of self-harm as a coping mechanism or exit for intense emotions, whether it was directed at others or oneself as a kind of self-punishment or control.

### **3.1.2. The dual presence of guilt and shame**

The subordinate theme examines the coexistence of guilt and shame in participants' narratives before they self-harm. During the interviews, Toprak, Lale, Bahar, and Kuzey mentioned guilt and shame as significant emotions, except for Toprak, who only mentioned guilt. Particularly, Lale and Bahar emphasized the shame they felt after they engaged in self-harming incidents.

For instance, after Lale's parents divorced, her father started a new relationship, bringing another woman and her child into her life. Lale stated these strangers

intruded on her relationship with her father, taking away precious time she could have spent with him. Lale's response to this situation was to distance herself from her father, choosing not to visit him for a period. She states she did not find herself guilty before for not visiting her father, but after, she said it was her fault. She also described self-harm as shameful and did not know how to explain it to other people, indicating another struggle to articulate experiences.

I'm an only child, I was jealous, very jealous. In the end, they were strangers to me. These strangers came and took the time I could spend with my dad away from me. It's my fault, by the way. I rejected it in the end, but back then, I didn't find myself guilty[...]When someone asks, what will I say? Will I say I cut myself? After all, it's something shameful. I understand why I did it, but at the end of the day, it's shameful behavior.

*Original*

*Tek çocuğum, kıskandım, çok kıskandım. Hani sonuçta onlar benim için yabancı. Bu yabancılar geldiler babamla benim geçirebilceğim vakti elimden aldılar. Suçlu benim bu arada. Ben reddettim sonuçta ama sonuçta yani o zaman kendimi suçlu bulmadım[...]Biri sorduğunda ne diyeceğim, kendimi kestim mi diyeceğim? Sonuçta utanç verici bir şey bu. Anlayabiliyorum neden yaptığımı biliyorum ama günün sonunda utanç verici bir davranış bu.*

Bahar described that she feels guilty when experiencing positive emotions and finds more comfort in feeling bad. She went into detail about how physical illness, such as a sore throat and fever, brought her mental relief. This response suggests that physical discomfort is more in line with her emotional state and provides a tangible release for her distress. Moreover, she brought up shame, and it seems that she feels ashamed of her self-harm behaviors.

B: When I feel good feelings, I usually feel guilty. So, feeling pain or, you know, feeling bad makes me feel more comfortable. For example, yesterday I got sick, my throat hurt, and I had a fever. For instance, not feeling good physically made me feel mentally relieved. It was a situation I couldn't understand and felt a bit psychotic[...]At first, I was a bit ashamed. Actually, I still feel a bit ashamed, but other than that, I don't feel much.

R: You mentioned feeling ashamed; could you elaborate on that?

B: I never judged my friends who self-harmed. I think it's something that can happen, and I was told that I was very supportive of my friends who did this. But when I did it myself, it was probably because I'm a bit of a perfectionist, and I thought, 'How could I do this?' Also, because it's not something that's

socially accepted. Let's say people are brave enough to make videos about it on Instagram; even in their comments, there are terrible things written. I just saw it yesterday; for example, there was a girl with cuts all over her arms and legs, and people commented, "You missed a few spots." I want to strangle those people. So, I was ashamed because it's not something that's widely accepted or understood.

*Original*

*B: İyi hisler hissedince kendimi suçlu hissediyorum genelde. O yüzden acı çekmek ya da ne bileyim, kendimi kötü hissetmek kendimi daha rahat hissettirir. Mesela dün hastalandım, boğazım falan ağrıyordu ve ateşim falan çıktı. Mesela fiziksel olarak zaten bir fiziksel olarak iyi hissetmemek beni mental olarak rahatlattı gibi bir durum oldu mesela dün. Anlam veremediğim ve biraz psychotic hissettim[...]İlk başta biraz utanmışım falan. Gerçi şimdi de biraz utaniyorum onun harici olarak çok bir şey hissetmiyorum[...]*

*A: Utanmak dediniz bir de onu biraz açar mısınız?*

*B: Kendine zarar veren arkadaşlarımı hiçbir zaman yargılamadım. Bence çok olabilir bir şey aslında ve hani bu konuda da bunu yapan arkadaşlarımın çok yanında olduğum söylendi. Hani ama kendim yapınca işte yine mükemmelliyetçi bir insan olmamdan kaynaklı sanırım hani birazcık daha ben nasıl bunu yaparım gibi bir şey oldu. Hani bir de toplumsal olarak çok kabul edilen bir şey olmadığı için. Hani diyelim bu konuda yeterince cesur olup instagramda video falan çeken insanların bile yorumlarında korkunç şeyler yazıyor. İnsanlar işte, daha dün gördüm mesela, kolları bacakları her yeri kesik bir kız işte "Birkaç yeri atlamışsın" falan yazmışlar yorumlarda. Boğmak istiyorum o insanları. O yüzden utandım yani çok kabul edilen bir şey olmadığı için ya da çok anlamlandırılabilen bir şey olmadığı için.*

Kuzey, a trans man, talked about his experiences with gender and sexuality during the interview. He mentioned a significant period in middle school when he discovered his attraction to women. Emotions of guilt and shame followed this realization, especially regarding his existence. These overwhelming emotions targeted to his own existence relate to his self-harm behaviors.

One of the biggest things from middle school was also realizing I liked women. I was ashamed of my existence. I was constantly ashamed. I was just feeling guilty and ashamed. Feeling guilty and ashamed were two of the things that made me worse.

*Original*

*Orta okuldaki şeylerimden en büyüklerinden bir tanesi bir de o dönem şey kadınlardan hoşlandığımı da fark etmiştim. Varlığımdan utaniyordum. Sürekli hani utaniyordum. Sürekli sadece utaniyordum hani sadece hani suçlu hissediyordum ve utaniyordum. Beni en kötü yapan iki şeylerden biri buydu.*

Guilt and shame were prominent emotions in self-harm incidents. Guilt is often articulated before engaging in self-harm, whereas shame is felt afterward. These emotions were expressed together with feelings of inadequacy, perceived failures, or wrongdoings. This theme connects difficulty in articulating complex emotions such as guilt and shame to the emergence of self-harm.

### **3.1.3. Dissociation from responsibility and negative experience**

The subordinate theme encompasses participants' statements regarding experiencing blurred memories or having a hard time remembering significant events in their lives. Participants described an inability to remember which functions like a shield that blocks the emotional pain associated with these memories. By not fully remembering or acknowledging these events, they can temporarily avoid the distress or the responsibility linked to them. This theme appeared in all of the participants' narratives.

Deniz talked about one of the self-harm episodes where they misused pills. They become increasingly agitated despite their mother's attempts to provide comfort and reassurance. When they called their mother, Deniz faced confrontations regarding their experiences and emotions, something they found unbearable at the time. Verbalizing their distress not only failed to bring relief but it made them feel like they lost control. They also went through a dissociative state in which they were unable to recognize themselves.

D: My mom couldn't calm me down, and I actually got worse. At that moment, I immediately took pills.

R: How did you get worse?

D: I don't know. It wasn't because of my mom. My mom was actually trying to calm me down nicely. I don't remember the details clearly. Some things are really a bit blurry for me from that part. My mom was trying to calm me down: "It's okay, Deniz. There's no problem, you're fine." She was giving me this kind of reassurance, but I couldn't calm down. The more we talked and the more I explained, maybe I had more chances to face the things I experienced or the things that affected me, and at one point, I couldn't handle it. What can I say, I think I lost control even more. Talking might have led me to lose control even more.

R: How might talking have led you to lose control?

D: I mean, while explaining to my mom, it felt like I had to face it more. I think I couldn't handle that confrontation[...]I can't calm down at that moment. It's a very different feeling. It feels like Deniz of that moment isn't the same as the current Deniz. As if I didn't recognize that Deniz as well. It felt like there was another Deniz in my life managing me and making decisions for me.

*Original*

*Deniz: Annem beni sakinleştiremedi ve hani daha çok kötü oldum hatta ve orada öyle bir an sonrasında işte direkt ilaç kullandım.*

*A: Nasıl daha kötü oldunuz?*

*D: Bilmiyorum. Hani annemden kaynaklı değil. Annem aslında beni güzel bir şekilde sakinleştirmeye çalışıyordu. Tam hatırlamıyorum detaylı bir şekilde. Hani bazı şeyler gerçekten benim için o kısımla alakalı biraz silik. Orada işte biraz şey olmuştu annem sakinleştirmeye çalışıyordu: "Tamam Deniz. Hani sıkıntı yok, iyisin." gibi. Daha bu tarz telkinler veriyordu bana ama ben sakinleşemiyordum. Her konuştuğum ve her anlattıkça belki anlattığımda yaşadığım şeyler ya da beni etkileyen şeylerle daha çok yüzleşme şansım oldu ve bir an şey yapamadım. Ne denir, o kontrolü galiba daha da çok kaybettim. Kontrolü kaybetmeme daha çok yol açtı olabilir.*

*A: Konuşmak kontrolü kaybetmenize nasıl yol açmış olabilir peki?*

*D: Yani anneme anlatırken bir an daha çok yüzleşmem gerekti gibi oldu. Galiba o yüzleşmeyi kaldıramadım[...]Sakinleşemiyorum o an ve hani çok farklı bir hissti yaşadığım şey sanki o anki Deniz şu anki Deniz zaten değildi de o anki Deniz'i sanki ben de hiç tanı mıyordum. O an sanki hayatımda beni yöneten ve benim yerime kararları veren başka bir Deniz var gibiydi.*

Bahar discussed the accumulation of stress and emotions caused by focusing merely on her studies, which eventually led to self-harm. She discusses the impact of her parent's divorce announcement and how she channeled her emotions toward academic work. It is noteworthy that she gets up to get water during this part of the interview, causing a pause in the conversation as she discusses her sadness and anger.

B: Three total times, that was also on my leg. I don't even remember much about why it happened. I have a thing like being unable to remember my memories, like what happened and when[...]During this period, I only studied, so everything piled up. I think that's why it all exploded in the recent period.

R: What kind of piled up was it exactly?

B: I think it was generally not getting upset about these. For example, when they first told me about the divorce, I had my final jury. They said, “We're getting divorced,” and I got very angry because I had a jury in three days. I said, “Okay, I'm leaving. I'll stay at my friend's place, and I need to work on my project for three days.” and I didn't think about anything else; I just worked on my model for three days. Whenever I got angry, the timing of it is so comically, happened right before my juries or pre-juries, and I directed all my sadness and anger toward academia. I will get some water over there.

*Original*

*B: Üç sefer total, o da bacağımaydı. Hatırlamıyorum bile çok neden olduğunu çok anılarımı hatırlayamamak gibi bir şeyim var, çok hatırlayamıyorum ne zaman ne olmuştu gibi[...]Bu dönem boyunca sadece ders çalıştım. O yüzden çok birikti sanırım öyle şu an bu son döneme patladı böyle her şey.*

*A: Nasıl bir şey birikmiş oldu peki?*

*B: Yani genel bunlara üzülmemem olduğunu düşünüyorum. Mesela ilk boşanma haberini verdiklerinde de benim yine final jürim vardı. Kesin biz boşanıyoruz dediler, benim üç gün sonra jürim var falan çok sinirlenmişim ama dedim ki “Okey tamam ben evden gidiyorum. Arkadaşımda kalacağım üç gün ödev yapmam lazım.” ve hiçbir şey düşünmeyip sadece maket yaptım mesela üç gün falan. O yüzden hep böyle bir şeye sinirlendiğimde yani zamanlaması çok komik bir şekilde jürilerimden pre-jürilerimden falan önceye denk geldi ve sürekli böyle üzgünlüğümü sinirimi falan akademiye yönelttim gibi oldu. Ben şuradan bir su alayım.*

Kuzey talked about the period of feeling responsible for parenting his mother and how it affected his mental health for the worse. He recalls his depression symptoms beginning in elementary school and progressing over time, and he paused to say he forgot the question. He also states he was diagnosed with depression during COVID, yet he does not remember the onset of this depression.

R: You mentioned parenting your mother during that time. How was that period for you?

K: It wasn't great, to be honest. When I was in middle school, how can I put it, in fact it started when they were still together. Most probably, I think my depression symptoms started showing around the fourth grade. Looking back now, by the seventh or eighth grade, it got pretty bad, what happened-I forgot your question by the way[...]I don't remember why I got worse or why I felt bad. I don't remember when it started.

*Original*

*A: Ebeveynlik yaptım anneme gibi anlattınız, o dönemler nasıldı sizin için?*

*K: Çok iyi değildi işin gerçeği. Ben orta okuldayken, nasıl diyeyim, aslında daha beraberlerken başlamıştı. Büyük ihtimalle ben depresyon belirtilerini dördüncü sınıfta falan göstermeye başladığımı düşünüyorum şu an baktığımda ama yedinci sekizinci sınıfta baya kötüleşmiştim neler oldu diyeyim-sorunuzu unuttum bu arada[...]Neden kötüleştiğimi hatırlamıyorum neden kötü olduğumu. Yani ne zaman başladı hatırlamıyorum.*

Participants frequently experienced dissociation from their emotions or significant life events. It may enable a defense mechanism to protect oneself from overwhelming events. In other words, the dissociation may create emotional distance, making it easier to avoid confronting painful experiences and responsibilities. Nevertheless, it provides a gap for behaviors of self-harm.

### **3.1.4. Physical pain turning into pleasure or a soothing feeling**

The subordinate theme explores the complex relationship between the body and psychology, where inflicting pain functions as a mechanism to cope with overwhelming emotions and achieve a sense of control. This theme explores how self-harm inflicts a short period of relief, which might be related to the externalization of the internal, and all participants narrated this theme.

Deniz stated how the pain from cutting their wrists enabled a sense of pleasure and served as a control point. They described the pain as a reminder of their existence and helped them to focus on their body and themselves.

D: I think feeling that pain gave me pleasure. I mean, the pain in the-or it was like my control point when I was angry about something. Like, that pain was kind of pain that reminded me of my existence.

R: How did the pain remind you of your existence?

D: I think it made me focus more on my body, making me focus on myself, and that part felt good.

*Original*

*D: Galiba o acıyı hissetmek bana zevk veriyordu. Yani şey kısmındaki o acıya da bir şeye sinir olduğumda o benim kontrol noktam gibiydi. O acı sanki bana benim varlığımı hatırlatan bir acı gibi geliyordu.*

*A: Varlığınızı nasıl hatırlatıyordu size acı?*



*D: Galiba daha çok bedenime odaklanmamı sağladığı için. Hani kendime odaklanmamı sağlıyordu galiba. Kendime odaklanma kısmı bana iyi geliyordu.*

Lale explained that she used a knife to make herself bleed, resembling it to cupping therapy. She believed that the blood flow helped her feel relieved and made her negative thoughts go away from that cut, which emphasized the externalization of the internal negative thoughts.

I took a knife, but I don't think it was very sharp. To only on one spot for a long time, I can show it like this, I do it as hard as possible. I did it like this, I tried to do it hard and hard, because I wanted blood to flow from there. I thought it was like cupping therapy. I thought if blood flowed from there, I might feel relieved. I thought that maybe negative thoughts would, poof, fly away, so I did that.

*Original*

*Bıçak aldım elime ama bence o kadar da keskin değildi. Sadece tek bir yere uzun bir süre boyunca yani şöyle bir hareketle gösterebilirim. Şu şekilde yaptım sert sert yapmaya çalıştım çünkü şey istedim oradan kan aksın istedim. Hacamat olarak düşündüm buradan kan akarsa belki biraz rahatlarım. Belki işte olumsuz negatif düşünceler de böyle puf uçup gider gibisinden düşündüm, öyle yaptım.*

Kuzey shared that the sensation of physical pain quieted his mind, comparing it to the effect of taking medication. It highlights the role of self-harm as immediate relief from psychological distress through physical sensation.

The physical sensation of pain quieted everything in my mind and calmed me down. It was like taking a medication[...]Feeling pain was good. So feeling pain, at least feeling physical pain, it was like, made it feel more real. The things I felt in my mind and inside me felt very abstract, but when I externalized it, something more solid was in my hand. I don't know how else to explain it, it just felt more real.

*Original*

*Fiziksel bir hisse dönüşmesi hani bir anda hani beynimdeki her şeyi susturdu. Hani sakinleştim hani sakinleştirdi hani ilaç almış gibi hissettim[...]Acı hissetmek iyi geliyordu. Yani acı hissetmek, en azından yani fiziksel acı hissetmek, şey geliyordu, daha gerçek hissettiriyordu. Hani şey beynimde ve içimde hissettiğim şeyler çok soyut geliyordu ama bunu dışarı vurduğum*

*zaman daha solid bir şey elimde oluyordu. Daha nasıl anlatırım bilmiyorum, sadece daha gerçek hissettiriyordu yani.*

For all participants, self-inflicted physical pain provided temporary relief from psychological distress. The pain felt real and tangible because the physical feeling served as a stabilizing mechanism, allowing them to externalize their internal struggle while regaining control over their emotions.

### **3.2. Inter-subjective dynamics of self-harm**

This superordinate theme explores the inter-subjective dynamics of self-harm, illuminating how participants establish connections with others. Some participants expressed a desire for these actions to be seen, along with a tendency to hide the marks from others. The role of other people is also narrated to stop self-harm behaviors. Additionally, suicidal thoughts appeared in the narratives, suggesting a thin line between self-harm and suicide.

Through a Lacanian perspective, this superordinate theme provides insights into how individuals position themselves in relation to the Other and how self-harm functions as a means of communication targeted to the Other. Within this framework, self-harm can be interpreted as an act of expressing feelings and struggles that are not spoken. By inflicting harm on themselves, participants may be attempting to make their internal pain external. Furthermore, self-harm can be understood as an attempt to go beyond language, which resembles what lies beyond the pleasure principle that is *jouissance*.

#### **3.2.1. The need for visibility and concealment in self-harm**

The subordinate theme reflects the paradox between the desire to keep self-harm hidden and the urge to make it visible, in which participants brought up both aspects. This theme reflects the relation with the Other since self-harm might function as a message addressed to the Other. Hence, how participants explain or hide these acts gain importance. Deniz, Bahar, Yonca, and Kuzey refer to this theme.

Bahar reflected on the visibility of the marks made out of cuts on her wrists, which she attributes to her cat's scratches. She mentioned cutting her ankles, and when asked why she chose ankles, she brought up that she was curious about the sensation on different body parts, along with her belief that marks on her ankles get less attention. However, she asserts it is more visible now, reflecting a need for her marks to be concealed yet visible.

The marks on my wrist seemed very noticeable, even if I had a cat. My mom saw it but they didn't question it because my cat scratched me a lot. I don't know, I was also curious about how it would feel, whether it would hurt more or less, and what I would feel, what I would feel when I saw it there. I realized now that my ankle is more noticeable, and it feels a bit strange, whatever, it is like that.

*Original*

*Bileğimdekiler çok dikkat çekermiş gibi geldi ki kedim var. Annem falan gördü ama sorgulamadı çünkü kedim çok fazla tırmaladığı için beni. Bilmiyorum, bir yandan nasıl hissettirceğini merak ettim yani, daha mı çok acır, daha mı az acır, ne hissederim, orada onu görünce ne hissederim gibi. Birazcık düşünmüştüm, ayak bileğimden ayak bileğim daha çok dikkat çekiyor şu an bunu fark ettim birazcık garip oldu neyse öyle o yüzden.*

Yonca mentioned the necessity to explain the bruises that resulted from punching walls and severely squeezing her arms. She highlighted a tendency to conceal it specifically from her family and stated that they somehow saw it.

Afterward, you have to explain those bruises to people, or I don't know, you have to deal with the pain, constantly applying creams to various places, always trying not to let the family notice[...]They saw it somehow; you can't hide it by always wearing long sleeves, especially in summer. If you wear long sleeves, people call you crazy. When you wear short sleeves, they see it.

*Original*

*Sonrasında insanlara o morlukları açıklamak zorunda kalıyorsun ya da ne bileyim şey sonrasında can acısıyla uğraşmak zorunda kalıyorsun ne bileyim sürekli bir yerlerime kremler sürmek hep, onu aileye belli etmemeye çalışmak[...]Bir şekilde görüyorlardı ediyorlar. Sürekli uzun kollu giyerek de saklayamazsın. Yaz geldiğinde uzun kollu giyince manyak bu deli mi falan diyorlardı. Hani kısa kollu giyince de zaten görüyorlardı.*

Kuzey discussed that he initially engaged in cutting his arms but switched to burning because the cuts were too visible. He mentioned that if it did not have any physical

result, he probably never would have stopped highlighting the paradox of the marks visible resulting from self-harm and the need to conceal them.

K: I would have continued cutting, but since it was too visible. I was trying to find an alternative, I switched to burning.

R: It being too visible, what did it make you think?

K: I just didn't want it to be known. For example, if it didn't have any physical thing, a result, I probably would never have stopped self-harming throughout my life.

*Original*

*K: Kesmeye devam ederdim ama belirli görünümü çok fazla olduğu için alternatif bulmaya çalıştığım için dolayı yakmaya dönmüştüm.*

*A: Görünümünün fazla olması peki o ne düşündürüyordu size?*

*K: Yani sadece bilinmesini istemiyordum. Yani mesela şöyle mesela herhangi bir fiziksel şeyi olmasaydı hani bir sonucu yani büyük ihtimalle hayatım boyunca durmamış olurdu yani kendime zarar vermeye.*

Participants described the contradictory need to conceal their self-harm while still making it known. Although participants frequently attempted to hide their acts, they also struggled with the notion of making them visible as a reflection of their emotional state. Hence, this aspect of self-harm displays that it served as a means of communication.

### **3.2.2. Other people as a mechanism to stop self-harming**

The subordinate theme is connected to interaction with others, enabling participants to stop self-harm. It might be related to the message carried within the act of self-harm. Deniz, Lale, Bahar, and Kuzey mentioned that they are able to stop self-harming after articulating these behaviors to others or simply by being around them.

Lale stated that moving back to her mother's place has prevented her from engaging in self-harm. She emphasized the role of her mother in keeping her from bad habits due to her mother getting angry.

L: I don't think I'll have the opportunity even if I feel this bad again, which is partly why I came back to (another city). I came back to my mom. I don't think I'll harm myself.

R: You said which is why I came back, what does it mean?

L: To not get lost in my thoughts and turn to bad habits. For example, I used to smoke a lot, two packs a day. Now, because my mom gets angry, I smoke less.

*Original*

*L: Fırsatım olmayacaktır kendimi bu kadar kötü hissedersen de. Biraz da zaten bu yüzden (farklı şehire) geldim. Annemin yanına geri geldim. Zarar vermeyeceğimi düşünüyorum.*

*A: Biraz da bu yüzden geldim dediğiniz nedir?*

*L: Düşüncelerimin içinde kaybolup kötü alışkanlıklara vermemek için. Şöyle, sigara çok içiyordum. İki paket sigara içiyordum. Şimdi annem kızdığı için daha az içiyorum.*

Bahar also described telling her friends acted as a barrier to self-harm. She explained a sense of obligation to those who cared about her and stated she does not value herself as much as others do, which makes their saying of “don’t do it” more impactful.

R: Have you ever tried to stop yourself while harming yourself?

B: Telling my friends might be considered a way, but other than that, no.

R: How has telling your friends been a way for you to stop?

B: It made me feel like I owed it to them, like they love me a little, I don’t know.

R: How do you owe them can you tell a bit more?

B: I don't value myself very much, but these people love me, they value me. Their saying “don't do it” is a little more meaningful than me saying “don't do it”.

*Original*

*A: Hiç kendinize zarar verirken kendinizi durdurmaya çalıştığınız olmuş muydu?*

*B: Yani arkadaşlarıma söylemem bir nevi o olur sanırım, onun harici, hayır.*

*A: Arkadaşlarınıza söylemeniz nasıl bir durdurma yöntemi olmuş oldu sizin için?*

*B: Bunu onlara borçluymuşum gibi hissettirdi. Bir tık hani beni seven insanlar, ne bileyim.*

*A: Nasıl bir borç biraz açabilir misiniz?*

*B: Ya ben kendime çok değer vermiyorum ama bu insanlar beni seviyorlar, bana değer veriyorlar. Onların yapma demesi benim yapma dememden birazcık daha anlamlı kalıyor.*

Kuzey explained the circumstances in a slightly different way than others. Others state that talking to others enables stopping self-harm, yet Kuzey indicated he hides his self-harm behaviors to avoid intervention from others.

I didn't want them to think I was in a bad state. Bad mood, bad situation. When people know, they want to intervene. Because you want to prevent someone from harming themselves. I didn't want to be stopped, so I hid it.

*Original*

*Kötü olduğumu düşünmelerini istemiyordum sanırım. Kötü bir ruh hali, kötü bir şeyde yani. Şimdi bilseler insan bilince müdahale etmek istiyor çünkü. Hani insanın kendine zarar vermesini engellemek istersin. Engellenmek istemediğim için biraz saklıyordum.*

Some participants were able to stop self-harming because of their interactions with other people. Although some chose to hide their behaviors in order to avoid intervention, participants uncovered that external relationships offered a barrier to self-harm.

### **3.2.3. Reference to suicide**

The subordinate theme reflects the participants' expression regarding suicidal thoughts; some participants directly referred to thinking about suicidal action, while some participants dismissed it yet still mentioned it. Toprak, Deniz, Lale, and Kuzey brought about suicidal thoughts, indicating there are no clear-cut boundaries between the motivation of self-harm and suicide, or it can coexist.

Toprak described feelings of abandonment and criticism from an ex-lover. He struggled with body image and believed that being unlovable made life unbearable. All these combined lead to a desire to no longer live.

That feeling of abandonment intensified it. I couldn't forget one thing; I had gained weight and my ex-lover told me that they didn't love me the way they

used to because I had gained weight. I was always having problems with my body, like you are extremely ugly, no one will love you, you are too fat. Then I wanted to meet new people. When that didn't work out, I said, I guess I won't be loved, I'm too ugly, I don't want to live.

*Original*

*O terk edilme duygusu şiddetlendirmişti. Şeyi unutamıyordum kilo almıştım kilo aldığım için eski sevgilim beni eskisi gibi sevmediğini söylemişti. Zaten her zaman vücudumla ilgili problem yaşıyordum. Sürekli son derece çirkinsin kimse seni sevmeyecek çok kilolusun diye. Sonra yeni insanlarla tanışayım istedim. O da olmayınca dedim herhalde ben sevilmeceğim, ben çok çirkinim, yaşamak istemiyorum.*

Deniz is asked about the continuation of self-harming behaviors. They replied with a belief that they would eventually take their own life.

R: Do you think these behaviors will continue?

D: Not in my current life, but I believe that at some point, I will end my own life. I don't believe that, of course, you can be hit by a car while walking on the road or something can happen. I think I will take my own life someday.

*Original*

*A: Peki bu davranışların devam edeceğini düşünüyor musunuz?*

*D: Şu an için şu anki yaşantımda öyle bir şeyim yok ama şunu biliyorum hayatımın bir noktasında ben şeye inanmıyorum tabii ki yolda yürürken araba da çarpabilir ya da bi şey olabilir ama bence ben hayatımın bir noktasında ben kendi hayatıma kendim son vereceğim diye düşünüyorum.*

While describing the act of cutting, Lale emphasized that she never intended to end her life. Moreover, it is important to highlight that throughout the interview, she mentioned she never intended to end her life multiple times, even though there were no prompted questions regarding suicide.

What I did was this, with the scissors on my pencil holder, you know, tiny little tiny because I'm scared, you know, you get scared, it was to make tiny little scratches. But I never intended to, you know, cut my vein, bleed to death or something like that[...]I harmed myself but never with the intention of ending my life.

*Original*

*Yaptığım şey şuydu kalemligimdeki makasla hani ufacak ufacak çünkü korkuyorum hani korkar insan. İşte ufacak ufacak çizikler atmaktı. Ama şey*

*amacım asla yoktu damarımı keseyim işte kan kaybından öleyim vesaire hani o şekilde bir şey değildi[...]Kendime zarar veriyordum diyeyim ama hani hiç hayatıma son verme olarak öyle bir amaçla değil.*

For certain participants, self-harming behaviors coexisted with suicidal thoughts. Although not every instance of self-harm was associated with a motivation for suicide, the narratives provided by the participants demonstrated that suicidal ideation frequently overlapped self-harm acts.

### **3.3. Chaotic family dynamics and their impact on self-harm**

The superordinate theme emphasizes the influence of family environment on the development of self-harming behaviors, and it encompasses reference to domestic violence, problems in parental relationships and the absence or inconsistent presence of a parent. The primary source of emotional and psychological development is the family, and constant instability and conflict within the family may disrupt emotional regulation and lead to self-harm.

Symbolic castration, as a concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis, refers to the limitation to jouissance imposed by paternal function. Disruption in the symbolic function, as briefly mentioned in the first superordinate theme, is a common factor for subthemes mentioned in the unspoken experiences behind self-harm. Exploration of family dynamics further investigates what might be the reasons for disruption in the symbolic order. Interestingly, four participants reported that their parents were divorced, while the other two described severe incompatibility among their parents.

#### **3.3.1. Reference to domestic violence**

The subordinate theme explores the participants' experiences and reflections on the presence or lack of violence within their families. This theme is particularly interesting since there was no prompted question regarding domestic violence, yet all participants except Bahar brought up this theme. This theme makes room for investigating how being violent to oneself is related to violence present at home.



Toprak shared the sudden and unpredictable physical violence from his mother, which included shouting, insults, and hitting. Moreover, the violence of his mother led him to run away from home, similar to the experiences of his father leaving home after arguing with his mother.

T: Sometimes in the summer, when my dad would go to work and my sister would go to camp somewhere, it would just be my mom and me. When she had no one else to pick on, she would pick on me, and we would have problems. That's why I couldn't be sure how much my mom loved me. Actually, I'm still not entirely sure, but I can say that I feel I have an important place in the family. That's how I feel.

A: How would your mother pick on you?

T: She would pick on me in a similar way to how she would pick on my dad. She would say things like, "You didn't clean this dust well" or "There was a draft, the door slammed." Then, all of a sudden, she would go somewhere completely unexpected. All of a sudden, she would start shouting at me, insulting me, doing things that she had a grudge against, doing physical violence, hitting me. Then, I would run away from home.

*Original*

*T: Bazen yazın gerçekten babam işe gittiği zaman, ablam bir yerde kampa tatile gittiği zaman, annemle ben kalırdım. Birine sataşacak bir şeyi olmadığında bana sataşır, benle problem yaşardı. O yüzden annemin beni ne kadar sevdiğinden emin olamazdım. Hala aklımda tam emin değilim hani öyle açıkçası aile içinde hani ama aile içinde önemli bir yerim olduğunu söyleyebilirim. Öyle hissettiğimi söyleyebilirim.*

*A: Anneniz nasıl sataşır?*

*T: Benzer şekilde sataşır, babama sataştığı gibi. "Buranın tozunu iyi almamışsın." ya da "Cereyan yaptı, kapı çarptı." diye böyle sataşır. Sonra bir anda hiç beklenmedik bir yerlere giderdi. Bir anda bana bağırma, hakaret etmeye, kin tuttuğu şeyleri şeyapmaya, böyle fiziksel şiddet uygulamaya başlardı, böyle vurmaya. Ondan sonra ben de evden kaçardım.*

When Lale mentioned she caught her father cheating on her mother and things got complicated. She provided a contrasting perspective by noting that there was no violence in her family, according to both her own observations and her mother's statements, yet she referenced domestic violence.

When I was in seventh grade, I caught my dad cheating on my mom. Things got a bit complicated after that. There was never any violence. From what I saw and from what my mom said, there was no violence. After this incident,

their marriage continued for a while. We were a bit uneasy, of course, but we still carried on with our lives.

*Original*

*Ben yedinci sınıftayken, ben babamın annemi aldattığını yakaladım. O zaman işler biraz şey oldu. Şiddet hiç yoktu. Şiddet hiç olmadı, benim gördüğüm kadarıyla ve de annemin söylediği kadarıyla da bir şiddet olmadı. Bu olaydan sonra da evlilikleri bir süre daha devam etti aslında. Hani biraz huzursuzduk tabii ama yine de hayatımıza devam ediyorduk.*

Yonca shared her brother's statement when he saw her bruises after self-harm, where he got violent verbally. Moreover, she stated the presence of constant tension in the household due to her father's tendency to create conflicts out of trivial matters.

My brother saw it and said, "Should I punch you in the face instead? Maybe then you'll stop." [...] There wasn't constant physical violence, but there was always tension because my dad would make something out of nothing.

*Original*

*Abim görmüştü "Senin yerine ben bir tane suratına çarpsam daha mı iyi olur acaba?" falan demişti. Böyle "Hem belki o zaman vazgeçersin." falan diye[...] Yani böyle sürekli dayak atma gibi bir durum yoktu ama hani evde sürekli bir gerilim hali mevcuttu. Çünkü babam olmayacak bir şeyden mana çıkartan bir insan.*

Participants shared experiences with domestic violence, often highlighting the presence or absence of violence within the household. Violence appeared to create an environment of instability that contributed to the struggles of participants.

### **3.3.2. Problems in the relationship between parents**

he subordinate theme explores the narratives related to parental relationship problems, emphasizing how ongoing conflict, lack of communication, and unexpected separation may contribute to psychological stress and, eventually, self-harm behaviors. All participants mentioned this theme.

Toprak recalled arguments occurring between his parents over trivial matters during his childhood and adolescence. This constant conflict may contribute to a sense of instability and insecurity.

They often argued over silly things, at least from what I remember from my childhood and adolescence.

*Original*

*Sık sık saçma sebeplerden kavga ederlerdi. En azından benim çocukluğumdan ergenliğimden hatırladığım kadarıyla öyleydi.*

When asked how Bahar's self-harm behavior started, she explained that it began during a challenging period in her life, which included stress from school, her parents' divorce, and her brother's recent marriage. Specifically, she asserted her surprise at her parents' divorce despite knowing they didn't have a good relationship. The unexpected nature of the divorce may contribute to feelings of uncertainty and loss.

I didn't expect them to divorce, so I was a bit surprised. I knew they didn't have a great relationship, and it came up from time to time, I knew it deep down inside. But I never thought they would actually do it.

*Original*

*Çok beklemiyordum boşanmalarını, o yüzden birazcık şaşırdım. Yani çok iyi bir ilişkileri olmadığı ve bu dönem dönem hani masaya geldiği için içten içte biliyordum ama hiçbir zaman gerçekten bunu yapacaklarını düşünmezdim.*

Yonca described her father's attempts to shield the children from marital problems. After adding that her parents avoided divorce multiple times, Yonca questions the rationale behind it.

My mother and father did not have a very good relationship[...]. My dad used to say, "Okay, we have problems in our relationship, this and that, but as much as possible, should we not reflect it to the children?" They avoided divorce many times, even last year, but I don't know, it is silly. Why drag it on?

*Original*

*Annemle babamın çok iyi bir ilişkileri yoktu[...]. Babam şöyleydi "Ha tamam böyle ilişkimizde problemler var şunlar bunlar var ama yani mümkün mertebe acaba çocuklara yansıtmasak mı ya da ne yapsak?" Böyle bir çok defa boşanmanın eşiğinden döndüler geçen sene de döndüler ama yani ne bileyim saçma sapan daha niye sürdürür ki insan?*

Parental conflicts, usually involving ongoing arguments, poor communication, or unexpected separations, contributed to participants' distress, potentially related to self-harming behaviors.

### 3.3.3. Absence or inconsistent presence of a parent

The subordinate theme explores the fluctuating presence of parents in participants' lives and the impact of this inconsistency on self-harming behaviors. All participants narrated this theme, revealing the significant impact of this on self-destructive tendencies.

Toprak shared his mother's physical abuse towards his father, who eventually pushed her away and left home. This narrative is similar to the one in which he describes his relationship with his mother. This cycle of violence and abandonment likely contributed to instability.

My mom used to throw things at my dad, hit him, kick him out, and slap him. Eventually, my dad got tired of the physical abuse and would push her away. He would say enough is enough and then he'd run away from home.

*Original*

*Annem babama bir şeyler fırlatırdı, vurmaya çalışırdı, evden kovardı, tokat atardı. Bir yerden sonra sürekli fiziksel darbe almaktan yorulan babam da en son annemi iterdi. Böyle yeter artık derdi sonra evden kaçır giderdi.*

Deniz shared a memory where they argued with their father, resulting in his father leaving the house for almost a year when he was 12 years old. Their mother stated she would not let him back into the house, yet his father returned. After his father's return home, Deniz misused pills, which was their first instance of self-harm.

I firstly, first time I harmed myself, I believe, when I was 12 years old. We had a very serious argument, and during that argument, my father disowned me[...]Afterwards, he left the house. My father didn't come home for almost a year after leaving, and during that time, we hardly spoke at all[...]My mother, during their separation, had said, "If he goes, I swear I won't let him back into the house."[...]When my father returned, it affected me deeply because someone I was very close to did not keep his promise, and someone I did not want, who had never spoken to me or called and asked for his own child, came back home. I didn't feel safe there, and that was the first time I tried to harm myself.

*Original*

*Ben ilk başta, ilk olarak galiba 12 yaşındayken kendime zarar vermişim. Biz çok ciddi bir kavga etmiştik ve babam o kavgasında beni evlatlıktan reddetmişti[...]Sonrasında da evi terk edip gitmişti. Babam evi terk ettikten*

*sonra yaklaşık bir yıla yakın bir süre hiç eve gelmedi ve biz bir yıla yakın bir süre babamla neredeyse hiç konuşmadık[...]Annem de babamla ayrıldıkları dönemde şey diye bir şey söylemişti: “Eğer hani giderse söz bir daha eve almayacağım.”[...]Sonra babamın eve gelmesi beni çok etkiledi çünkü hem çok yakın olduğum bir insan bana verdiği sözü tutmadı tutmamış oldu hem de istemediğim bir insan ve asla benimle konuşmamış bir insan kendi çocuğunu arayıp sormamış bir insan tekrar eve döndü. Hem güvenli hissetmediğim bir yer hem şey ilk defa o zaman kendime zarar vermeye çalışmıştım.*

Kuzey started taking on a parental role in his relationship with his mother after his parent's divorce and providing emotional support as she faced backlash from her family. This role reversal likely added to his emotional burden, feelings of isolation, and lack of support from his father.

After the divorce, since my mother was left alone, I, how should I put it, I became a parent, I was taking care of my mother a little bit. Well, what I mean by taking care is a little bit, more emotionally than physically. There was no one around her, especially her family were very opposed the divorce at that time. So she told me everything, I comforted her[...]I didn't have much of a relationship with my dad; he wasn't very present when I was young.

*Original*

*Boşanmadan sonra ben bir tık annem yalnız kaldığı için ben annemi, nasıl diyeyim, hani ebeveynleştim bir tık hani anneme biraz bakıyordum. Şey bakmaktan kastım biraz şey hani fizikselden daha çok duygusal olarak hani. Şey etrafında kimse kalmamıştı, özellikle ailesi zaten ayrılmasını çok karşıydı o sıra. Yani her şeyi bana anlatıyordu her şeyi ben teselli ediyordum[...]Babamla ilişkim çok yoktu. Babam çok yani böyle varlığı ortada olan bir insan değildi böyle küçükken.*

Participants described inconsistent parental presence in their lives. This inconsistency can be associated with abandonment or instability, contributing to self-harming behaviors.

### **3.4. Birth narratives and their impact on self-harm**

The superordinate theme delves into how individuals' experiences and perceptions related to their birth narratives and early life can relate to their inclination to self-harm. Birth narratives may shed light on the individual's ideas about how their birth affected the family system within which they arrived. Negative connotations attached

to these narratives may hint at a tendency to self-harm. The theme includes subordinate themes such as perceived unwantedness, complications during birth, and the need to release what is inside.

Through a Lacanian perspective, early experiences that are marked with unwantedness or complications faced by the m(Other) may impact the subject's psyche. Hence, self-harm may emerge from the relation to the Other's desire and be targeted to the Other with the message affected by these narratives. Moreover, participants' narration of self-harm has a metaphorical resemblance to birth, which highlights the cyclical nature of creation and destruction relating to Freud's life and death instinct.

### **3.4.1. Perceived unwantedness**

The subordinate theme explores participants' reflections on their birth stories and their parents' attitudes toward their pregnancies. All participants highlighted a perceived unwantedness regarding their birth. Most importantly, these stories are told by the parents to the children, which carries an important message.

Toprak stated that his parents did not plan for him and that his mother initially did not realize she was pregnant. When she found out, she considered abortion. This sense of being unwanted from conception may have contributed to feelings of rejection.

R: What were you told about the period before pregnancy, the pregnancy itself, and your birth process?

T: I know they didn't want me. My mom didn't even realize she was pregnant for about three or four months and was taking medications for stomach pain, etc. When she found out, she considered abortion.

*Original*

*A: Sizin doğum süreciniz hakkında, hamilelik öncesi hamilelik ve doğum, neler anlatılmıştı size?*

*T: Beni istemeyerek yaptıklarını biliyorum. Yaklaşık bir üç dört ay boyunca annem hamile olduğunu mesela tam bilmiyormuş, böyle ilaç kullanıyormuş, hani mide ağrısı şu bu vesaire için. Hamile olduğunu anladıktan sonra mesela annem bir ara çocuğu aldırısam mı diye düşünmüş.*

Deniz reflected on how their parents' relationship might have ended before it began if their mother had a later pregnancy. They stated their birth occurred at the wrong time, and it could have been better for their parents if Deniz's birth did not occur.

R: How do you evaluate the stories about your birth?

D: If my mother had a later pregnancy, maybe a few years later, their relationship might have ended before it even started. I mean, if they had realized they couldn't continue the relationship, they would have ended it between themselves. Maybe it could have been better for their lives, so sometimes it feels like it happened too quickly at a very wrong time.

*Original*

*A: Siz bu doğumunuzla ilgili anlatılanları nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?*

*D: Eğer annemin daha geç bir hamileliği olsaydı belki birkaç yıl sonra belki ilişkileri başlamadan biterdi gibi düşünüyorum. Hani yani o ilişkiye devam edemeyeceklerini fark edip onlar kendi aralarındaki ilişkiyi bitirirdi. Belki daha iyi olabilirdi onların hayatları için o yüzden hani şey gibi geliyor bazen hani çok yanlış bir zamanda çok hızlı bir şekilde.*

Yonca shared that she was not planned and got quite sick in her childhood, emphasizing that it is not at a life-threatening degree. Her mother had abortions before she was born because of her fear that her age might lead to having children with disabilities. Moreover, she stated how her father wanted her regardless of the circumstances, while her mother was anxious and considered an abortion if there were any negative signs from the doctor.

Let me just say, I wasn't planned. During my childhood, I was quite sick, though it wasn't to a life-threatening degree[...]. My mother had aborted the children before me, fearing they might be born with disabilities or similar issues[...]. My dad didn't have thoughts like that, he said he wanted the baby regardless. My mom didn't really want it and was constantly worried about what will happen. I know that if she would hear the slightest negativity from the doctor, she would have an abortion.

*Original*

*Beni planlayarak yapmamışlar onu bir söyleyeyim. Çocuklukta ben baya hasta olmuşum böyle ölümcül düzeyde falan değildi[...]. Benden önceki çocukları aldırması annem sakat doğma tehlikesi varsa falan diye[...]. Babam öyle düşünceleri yokmuş, hani öyle de olsa böyle de olsa ben doğmasını istiyorum demiş. Annem çok istemiyor böyle ne olacak ne bitecek diye sürekli*

*endişe halindeymiş. Hani doktordan en ufak bir olumsuzluk duyacak olsa zaten yine kürtaj olacaktı.*

The stories their parents told participants about being unwanted from birth generated shared feelings. These stories of being unexpected or uninvited at first may intensify feelings of rejection and have a negative impact on the sense of self.

### **3.4.2. Complications during birth**

The subordinate theme examines participants' reflections on the difficulties their mothers faced during pregnancy and childbirth. Lale, Bahar, Yonca, and Kuzey narrated this theme, and their narration carried self-induced guilt along with implicit aggression toward the mother.

Lale noted that her mother never talked about any difficulties she faced during pregnancy, such as struggling with movement. Yet it was noteworthy that she thought about the complications and brought it up in the interview.

R: How would you evaluate the stories told about your birth?

L: Great, the pregnancy process was also very smooth. "I didn't vomit even once" she tells me. I'm very happy for her. It went well, I think it's not too bad. I only saw my mom's photos; she gained a lot of weight, really, but she never talked about how difficult it was, how hard it was to move, etc. She never says things like that about her pregnancy.

*Original*

*A: Peki siz bu doğumunuzla ilgili anlatılanları nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?*

*L: Güzel yani hamilelik süreci de çok sancısız geçmiş. "Bir kez bile kusmadım" diyor bana ne güzel onun adına çok sevindim. Güzel geçmiş bence çok fena değil. Sadece şeyi gördüm annemin fotoğraflarını görüyorum çok kilo almış gerçekten ama hiç şey anlatmıyor, çok zor hareket ederdim, şöyle zorlandım böyle zorlandım. Asla böyle şeyler söylemiyor hamilelik süreciyle ilgili.*

Bahar stated that the pregnancy of her mother was not too difficult as stated by her mother. However, she also shared that her mother experienced facial paralysis during childbirth, which took a long time to recover from.



I know it wasn't too difficult during the pregnancy[...]My mom had facial paralysis during childbirth, and it took a long time to recover after birth.

*Original*

*Hamilelik süreciyle ilgili çok zor geçmediğini biliyorum[...]Annem yüz felci geçirmiş ben doğarken, baya bir süre geçmemiş o doğum sonrası.*

Yonca shared a traumatic birth story, where her mother lost a significant amount of blood and could have died if not properly saved. This narrative of nearly causing her mother's death comes with a sense of guilt where she states it is not her fault.

My mom could have died if she hadn't been properly saved there because, after the surgery, she regained consciousness. She tried to stand up, and as soon as she did, she said, "Almost a bucket of blood came out of my uterus." [...]During birth, I tore my mom all over, and she lost a lot of blood [...]I was born with great difficulty, a painful one, but actually it's not my fault.

*Original*

*Annem orada eğer düzgünce kurtarılmasaydı ölebilirmiş çünkü ameliyattan çıktıktan sonra bir kendine gelmiş. Ayağa kalkacak olmuş, kalktığı gibi "Neredeyse bir kovaya yakın kan boşaldı rahmimden" diyor[...]Doğum sırasında ben annemin her yerini yırtmışım, çok fazla da kan kaybetmiş[...]Baya zor doğmuşum sancılı doğmuşum, ya aslında hani benim suçum da değil.*

Some participants described complications during their birth that led to guilt. Furthermore, these narratives carried an aggressive undertone toward their mothers. It highlighted a complex relationship between the emotional burden participants carry and self-harming behaviors.

### **3.4.3. The metaphorical need to release what is inside**

The subordinate theme delves into the metaphorical relation between self-harm and birth, highlighting the cyclical nature of creation and destruction as conceptualized by Freud's concepts of life and death instincts. Birth involves the release of a child from the womb; self-harm can be viewed as a way for individuals to release what is internal, including blood or negative feelings and experiences. This metaphorical relation is narrated by Bahar, Yonca, and Kuzey and explored through a complementary interview.

Bahar described how self-harm provided a sense of relief by externalizing her internal. She explains that inflicting physical pain allowed her to release feelings of stress and confusion that she could not otherwise articulate or manage. Furthermore, her articulation, such as the need to physically come out of inside, draws a parallel between birth experience.

B: It felt good to hurt.

R: How did it feel good?

B: Like suffering needs to come out physically. Feelings inside that I can't make sense of, that I'm very stressed, that I'm nervous about.

*Original*

*B: Yani iyi hissettirmişti acıması canımın.*

*A: Nasıl iyi hissettirmişti?*

*B: Hak ediyordum gibi. Birazcık hani çok fiziksel bir şekilde bunu desteklenmesi gerekiyormuş gibi. Fizikselde acı çekmemin dışarı çıkması gerekiyormuş gibi. İçimdeki çok anlamlandıramadığım hislerin, çok stresli olmamın.*

In the complementary interview, Bahar further illustrates a rebirth experience through self-harm by stating how it makes her feel alive.

R: Deserving pain, what does it makes you think of?

B: I would say it made living a little bit meaningful. Feeling things and one of them being pain is something that makes you feel alive.

*Original*

*A: Neler düşündürür size acıyı hak etmek?*

*B: Biraz yaşamayı anlamlı kılıyordu diyebilirim. Bir şeyler hissetmek ve bunlardan birinin acı olması biraz hayatta hissettiren bir şey.*

Yonca described self-harm acts as a form of catharsis, providing temporary relief from overwhelming emotions. She shared that after significant personal losses, eating offers some relief, yet it is followed by abdominal pain, resembling the experience of being pregnant.

You feel the need to empty out somehow, and when you can't, you start to feel tense or I don't know you may want to do it to someone else. But when

you can't, you end up turning it onto yourself[...]After that you harm yourself. After doing it, you first feel relief, and the anger inside is gone. It's like a form of catharsis in your own way. You're emptying your body[...]Whether it was my friend's death in the earthquake or my uncle's death, in 2023 alone, I experienced five deaths, one after another. Finally, with the death of my teacher, it peaked, and I became unable to cope with anything in any way. The only time I feel relief is when I eat, but afterward, I experience pain in my stomach.

*Original*

*Böyle bir yerden boşaltma ihtiyacı hissedersin. Boşaltamayınca böyle kendini sıkıyorsun ya da ne biliyim aslında onu birine yapmak istiyorsun. Yapamayınca kendine dönüyor ondan sonra da kendine zarar veriyorsun gibi[...]Yani sonrasında yapınca başta bir rahatlıyorsun ve içindeki o öfke geçiyor böyle kendince katarsis yaşıyorsun. Vücudunu boşaltıyorsun[...]Depremde arkadaşımın ölümü olsun amcamın ölüsü olsun bilmem ne, zaten 2023'te ben peş peşe beş tane ölüm yaşadım. En son artık hocamın ölümüyle iyice artık peak yaptı hiçbir şekilde hiçbir şeyle başa çıkamaz hale geldim. Ancak yemek yediğimde rahatlıyorum ama sonrasında karnımda bir ağrı oluyor.*

Yonca, in the second interview, once again draws attention to a loss and how the news of her ex-boyfriend's childhood friend's death reawakened her own traumas, specifically the loss of her friend in an earthquake. The loss once again leads to an eating behavior, emphasizing the destruction and creation cycle.

Y: My ex-boyfriend called me and said, “My childhood friend died”. His death revived my traumas a lot. I said, “I'm sorry for your loss, I'm sorry, but I can't be with you like before, but if you need help, I will help you as much as I can.” But then I fell into debt. After that, my nerves broke down and I kept ordering desserts to the office and I still do because the thoughts in my head just won't stop.

A: How did the death of his friend affect you?

Y: My friend died in the earthquake and it remind me of him.

*Original*

*Y: Eski sevgilim aradı “Benim çocukluk arkadaşım öldü” dedi. Onun ölümü benim travmalarımı baya bir canlandırdı. “Başın sağ olsun üzüldüm ama eskisi gibi olamam ben seninle ama onun dışında yardıma ihtiyacın olursa elimden geldiği kadar yardım ederim.” dedim ama sonra ben borçlu duruma düştüm. Ondan sonra sınırlarım bozuldu ofisteyken falan devamlı ofise tatlı sipariş edip durdum hala da ediyorum çünkü kafamdaki düşünceler bir türlü durmuyor.*

A: Arkadaşının ölümü nasıl etkiledi sizi?

Y: Benim depremde arkadaşım öldü onu aklıma getirdi.

Kuzey explained how cutting himself gave him a sense of relief by letting go of something built inside him. His account was similar to the growth of an infant inside the womb.

K: When I cut myself, the sharp pain and seeing the blood was making me feel really good. I mean, it felt good.

R: How did seeing the blood make you feel good?

K: As I said, it felt like there is something accumulating inside me, I was releasing it. It made me felt that[...]It felt like I needed to get something out of my body. When it was blood, at least it calmed me down, something like that. I was looking for something to cope with. I think it came out of a search for something to cope with.

*Original*

*K: Kesmede hani o anki hani keskin acı ve kan görmek bana çok iyi geliyordu. Yani iyi geliyordu.*

*A: Peki kan görmek nasıl iyi geliyordu?*

*K: Yani dediğim gibi şey hissettiriyordu. İçimde biriken bir şey var, onu dışarı atabiliyorum. Biraz onu hissettiriyordu[...]Nasıl diyeyim vücudumdan bir şey çıkarmam gerekiyor. Bu kan olduğu zaman en azından sakinleşebiliyorum, tarzında bir şey. Yani baş etmek için bir şey aramışım baş etmek için bir arayıştan kasıtlı çıktığımı düşünüyorum.*

In the complementary interview, Kuzey further described blood as a life source that can highlight the life and death cycle involved in self-harm.

I think one of the important things about seeing blood is that it's probably something that's so fundamental to the body, it's like a life source, so maybe taking it out connects with what I feel is so deep.

*Original*

*Kanı görmenin önemli şeylerinden bir tanesi büyük ihtimalle çok böyle vücudun temelinde olan bir şey olması olduğunu düşünüyorum. Hayat kaynağı gibi bir şey sonuçta onu çıkarmak o kadar derinde olduğunu hissettiğim şeylerle belki bağdaşıyordur.*

Participants compared the act of self-harm to giving birth as a metaphor for the release of internalized feelings and experiences through self-harm. Catharsis was provided by self-harm; it was similar to a cycle of creation and destruction and mirrored the physical release that comes with birth.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

The current study explores self-harm behavior through a psychoanalytic lens, particularly Lacanian psychoanalysis, and it aims to contribute to the field of psychoanalysis by offering theoretical and practical implications. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with six participants, and data is analyzed by employing reflexive thematic analysis. The first research question of this study is “What are the experiences of individuals engaging in self-harm?” and the second one is “How do individuals engaging in self-harm evaluate their family dynamics and the narratives surrounding their conception and birth?”. The first theme, namely the unspoken experience behind self-harm, explores disruption in the symbolic function, which brings a gap and distances subjects from using words or symbols to communicate their feelings and experiences. Through this gap, self-harm emerges as an effort to externalize the internal negative feelings and experiences. Furthermore, the second theme, which is the inter-subjective dynamics of self-harm, delves into the communicative function of self-harm that transcends language, relating to the concept of jouissance. This study further investigates individuals engaging in self-harm and their relation to the Other. The investigation revealed a third theme as chaotic family dynamics and their impact on self-harm. This theme sheds light onto the disruption in symbolic order identified in the first theme, revealing a lack of paternal function that is supposed to impose a limitation on jouissance. In an attempt to gain a better understanding of family dynamics, participants’ narratives surrounding their own conception and birth are examined. By further examining family dynamics, this theme sheds light on participants’ beliefs of how their existence has affected the family system into which they were born. The fourth and final identified theme related to this aspect of self-harm is called birth narratives and their impact on self-harm. This theme highlights the cyclical relationship between creation and destruction. Furthermore, it displays a relation between self-harm and

messages received from the (m)Other, particularly when the message perceived as one's existence is filled with ambivalence, negativity, or rejection. The following sections of chapter four explore each theme in greater detail, employing Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective as well as other psychoanalytic perspectives.

#### **4.1. When Language Fails: Emergence of Jouissance in Self-Harm**

Symbolic castration entails the subject's recognition of the limitations imposed by the paternal function. This limitation, metaphorically, is the intervention of the Name-of-the-Father to the dyadic relation of the mother and infant. Symbolic castration is fundamental for the child to transition into the realm of language and culture (Soler, 2014, as cited in Gürsoy, 2023). However, disruptions in the symbolic function can lead to an inability to process and communicate experiences and emotions. In other words, the unspoken experience behind self-harm, as identified in this study, indicates a disruption in the symbolic function. In this context, self-harm emerges as an attempt to externalize internal states, not through communication but with action. In this study, the unspoken experience behind self-harm was intense emotions such as anger, guilt, and shame, along with dissociative states and the painful pleasure of the act.

To understand the connection between anger and self-harm, anger needs to be evaluated through Lacanian lens. Soler (2015) situates anger as a fundamental affect due to its deeply rooted presence in the human psyche and its powerful impact on behavior. It is further argued that it arises from the subject's response to failure between symbolic and real order. This failure exposes the limitations of the symbolic and real intrudes upon one's constructed reality. Deniz's narrative: "Things had piled up in my life; I was sexually harassed. Later, I went through some political difficulties[...]I couldn't control anything in my life at that moment, and maybe realizing that I don't know, I had been crying out of anger for a few days. (*Ya bir şeyler çok üst üste gelmişti hayatımda işte şey bir tacize uğradım. Daha sonra işte şeyle siyasi olarak sıkıntı yaşadığım birkaç süreç yaşadım[...]Hayatımdaki hiçbir şeyi kontrol edemiyordum o an ve onu fark etmek midir nedir bilemiyorum işte sinirden zaten ağlıyordum birkaç gündür.*)" is an example of how a subject may feel

anger when real intrudes symbolic order through an event that cannot be symbolized readily. Furthermore, it is argued that, unlike other emotions, anger emerges as a response to real and cannot be easily moderated through symbolic. For instance, a burst of anger and its physical experience (such as increased heart rate, muscle tension, etc.) points out its unmediated nature and its connection to the real. Hence, anger is beyond the limitations of symbolic structure (Soler, 2015). In the participants' statements, anger is frequently directed inward. For example, Lale mentioned, “Not in a way that I attacked people or anything like that, but I was very, very angry inside, very angry. (*İnsanlara saldırma vesaire gibi değil ama içimden çok çok sinirlendim çok sinirliydim.*)” She emphasized that her anger was internal rather than outwardly expressed. This internal anger, which lies beyond the symbolic and cannot be easily mediated by the symbolic, may manifest through the body as self-harm. Toprak similarly noted, “My self-harm situations increased when I was very angry at both myself and life. (*Kendime zarar verme durumları aynı zamanda çok hem kendime hem hayata öfkeliyken daha çok oluyordu.*)”.

The other intense emotions narrated by the participants were guilt and shame. From a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, Miller (2006) argues that shame and guilt can be distinguished based on their relation to the Other. Shame considered a primary emotion, is enforced through the gaze of the Other. The subject interprets this gaze, and shame emerges from how the subject imagines being seen by the Other. For instance, Lale reflected, “When someone asks, what will I say? Will I say I cut myself? After all, it's something shameful. I understand why I did it, but at the end of the day, it's a shameful behavior. (*Biri sorduğunda ne diyeceğim, kendimi kestim mi diyeceğim? Sonuçta utanç verici bir şey bu. Anlayabiliyorum, neden yaptığımı biliyorum ama günün sonunda utanç verici bir davranış bu.*)” which illustrates how the subject's perception of the Other's judgement is connected to shame. Guilt, on the other hand, arises when the subject believes that they have transgressed values and feels judged by the Other embodying those values (Miller, 2006). Bahar expressed this by saying, “When I feel good feelings, I usually feel guilty. So, feeling pain or, you know, feeling bad makes me feel more comfortable. (*İyi hisler hissedince kendimi suçlu hissediyorum genelde. O yüzden acı çekmek ya da ne bileyim, kendimi kötü hissetmek kendimi daha rahat hissettirir.*)”. Bahar's expression of feeling guilty

due to feeling good can be understood as the subject's belief that they transgressed the values imposed by the Other, and in this context, self-harm becomes a punishment. Yet it is important to note that not all guilt is pathological; Soler (2015) states that when the paternal function is efficient, guilt is moderated. Conversely, where this symbolic function fails, guilt is experienced as overwhelming. It might be related to the close association between the Other and feelings of guilt and shame. When symbolic function is effective, there is a barrier between the subject and the Other's gaze or the Other's judgement where shame and guilt arise. This is further illustrated in the literature where shame is described as the feeling of an individual “who is in a room full of mirrors with distorted images of self.” (Kilborne, 2012, as cited in Canbolat, 2018, p. 101). Dominant models of guilt and shame differentiate these two. Yet, in the literature, it is suggested that this distinction is less predominant in collectivist cultures. In collectivist contexts, individuals tend to see themselves as integrated with their relationships with others. Hence, there is less focus on an individual's internal orientation, as is often seen in individualistic cultures (Wong & Tsai, 2007). Even though it needs more examination on the overlap between the two emotions in "Eastern cultures" from a psychoanalytic perspective, it can be said that they also dually appeared in the participants' narratives. For instance, Kuzey described “I was ashamed of my existence. I was constantly ashamed, I was just feeling guilty and ashamed. (*Varlığımdan utanıyordum sürekli hani utanıyordum. Sürekli sadece utanıyordum hani sadece hani suçlu hissediyordum ve utanıyordum.*)”. Hence, it might be said that self-harm is closely associated with an overwhelming experience of shame and guilt, which might arise from the failure of symbolic function.

Dissociation from responsibility and negative experience is another important aspect of self-harm. In the literature, it is discussed that dissociation is involved in some self-harm cases where the agent that causes harm is not perceived as the real self (Edmonson et al., 2016). Deniz's statement “It felt like there was another Deniz in my life managing me and making decisions for me. (*O an sanki hayatımda beni yöneten ve benim yerime kararları veren başka bir Deniz var gibiydi.*)” is an example to this dissociation. Another form of dissociation includes being unable to recall memories, which all participants stated. Bahar's narrative “I don't even remember much about



why it happened. I have a thing like unable to remember my memories. (*Hatırlamıyorum bile çok neden olduğunu çok anılarımı hatırlayamamak gibi bir şeyim var.*)”, Deniz’s statement, “I don't remember the details clearly. Some things are really a bit blurry for me from that part. (*Tam hatırlamıyorum detaylı bir şekilde. Hani bazı şeyler gerçekten benim için o kısımla alakalı biraz silik.*)” and Kuzey's remark. I don't remember why I got worse or why I felt bad. I don't remember when it started. (*Neden kötüleştiğimi hatırlamıyorum neden kötü olduğumu. Yani ne zaman başladı hatırlamıyorum.*)” are examples of this type of dissociation. From a Lacanian view, symbolic castration necessitates the acquisition of language and relinquishment of subjectivity, which allows individuals to access broader social contexts of communication (Lacan, 2006b). However, as it is evident in participants' shared experiences, language is perceived by those who self-harm as having fallen short of its promise to provide a shared meaning, or at least the illusion of it (Straker, 2006). Hence, participants were left with no tool to communicate or even remember when they experienced negative events. Furthermore, Deniz described how talking made things worse for them by stating, “I mean, while explaining to my mom, it felt like I had to face it more. I think I couldn't handle that confrontation. (*Yani anneme anlatırken bir an daha çok yüzleşmem gerekti gibi oldu. Galiba o yüzleşmeyi kaldıramadım.*)”. Symbolic castration imposed by the language might threaten this dissociative barrier, forcing them to revisit and relive painful memories that they tried to distance themselves from. This is also evident in Bahar’s statement “I directed all my sadness and anger toward academia. I will get some water over there. (*Sürekli böyle üzünlüğümü sinirimi falan akademiye yönelttim gibi oldu. Ben şuradan bir su alayım.*)”. Before taking a break to get water, she discussed her parent's divorce and how she directed her sadness and anger to academia. The need for a pause during the interview may also be related to articulating these events disrupting the dissociative barrier. Similarly, Kuzey is asked about the period when he felt responsible for parenting his mother and how it affected his mental health for the worse. He recalls his depression symptoms beginning in elementary school and progressing over time, and he paused to say he forgot the question, indicating a possible dissociative response. Gathering this information together raises questions about the function of dissociation, which might be related to the subject's attempt to bring “a third” into the position of the law. Dissociative states involve three

positions: harming self, self that is exposed to harming, and the (m)Other. In other words, self-harm might be an unconscious attempt to triangulate the relationship. Yet, it cannot create the triangle posited by paternal function due to the lack of intersubjectivity (Straker, 2006).

The other aspect of self-harm displayed physical pain turning into pleasure or a soothing feeling, which can be explored through the concept of *jouissance*. Lacan asserts there is a limit to pleasure that a subject can endure, and beyond this limit, there is not simply more pleasure but rather pain. *Jouissance* is a form of pleasure that transcends the pleasure principle, resulting in a blend of pleasure and pain (Lacan, 2006b). There is a neurotic illusion that pleasure beyond the limit is attainable if not for the prohibition imposed by the symbolic function. The transgressive nature of *jouissance* is evident when individuals attempt to breach the prohibition in search of excess pleasure, yet it manifests as pain (Evans, 2006). Deniz's statement, "I think feeling that pain gave me pleasure. (*Galiba o acıyı hissetmek bana zevk veriyordu.*)" embodies this notion of *jouissance* in self-harm. Kuzey also asserted, "Feeling pain was good. (*Acı hissetmek iyi geliyordu.*)" which further illuminates how the act of self-harm serves as a pursuit of this paradoxical enjoyment. Moreover, *jouissance* embodies the bodily expression of the real, and it is closely linked to the death drive. The death drive is marked by a relentless pursuit to transgress the pleasure principle that leads toward self-destruction or a path toward death (Evans, 2006). Thus, self-harm can be an expression of the death drive, in which the subjects' actions are driven to attain *jouissance* through the infliction of pain to themselves.

Interestingly, the act of self-harm often provides a short period of relief for participants overwhelmed by intense emotions and experiences. Straker (2006) asserts an intricate link between soothing and pain, which can be addictive, and this might be related to self-harm providing a temporary sense of integration where subjects distance themselves from suffering to a more stable sense of self. This is prominent in Deniz's statement "Like, that pain was kind of pain that reminded me of my existence. (*O acı sanki bana benim varlığımı hatırlatan bir acı gibi geliyordu.*)". Furthermore, for some, seeing their blood as a raw representation of the

effect enables a concrete confirmation of their internal chaos (Straker, 2006). Agonizing feelings are not articulated yet acted out, which demonstrates a way to cope with jouissance (McLaughlin & Daffron, 2021). Similarly, Lale shared, “I thought it was like cupping therapy. I thought if blood flowed from there, I might feel relieved. I thought that maybe negative thoughts would, poof, fly away, so I did that. (*Hacamat olarak düşündüm buradan kan akarsa belki biraz rahatlarım. Belki işte olumsuz negatif düşünceler de böyle puf uçup gider gibisinden düşündüm, öyle yaptım.*)”. Kuzey's experience further illustrates the calming effect of self-harm where he stated “The physical sensation of pain quieted everything in my mind and calmed me down. It was like taking a medication. (*Fiziksel bir hisse dönüşmesi hani bir anda hani beynimdeki her şeyi susturdu. Hani sakinleştim hani sakinleştirdi hani ilaç almış gibi hissettim.*)”. These self-destructive behaviors may function as a temporary emergence of subjectivity and a way to cope with jouissance since it can be considered as an attempt to create a thirdness. However, this strategy lacks inter-subjectivity and is doomed to be a form of jouissance even after a short period of relief. This is why it is a vicious cycle where these behaviors repeatedly occur.

Even though self-harm is closely related to unspoken experiences, it is important to note that the behavior itself inherently targets an inter-subjective aspect. It includes a duality of concealment and visibility, other people as ways to stop self-harming, and reference to suicide. Self-harm can be portrayed as a private experience or suffering in silence, and this is partly true since it is often conducted privately. Yet it is surprising how the scars somehow become shown or known despite the desire to conceal them. It highlights a paradoxical situation where there is a wish to conceal the scars that come with unavoidable visibility (Papadima, 2019). This visibility and concealment dilemma is illustrated in the statements of several participants in the study. For instance, Bahar expressed, “The marks on my wrist seemed very noticeable. (*Bileğimdekiler çok dikkat çekermiş gibi geldi.*)” which leads to a shift in the location of her self-harm to her ankles. She later adds “I realized now that my ankle is more noticeable. (*Ayak bileğim daha çok dikkat çekiyor şu an bunu fark ettim.*)”. Yonca also described her continuous efforts to prevent her family from noticing her scars yet stated, “They saw it somehow. (*Bir şekilde görüyorlardı ediyorlar.*)”. Both participants described that self-harm is visible to others despite

their best attempts, further highlighting the conflict that naturally exists between concealment and unavoidable visibility. Kuzey's experience also supports this paradox, as he reflects on the visible results of self-harm being a critical factor in his decision to stop cutting and start burning and stated “I just didn't want it to be known. (*Yani sadece bilinmesini istemiyordum.*)”.

The need for visibility and concealment dilemma can be understood through the concept of acting out, initially introduced by Freud. Acting out is defined as subjects' repressed experiences returning as actions without the subject noticing they are repeating these experiences (Freud, 1914). As discussed, the dissociative state involved in the process points out a repressed experience. Lacan further details that acting out involves an inter-subjective aspect related to the Other, where the subject's unconscious messages are expressed through actions (Evans, 2006). Self-harm signals a disruption in the symbolic function. Where communication fails, internal experiences, especially the ones associated with negative emotions, emerge through the action. Hence, self-harm aligns with Freud's concept of acting out due to its return of the repressed and repeated aspects. Moreover, Lacan's statement of acting out as a form of communication aligns with the scars or marks resulting from these behaviors. Participants' expressions regarding the visible results of the self-harm emphasize that the content of the message in acting out is unconscious, suggesting even the subject is unaware that their actions carry a message. In other words, despite the conscious wish to conceal them, participants are communicating their struggles or repressed experiences by making them public through the marks and scars.

Upon the need for visibility and concealment, participants described how interactions with others are crucial to stop self-harming. Self-harm carries an unconscious message addressed to the Other as a form of acting out, which might involve a range of different connotations, from a request for attention to intervention. The interaction with others may provide a sense that the message is acknowledged and might establish a form of prohibition against self-harm. For instance, Lale assured that she moved back to her mother's place to prevent herself from engaging in self-harm and added, “For example, I used to smoke a lot, two packs a day. Now, because my mom gets angry, I smoke less. (*Şöyle, sigara çok içiyordum. İki paket sigara içiyordum.*)”.

*Şimdi annem kızdığı için daha az içiyorum.*)". Similarly, Bahar described telling her friends of these behaviors acted as a barrier to self-harm. She explained her sense of obligation to those who cared about her and said she did not really value herself, which made her friends' suggestions of "don't do it" more meaningful. These interactions suggest that the unconscious message carried within the act of self-harm is somewhat acknowledged, overriding the need for the harmful behavior. Kuzey's statement, on the other hand, presents a different perspective. He revealed, "When people know, they want to intervene. Because you want to prevent someone from harming themselves. I didn't want to be stopped, so I hid it. (*Şimdi bilseler insan bilince müdahale etmek istiyor çünkü. Hani insanın kendine zarar vermesini engellemek istersin. Engellenmek istemediğim için biraz saklıyordum.*)". By hiding these behaviors, he avoids the intervention that would disrupt his means of expressing his agitation. This secrecy ensures the continuation of self-harm as an attempt to convey his message to the Other through the act.

The motivation behind self-harming behaviors is complex and multifaceted, involving a complex interaction between suicidal and non-suicidal intentions. It is also highlighted by researchers who recommend including both motivations within the scope of self-harm due to the difficulty in defining clear-cut distinctions between these motivations (Kapur et al., 2013; Linehan & Nielsen, 1981). As for the psychoanalytic view, self-harm is associated with a constant attempt to transgress the limits towards an excess jouissance. Jouissance, inherently linked to the death drive, is a path toward death where gratification is derived from states of excitation and agitation (Evans, 2006; Vanheule, 2011). Given the profound connection between self-harm, jouissance, and the death drive, it is almost inevitable that reference to suicide will emerge. For instance, Deniz, when asked about the continuation of their self-harming behaviors, expressed a belief that they would eventually take their own life. Similarly, Toprak said, "I guess I won't be loved, I'm too ugly, I don't want to live. (*Herhalde ben sevilmeyeceğim, ben çok çirkinim, yaşamak istemiyorum.*)". It was also noteworthy that during the interview, Lale repeatedly claimed she never intended to end her life, even without a prompted question regarding suicide. For example, she stated "I harmed myself but never with the intention of ending my life. (*Kendime zarar veriyordum diyeyim ama hani hiç hayatıma son verme olarak öyle*

*bir amaçla değil.)”*. It raises a question regarding why the notion that she had no intention of ending her life occupies her thoughts persistently if that desire did not drive her actions. This frequent insistence on a lack of suicidal intent suggests a deeper internal conflict regarding her motivations. It might be a way to assert control over her narrative or a message carried to the Other, highlighting the complex relation between conscious assertions and potential unconscious motivation. It further illuminates the thin line between suicidal and non-suicidal intentions.

#### **4.2. From Birth to Death: Early Life Experiences and Self-Harm**

The findings of this study highlight the significant influence of chaotic family dynamics on self-harm behaviors. Constant instability and conflict within the family environment while growing up may disrupt the emotional regulation of individuals who engage in self-harm as a maladaptive coping mechanism. These findings attempt to illuminate further the discussion on how language has failed in self-harm. It is further explained by the Lacanian psychoanalytic concept of symbolic castration, which suggests that disruptions in the symbolic order caused by a lack of limitations imposed by the paternal function are factors in the development of self-harm. These are examined through the family dynamics, which encompasses reference to domestic violence, problems in the relationship between parents, and the absence or inconsistent presence of a parent. All participants shared parental divorce and severe incompatibility, and the participants' experiences highlight the profound effects of family chaos.

All participants mentioned domestic violence even though there is no prompted question, yet Lale offered a perspective by asserting that there was no violence in her family, based on both her observations and her mother's statements. Interestingly, she still referenced domestic violence. Hence, the relationship between self-directed violence and the presence of domestic violence emerged as an important aspect while examining self-harm. In the literature, it is pointed out that a child's early experiences with abuse lead to internalizing the abuser, which leads to a reduced ability to express and regulate feelings (Yakeley & Burbridge-James, 2018).

Toprak shared “Sometimes in the summer when my dad would go to work and my sister would go to camp somewhere, it would just be my mom and me. (*Bazen yazın gerçekten babam işe gittiği zaman, ablam bir yerde kampa tatile gittiği zaman, annemle ben kalırdım. Birine sataşacak bir şeyi olmadığına bana sataşır, benle problem yaşardı.*)” emphasizing he faced his mother's aggression alone. He also added “Then, all of a sudden, she would go somewhere completely unexpected. All of a sudden she would start shouting at me, insulting me, doing things that she had a grudge against, doing physical violence, hitting me. Then, I would run away from home. (*Sonra bir anda hiç beklenmedik bir yere giderdi. Bir anda bana bağırma, hakaret etmeye, kin tuttuğu şeyleri yapmaya, böyle fiziksel şiddet uygulamaya başlardı, böyle vurmaya. Ondan sonra ben de evden kaçardım.*)”. Yonca provided additional comment about the time where her brother saw her marks from self-harm and said “My brother saw it and said, “Should I punch you in the face instead? Maybe then you'll stop.” (*Abim görmüştü “Senin yerine ben bir tane suratına çarpsam daha mı iyi olur acaba?” falan demişti. Böyle “Hem belki o zaman vazgeçersin.” falan diye.*)”. She also mentioned about her father's aggression when she is growing up by stating “There wasn't constant physical violence, but there was always tension because my dad would make something out of nothing. (*Yani böyle sürekli dayak atma gibi bir durum yoktu ama hani evde sürekli bir gerilim hali mevcuttu. Çünkü babam olmayacak bir şeyden mana çıkartan bir insan.*)”. A crucial point is highlighted by these personal accounts.

When an abusive figure is deeply involved in children's lives, and they are hard to escape, especially when the abuser is a trusted and loved parent, they tend to internalize this figure. It leads to a blur in the distinction between good and bad, self and other, inner and outer (Bick, 1968). For self-harm, it is important to highlight the holding function of the skin, providing a boundary between experiences within and external experiences. A breach of this boundary, involving a transition from internal to external, is demonstrated through self-harm. This breach communicates an unconscious material to get rid of bad feelings or helps eliminate bad parts of the self. It indicates primitive defense mechanisms at use, such as splitting, projection, and projective identification to avoid painful feelings. Hence, self-harm may be an unconscious attack on the internalized hated object and the victim self (Yakaley &

Burbridge-James, 2018). This viewpoint highlights the importance of addressing the interpersonal patterns of those who engage in self-harm.

Ongoing interactions among the individual, each parent, and the relationship of the parental couple must be considered when examining self-harm. In the literature, mutual influences of family members, attachment issues, and systemic relational patterns on the emergence and continuation of self-harm are highlighted (Karamat Ali, 2020). High levels of marital distress contribute to an unstable family environment, making it difficult for individuals to find emotional support. Marital problems, parental separation, or divorce have been identified as a significant risk factor for self-harm (Fortune et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2019; Wagner, 1997); this is consistently reflected in the narratives of all participants in this study. For instance, Toprak recalled his childhood and adolescence as filled with frequent arguments between his parents about insignificant things, which emphasizes the chronic conflict in the environment in which he was raised. Bahar further illustrated the impact of parental conflict when asked about the onset of self-harm, stating, “I didn't expect them to divorce, so I was a bit surprised. I knew they didn't have a great relationship, and it came up from time to time, I knew it deep down inside. But I never thought they would actually do it. (*Çok beklemiyordum boşanmalarını, o yüzden birazcık şaşırdım. Yani çok iyi bir ilişkileri olmadığı ve bu dönem dönem hani masaya geldiği için içten içte biliyordum ama hiçbir zaman gerçekten bunu yapacaklarını düşünmezdim.*)”. A deeper comprehension of how these relational dynamics impact self-harm can be provided by psychoanalytic theory.

Initially, the Oedipus complex arises from the child's realization of the (m)Other's lack, which creates the illusions that the Other seeks the imaginary phallus and that the child needs to become this phallus. An attempt to become the imaginary phallus that fills the Other's lack positions the child as an object rather than a subject. However, because the Other's gaze is not focused solely on the child, the child recognizes that they will never be able to fill this role for the Other fully. By the end of the Oedipus complex, the child recognizes their lack as well as the Other's. Furthermore, through the intervention of the Name-of-the-Father, to whom the Other's gaze is directed, the child is separated from the Other and moves from the



object to the subject position (Evans, 2006). In cases of persistent marital conflict, which the participants also describe, the Other's desire is not directed towards a third position. When the paternal function is unable to regulate desire in the Oedipus complex, separation is disrupted, which prevents the emergence of the subject position. Yonca also reflected on prolonged conflict, stating, “My mother and father did not have a very good relationship. (*Annemle babamın çok iyi bir ilişkileri yoktu.*)” and added, “They avoided divorce many times, even last year, but I don’t know, it is silly. Why drag it on? (*Böyle bir çok defa boşanmanın eşiğinden döndüler, geçen sene de döndüler ama yani ne bileyim saçma sapan daha niye sürdürür ki insan?*)”. When there is no apparent reason why parents stay together, subjects become entangled in a dual relationship with the mother, resulting in intense feelings of anguish. This uninterrupted dyadic bond can lead to the child inflicting literal cuts on themselves, imitating a literal castration to create a sense of separation and relieve the overwhelming psychological state.

It would be an oversimplification to assert that problems in the parental relationship cause self-harm. Furthermore, Lacan's understanding of the Oedipus complex is metaphorical rather than literal, and not everyone who experiences parental conflict engages in self-harm. The uninterrupted dyadic bond described is not solely related to problems in the parental relationship but is accompanied by absence and domestic violence. For instance, Toprak shared his experience of his mother's physical violence towards his father, resulting in him leaving home. It is also stated in the literature that good communication and family members' involvement can act as protective factors against self-harm behaviors (Beautrais, 2000). It is noted that early experiences with depriving or absent parents lead to an internalized reduced ability to express and regulate feelings (Yakeley & Burbridge-James, 2018). Deniz gave an example of this aspect with a memory of an argument with their father, resulting in the father leaving the house for almost a year. Their mother stated she would not let him back into the house, yet Deniz's father returned. After their father's return home, Deniz misused pills, which was their first instance of self-harm. In a more Freudian sense, this can relate to melancholia and how it arises when ambivalence and hostility dominate feelings toward the lost object, blocking mourning. In a melancholic state, the hated object becomes part of the self (Freud, 1914). In self-

harm, this hated or lost object might be attacked. Since it is within the self, these attacks are consciously targeted at the self.

According to Lacan, the relationship between the signifier and the signified in the language present is arbitrary. However, he highlighted the importance of an anchoring point, or point de capiton, where signifier and signified are knotted, and meaning and subjectivity emerge. The paternal function produces this anchoring point by breaking the dyadic relation between the child and the Other, limiting and interrupting jouissance. This results in the child being released from the subject-object dyad so that subjectivity can arise (Evans, 2006; Skater, 2006). When there is nothing else for the Other than the children, this dual relation maintains and it can be anguishing for the child. Kuzey provides an example: “After the divorce, since my mother was left alone, I, how should I put it, I became a parent, I was taking care of my mother a little bit...Well, what I mean by taking care is a little bit, more emotionally than physically. There was no one around her, especially her family were very opposed the divorce at that time. So she told me everything, I comforted her[...]I didn't have much of a relationship with my dad; he wasn't very present when I was young. (*Boşanmadan sonra ben bir tık annem yalnız kaldığı için ben annemi, nasıl diyeyim, hani ebeveynleştım bir tık hani anneme biraz bakıyordum. Şey bakmaktan kastım biraz şey hani fizikselden daha çok duygusal olarak hani. Şey etrafında kimse kalmamıştı, özellikle ailesi zaten ayrılmasını çok karşıydı o sıra. Yani her şeyi bana anlatıyordu her şeyi ben teselli ediyordum[...]Babamla ilişkim çok yoktu. Babam çok yani böyle varlığı ortada olan bir insan değildi böyle küçükken.*)”. The absence of a paternal function is exemplified in Kuzey's narrative, hinting a disruption in breaking the dyadic relationship between the mother and child. It demonstrated that in the absence of his father, he assumed a parental role, providing emotional support and comfort to his mother. Further stating his father was not very present when he was young highlights the absence of paternal function necessary for separation. In the absence of separation, overwhelming emotions may manifest. Furthermore, subjectivity and meaning are undermined due to the lack of paternal function. This results in overwhelming emotions and experiences that resist entering the symbolic order. Hence, acting on the body enables an expression of the unspeakable (Aron, 1998).

The absence or inconsistent presence of a parent and the need for visibility and concealment resonate with Freud's fort/da game, where a child symbolically plays with the absence and presence of the mother. In the play, the child keeps throwing a spool away, fort meaning gone, and repeatedly pulling it back, da meaning there. This game is enacting a way to deal with the absence of the mother and, at the same time, control the disappearance and return of the mother. (Chanter, 2008 in Canbolat, 2018). It is similar to the duality in self-harm, where participants hide their act of self-harm, but it happens to reveal itself either by chance or by scars and marks. The scars not only represent a hidden pain but also expose the expression of an unconscious message that is trying to surface. Scars are inescapable, like the spool returning to the child, and this paradox can be understood as a physical enactment of an internal conflict one is not consciously aware of. Lacan further elaborates on the game of fort/da to the introduction within the symbolic order, through which both language and the paternal function come into play in the child's relation to its mother (Elsner 2017 in Canbolat 2018). However, suppose the paternal function is absent or inconsistent. In that case, the availability of such separation is compromised, and dependency becomes unresolved. It might lead to the need for self-harm as a way of managing this unresolved tension. The relationship between visibility, concealment, and the game of fort/da is further illuminated by the lack of presence, or inconsistent presence, of a parent hinting at a compromise in separation.

Birth narratives mark the occasion of a person's entry into the world and their family. They hold an important meaning because they communicate received knowledge. Individual's expression of their birth stories arises from the stories that were told to them and the ways in which they internalized these stories. As a result, birth stories provide a theoretically interesting link between personal narratives and family history (Andrews et al., 2015). Since these stories repeat and continue to have significance in the person's life and relationships, they are markers of critical unconscious materials. Hence, important aspects of personality, psychopathology, and individual and family development can be discovered through the psychoanalytic investigation of the birth narratives (Arlow, 1991; Aron, 2014). In the current study, birth narratives and their impact on self-harm are conveyed through the concepts of

perceived unwantedness, complications during birth, and the metaphorical need to release what is inside.

When participants' reflection on their birth stories and their parents' attitudes toward the pregnancy is investigated, a common theme occurs across all narratives that are perceived as unwantedness. These narratives are particularly important since they are gained knowledge and are often narrated by the parents. In these narrations, subjects tend to find a message. For instance, when Toprak is asked what he knows about his birth story, the first thing he told was, "I know they didn't want me. (*Beni istemeyerek yaptıklarını biliyorum.*)" and adds, "My mom didn't even realize she was pregnant for about three or four months and was taking medications for stomach pain, etc. When she found out, she considered abortion. (*Beni istemeyerek yaptıklarını biliyorum. Yaklaşık bir üç dört ay boyunca annem hamile olduğunu mesela tam bilmiyormuş, böyle ilaç kullanıyormuş, hani mide ağrısı şu bu vesaire için. Hamile olduğunu anladıktan sonra mesela annem bir ara çocuğu aldırısam mı diye düşünmüş.*)". The narrative highlights the initial lack of desire for the child and the consideration of terminating the pregnancy. More than that, it displays how these narratives have left a lasting impression on Toprak. Fantasies and perceptions derived from birth stories are closely connected to the parent's desires and beliefs about their offspring, as well as to individuals' ideas about how their birth affected the family system in which they arrived (Aron, 2014). Similar to Toprak, Yonca stated, "My mom didn't really want it and was constantly worried about what will happen. I know that if she would hear the slightest negativity from the doctor, she would have an abortion. (*Annem çok istemiyor böyle ne olacak ne bitecek diye sürekli endişe halindeymiş. Hani doktordan en ufak bir olumsuzluk duyacak olsa zaten yine kürtaj olacaktı.*)". She indicates a thin line between being born and being aborted. Yonca also added, "Let me just say, I wasn't planned. During my childhood, I was quite sick, though it wasn't to a life-threatening degree. (*Beni planlayarak yapmamışlar onu bir söyleyeyim. Çocuklukta ben baya hasta olmuşum böyle ölümcül düzeyde falan değildi.*)". Noting that her illness was not life-threatening right after stating the possibility of being aborted further highlights her sense of being unwanted.

The desire of the Other plays an important role in self-harm and acting out. If a child cannot find a place within the Other's desire and their need for love is met with unresponsiveness, they become more vulnerable to suicidal ideation (Raes, 2011). Lacan distinguishes desire, demand, and need. Need is a basic biological instinct, something that the individual depends on another, particularly in infancy. The infant depends on the Other, such as caregivers, to meet their needs, and the expression of need becomes demand. Moreover, demand in its nature cannot be fulfilled which presents a lack, and it gives rise to desire, something that can never be fully met (Evans, 2006). The disruption in symbolic castration, where desire is supposed to emerge from lack, may lead the subject to be stuck in a repetitive cycle of trying to meet needs or demands. Deniz considered how their parents' relationship might not have survived if their mother had gotten pregnant later. They felt their own birth came at the wrong time, and it would have been better for their parents if Deniz had not been born. It might reflect their identification with what they perceive as the Other's desire, which is their non-existence or even death. When the Other is perceived as unresponsive, the individual may act out in an attempt to communicate their distress. Furthermore, self-harm includes a demand for attention and recognition from the Other when words fail. In other words, these behaviors can be interpreted as an attempt to validate and reaffirm their connection to the Other despite its painful nature.

According to the literature, the relationship between parents and their children is heavily influenced by their perceptions and experiences surrounding the child's birth. Complication during birth was also salient in participants' narratives. For instance, Bahar shared that her mother experienced facial paralysis during childbirth, which took a long time to recover from. Maternal PTSD is frequently the result of a traumatic birth, which can impair the mother's ability to form a secure attachment with her child. A traumatic childbirth experience has been identified as a significant risk factor for the formation of a warm and close attachment bond between a mother and her newborn (Thiel et al., 2019; Church & Scanlan, 2002). The attachment style with the parents is a significant risk factor for self-harm behavior, despite the fact that there are not many studies linking the childbirth experience to self-harm behavior (Gratz, 2003; Wagner et al., 2003).

From a more psychoanalytic approach, participants' narration carried self-induced guilt along with implicit aggression toward the mother. One of the participants, Lale, stated, “Great, the pregnancy process was also very smooth. “I didn't vomit even once,” she tells me. I'm very happy for her. (*Güzel yani hamilelik süreci de çok sancısız geçmiş. “Bir kez bile kusmadım” diyor bana ne güzel onun adına çok sevindim.*)”. This statement has two meanings. The first one is that there are no negative sides to her mother giving birth to Lale. Nevertheless, another meaning in Lale's statement is that “She says “I didn't vomit even once” what do I care? (*“Bir kez bile kusmadım” diyor bana ne.*)”. This signals an implicit aggression towards her mother. Similarly, Yonca stated “During birth, I tore my mom all over, and she lost a lot of blood. (*Doğum sırasında ben annemin her yerini yırtmışım, çok fazla da kan kaybetmiş.*)”. This statement carries meaning as if she literally tore her mother “all over,” not as a part of the birth process. Due to this implicit aggression, she later might state, “I was born with great difficulty, a painful one, but actually it's not my fault. (*Baya zor doğmuşum sancılı doğmuşum, ya aslında hani benim suçum da değil.*)” with an attempt to distance herself from this aggression towards her mother by implying she is not guilty. As is also stated in the family dynamics discussion, in a melancholic state, the hated object becomes part of the self (Freud, 1914). Individuals engaging in self-harm may target the lost or hated object inside of them. They are deliberately attacking themselves because this object is an integral part of themselves. Attacking oneself is a more convenient expression rather than focusing this aggression on someone else.

The narratives of the participants in the study on self-harm reflect striking similarities to birth experiences. Freud's concepts of the life instinct and death instinct serve as a foundation for understanding this duality. These instincts imply that individuals are drawn to both creative and destructive forces (Freud, 1920). Self-harm embodies this dichotomy, expressing both a drive to destruct and a drive for rebirth and renewal. It is salient in Bahar's statement “Like suffering needs to come out in physically. Feelings inside that I can't make sense of, that I'm very stressed, that I'm nervous about. (*Fizikselde acı çekmemin dışarı çıkması gerekiyormuş gibi. İçimdeki çok anlamlandıramadığım hislerin, çok stresli olmamın.*)”. These acts can

be viewed as a way to relieve internal pain and regain control over one's body and emotions. Furthermore, this duality can be viewed through Lacanian concept of separation from the (m)Other. In the complementary interview, Bahar stated, “I would say it made living a little bit meaningful. Feeling things and one of them being pain, is something that makes you feel alive. (*Biraz yaşamayı anlamlı kılıyordu diyebilirim. Bir şeyler hissetmek ve bunlardan birinin acı olması biraz hayatta hissettiren bir şey.*)”. Bahar's description of self-harm as a “need to come out physically” resembles a metaphoric narration of a birth such as being inside of the womb and coming out of the mother. After this statement is asked she expressed that this physical act made life feel more meaningful. The (m)Other represents the primary caregiver and their close, often symbiotic relationship with the infant. Self-harm may represent a struggle for separation, similar to how the child physically separates from their mother during birth. The desire for separation reflects an attempt to establish a distinct subjectivity and assert boundaries, which may be undermined by the overwhelming presence of the (m)Other.

Yonca's account reinforces this analogy where she said “You feel the need to empty out somehow. (*Böyle bir yerden boşaltma ihtiyacı hissedersin.*)” and “You're emptying your body. (*Vücudunu boşaltıyorsun.*)”. Her statements about self-harm draw similarities to the process of giving birth. Moreover, she shared that she had to face her friend's, uncle's, and professor's death. During this time, she described that she harmed herself by eating a lot until having abdominal pain, simulating pregnancy. This cyclical experience underscores the life and death dynamics involved in self-harm. Similarly, Kuzey mentioned “As I said, it felt like there is something accumulating inside me, I was releasing it. (*Yani dediğim gibi şey hissettiriyordu. İçimde biriken bir şey var, onu dışarı atabiliyorum.*)”. This pressure increases gradually, much like the growth of an infant inside the womb. It escalates into an intolerable state that must be released. In this situation, self-harm functions as a release mechanism for this internal pressure, offering a short period of relief. Through this perspective, one way to interpret self-harm can be as an act of giving birth to one's suffering and pain. His comment on blood further supports this: “It felt like I needed to get something out of my body. When it was blood, at least it calmed me down, something like that. (*Nasıl diyim vücudumdan bir şey çıkarmam gerekiyor.*)”

*Bu kan olduđu zaman en azından sankinleşebiliyorum, tarzında bir şey.)”*. Releasing the life source illustrates the life and death cycle involved in self-harm.

### **4.3. Final Remarks on the Findings**

The core findings of this study asserted the link between self-harm behaviors and chaotic family dynamics, disrupted symbolic function, and birth narratives. This study has displayed how instability in the family environment, such as domestic violence, problems in parental relations, and lack of parental presence, can have an impact on emotional regulation, thus leading to maladaptive coping skills in the form of self-harm behavior. It is also important to note that the conceptualization of self differs across cultures, specifically through the dimension of independence and interdependence. In cultures that emphasize independence, the self has clear boundaries separating the individual from others. On the other hand, in interdependent cultures, the self is more relational and influenced by significant others (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2017). Hence, the self that is subjected to harm may be closely related to the independence and interdependence aspect of the self. This study was conducted in Türkiye, where the interdependent conceptualization of self is common. Due to the interdependent understanding of self, this study may identify many themes related to the Other such as chaotic family dynamics or inter-subjective dynamics of self-harm.

Self-harm is understood in a Lacanian perspective as a failure of language and disruption in symbolic castration, in which paternal intervention is not adequately represented, and the subject experiences a gap in the symbolic order. Hence, anger, guilt, shame, and dissociation are unmediated through symbolic function, eventually finding a means to be communicated not through words but through the body. Participants' birth stories, specifically those described as being unwanted, illustrate feelings of rejection and inner conflict that might contribute to the practice of self-harm. The current study demonstrates how self-harm acts as a physical expression of unresolved psychic tensions that work within the dynamics of jouissance and the death drive. Gathering these aspects together, self-harm reflects a struggle for subjectivity, separation, and a means to communicate what cannot be symbolized.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The current study aims to contribute to the field of psychoanalysis by providing theoretical and practical implications for understanding self-harm behavior. With this purpose, six participants were interviewed in semi-structured interviews. This study used a reflexive inductive thematic analysis approach to preserve the complexity inherent in social reality. Through this analysis, two research questions are examined: “What are the experiences of individuals engaging in self-harm?” and “How do individuals engaging in self-harm evaluate their family dynamics and the narratives surrounding their conception and birth?”. The first two themes focused on the experiences of self-harm and identified themes described as the unspoken experience behind self-harm and inter-subjective dynamics of self-harm. The first theme delves into an interruption in the symbolic function, causing a void that prevents people from expressing their emotions and experiences through words or symbols. Self-harm appears through this gap as an attempt to externalize negative internal experiences and feelings. The second theme explores the communicative function of self-harm in relation to *jouissance*. The third and fourth themes provide additional insight into the relationship between the self-harming subjects and the Other. The results from this study indicated the third and fourth themes as chaotic family dynamics and their impact on self-harm and birth narratives and their impact on self-harm. These themes draw attention to the break in symbolic order noted in the first theme and expose the disruption of the paternal function supposed to restrict *jouissance*. It also demonstrated the cyclical nature of creation and destruction and how self-harm can result from messages received from the (m)Other about their existence.

For clinical practice, through the findings of this study, it is suggested to delve into the interpersonal dynamics that motivate people to express themselves through

self-harm. The reason these individuals choose to communicate through scars and marks rather than words and symbols can be understood by inter-subjectivity. Understanding these dynamics can provide critical insights into the psychological and emotional reasons behind such behaviors. A noteworthy limitation of this study is the absence of homogeneity in the participant age group. Narrowly defined age ranges can provide more consistent and comparable data since relations of the individuals vary across different age cohorts. The suggested age group is adolescents due to self-harm's prevalence in this age range. Including adolescent and family interviews to gain insights specific to this developmental stage would be beneficial. Research on self-harm is recommended to either focus solely on one gender or involve an equal number of participants from each gender to enable a nuanced examination of both similarities and differences. In a latter example, it is essential to highlight explicitly that results might only apply to the gender under investigation and might not generalize to other genders (Miller & Johnson, 2021). Only one cisgender man was included in this study, which is consistent with the findings of a meta-analysis that women and LGBTQ+ people are more prone to experiencing suicidality and self-harm (Richardson et al., 2023). It is crucial to emphasize that this study did not particularly look into gender differences. Hence, a noteworthy limitation is that the results might not be applicable to other genders and sexual orientations. Another suggestion for future research can be to look into gender-specific aspects of self-harm.

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## APPENDICES

### A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
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06 MAYIS 2024

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Prof. Dr. Tülin GENÇÖZ

Danışmanlığımı yürüttüğünüz Başak GÜNDOĞAN'ın "*From birth to death: Self-harming individuals' evaluation of their own birth narratives*" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek 0220-ODTÜİAEK-2024 protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır

Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.

Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN  
Başkan

Prof. Dr. İ. Semih AKÇOMAK  
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Doç. Dr. Ali Emre Turgut  
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Doç. Dr. Şerife SEVİNÇ  
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Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Müge GÜNDÜZ  
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## **B. ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE STUDY**

Ben ODTÜ Klinik Psikoloji programı yüksek lisans öğrencisi ve araştırma görevlisi Başak Gündoğan. Bu çalışmayı tez kapsamında, Prof. Dr. Tülin Gençöz danışmanlığında yürütmekteyim. Bu çalışmada “kendine zarar verme eğiliminde olan kişilerin kendi doğum hikayelerini nasıl değerlendirdiklerinin” incelenmesi hedeflenmektedir. Çalışmaya katılım kriterlerini karşılayan kişilerle yaklaşık bir saat süren bir veya iki görüşme yapılması planlanmaktadır.

Görüşmeler veri analizi için ses kayıt cihazıyla kaydedilecektir. Katılımcıların kimlikleri tümüyle gizli tutulacak ve elde edilen veriler yalnızca araştırma kapsamında kullanılacaktır. Araştırmaya katılım gönüllülük esasına dayanmaktadır.

Eğer kendinize zarar verdiyseniz ya da veriyorsanız ve bu çalışmaya katılma konusunda gönüllüyseniz sizden öncelikle aşağıdaki linkteki kısa anketi doldurmanız istenmektedir. Verdiğiniz bilgiler doğrultusunda, çalışmaya katılım kriterlerini karşılamanız durumunda sizinle yapılacak görüşmeyi gerçekleştirmek amacıyla uygun bir zaman belirlemek üzere size mail ya da telefonla ulaşılabilecektir. Çalışmaya sunduğunuz katkılar için şimdiden teşekkürler.

<https://forms.gle/9y8fQ63gcATYFvg38>

### C. PRE-INTERVIEW FORM

1-Yaşınız: (Kısa yanıt metni)

2-Cinsiyetiniz: (Kısa yanıt metni)

3-Eğitim durumunuz (aktif olarak devam eden):

a- Lise

b- Üniversite (Lisans)

c- Yüksek lisans/Doktora

d-Diğer (Kısa yanıt metni)

4-Üniversite (Lisans/Yüksek Lisans/Doktora) öğrencisiyseniz bölümünüzü belirtiniz.  
(Kısa yanıt metni)

5-Size uygun olan seçeneği işaretleyiniz:

a-Bir kez kendime zarar verdim.

b-Birden fazla kez kendime zarar verdim.

6-Size uygun olan seçeneği işaretleyiniz:

a-Hiç intihar girişiminde bulunmadım.

b-Bir kez intihar girişiminde bulundum.

c-Birden fazla kez intihar girişiminde bulundum.

7-Kendinize zarar verme şekillerinizi düşündüğünüzde, en ciddi olanını kısaca açıklayınız. (Kısa yanıt metni)

8-(Yukarıdaki cevabınızdan farklıysa) Kendinize zarar verme şekillerinizi düşündüğünüzde, en sık olanını kısaca açıklayınız. (Kısa yanıt metni)

9-Kaç yaşında ilk kez kendinize zarar verdiniz? (Kısa yanıt metni)

10-En son ne zaman kendinize zarar verdiniz? (Kısa yanıt metni)

11-Lütfen e-mail adresinizi ve/veya telefon numaranızı belirtiniz: (Kısa yanıt metni)

#### D. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Bu çalışma ODTÜ Klinik Psikoloji Bölümü yüksek lisans öğrencisi ve araştırma görevlisi Başak Gündoğan tarafından Prof. Dr. Tülin Gençöz danışmanlığında yürütülmektedir. Bu form sizi araştırma koşulları hakkında bilgilendirmek için hazırlanmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı kendine zarar verme eğiliminde olan kişilerin kendi doğum hikayelerini nasıl değerlendirdiklerinin araştırmaktır. Araştırma katılımcıların kendilerini rahat hissedebileceği online ya da yüz yüze bir ortamda yapılacaktır. Çalışma kapsamında katılımcılar ile yaklaşık 1 saat sürecek bir ya da iki görüşme yapılacaktır ve bu görüşmeler ses kayıt cihazı ile kayıt altına alınacaktır. Bu çalışmaya katılmak tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayalıdır. Görüşme esnasında sorulardan ya da herhangi başka bir nedenden ötürü kendinizi rahatsız hissederseniz görüşmeyi yarıda bırakmakta serbestsiniz. Böyle bir durumda araştırmacıya görüşmeyi bitirmek istediğinizi söylemeniz yeterli olacaktır. Görüşme sonunda bu çalışmayla ilgili sorularınız cevaplanacaktır.

Araştırmaya katılanların kimlik bilgileri tamamen gizli tutulacak, veriler ve kimlik bilgileri herhangi bir şekilde eşleştirilmeyecektir. Ayrıca toplanan verilere sadece araştırmacılar ulaşabilecektir. Bu araştırmanın sonuçları bilimsel ve profesyonel yayınlarda veya eğitim amaçlı kullanılabilir. Çalışmayla ilgili soru ve yorumlarınızı araştırmacıya \_\_\_\_\_ adreslerinden iletebilirsiniz.

Yukarıdaki bilgileri okudum ve bu çalışmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum.

Ad Soyad

Tarih

İmza

## E. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Yarı Yapılandırılmış Görüşme Soruları (Turkish Version)

#### A) Demografik bilgiler

-Katılımcının: Yaş, Cinsiyet, Eğitim Durumu, Meslek, İlişki Durumu

-Anne ve baba: Yaş, Cinsiyet, Eğitim Durumu, Meslek

-Anne ve babanın: Daha önce/sonra evlilikleri veya çocukları var mı?

-Kardeş/ler (varsa): Yaş, Cinsiyet, Eğitim Durumu, Meslek

#### B) Aileyle ilişkili sorular

1- Hayatınız boyunca kimle/kimlerle yaşadınız? Sizinle aynı evde yaşayan kişiler arasındaki ilişkiyi nasıl anlatırsınız?

- Peki, anne ve babanız arasındaki ilişkiyi nasıl anlatırsınız? (Anne babanız nasıl tanışmış? Evlenmeye nasıl karar vermişler?)

2- Ailenizdeki bireylerin size karşı tutumunu değerlendirdiğinizde ailedeki yeriniz hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?

- (*Kardeş/ler varsa*) Kardeş(ler)inizin ailedeki yer(ler)i hakkında neler düşünüyorsunuz?

4- Ailenizin size yönelik bir beklentisi/isteği/ideali var mıdır? Varsa nedir?

- (*Kardeş/ler varsa*) Kardeş(leri)nize yönelik bir beklentisi/isteği/ideali var mıdır? Varsa nedir?

5- Peki, sizin kendinizden beklentileriniz neler?

### **C) Doğum hikayesiyle ilişkili sorular**

7- Sizin doğum süreciniz hakkında (hamilelik öncesi, hamilelik, doğum) neler biliyorsunuz?

- Annenizin hamileliği ailede nasıl karşılanmış?
- Siz doğmadan önce sizin için hazırlık yapmışlar mı? *Yaptılarsa* ne gibi hazırlıklar yapılmış?
- Doğduğunuz günle ilgili size neler anlatıldı?
- Doğum hikayenizi nasıl öğrendiniz?
- Siz doğumunuzla ilgili anlatılanları nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?
- (Kardeş/ler varsa) Sizin doğumunuzla ilgili anlatılanların kardeş(ler)inizin doğumuyla ilgili anlatılanlardan farklılaştığını düşünüyor musunuz?  
*Farklılaşıyorsa* nasıl?

### **D) Kendine zarar vermeyele ilgili sorular**

8- Kendinize zarar verdiğiniz ilk zamanla ilgili neler anlatırsınız?

- Sizce neden ve nasıl başladı?
- Sonrasında neler hissettiniz ve düşündünüz?

9- Kendinize zarar verdiğiniz diğer zamanlar hakkında neler anlatırsınız?

- Hangi zamanlarda kendinize zarar veriyorsunuz?
- Farklı şekillerde zarar veriyor musunuz? *Farklı şekillerde zarar veriyorsanız* bu değişiklikleri nasıl yorumlarsınız?
- Yanınızda birileri varken kendinize zarar verdiğiniz oldu mu? *Olduysa* neler anlatırsınız?

- Çevrenizdekiler (aile/arkadaş/partner vs.) bu davranışlarınızla ilgili neler düşünüyor?
- Bu davranışların devam edeceğini düşünüyor musunuz? *Düşünüyorsanız* neden ve nasıl devam edeceğini düşünüyorsunuz?
- Profesyonel bir yardım aldınız mı veya alıyor musunuz? (*Alıyorsa*) Başlamaya nasıl karar verdiniz? *Önceden aldıysanız* sonlandırmaya nasıl karar verdiniz?
- (*Almıyorsa*) Almayı düşünüyor musunuz? Çevrenizde öneren birileri oldu mu? *Olduysa* kim/ler?

10-Hiç kendinizi durdurmaya çalıştığınız oldu mu?

- *Olduysa* ne düşünerek durdurmaya çalıştınız?
- Kendinizi durdurmayı başardıysanız/başaramadıysanız bu süreci nasıl yorumlarsınız?

## F. TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET

### 1. GİRİŞ

#### 1.1. Kavramsallaştırma ve Arka Plan

Kendine zarar verme, kişinin kendine kasıtlı olarak ölümcül olmayan acı ya da yaralama davranışlarında bulunması olarak tanımlanır ve genellikle duygularla başa çıkma biçimi olarak ortaya çıkar. Bu davranış, intihar girişimini de içerebilir (Sahlin, 2018). DSM-5, kendine zarar vermeyi “intihara niyetsiz kendine zarar verme” olarak sınıflandırır. Bu terim intihar niyeti olmaksızın gerçekleştirilen ve genellikle vücudun doğrudan zarar görmesiyle sonuçlanan davranışları ele alır (APA, 2022).

Araştırmacılar, kendine zarar verme davranışını intihar motivasyonları ile bir arada ele almayı önermektedir. Bu, kendine zarar veren bireylerin motivasyonları arasındaki sınırların net bir şekilde tanımlanmasının zor olmasından kaynaklanmaktadır (Kapur ve ark., 2013). Bu nedenle, bu çalışma intihar niyeti olup olmamasının ayırımına bakmamıştır.

#### 1.2. Kendine Zarar Verme Davranışına Genel Bakış

Kendine zarar verme davranışı, ergenler ve genç yetişkinler arasında daha yaygındır. Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Kanada’da yapılan çalışmalar, ergenlerin yaklaşık %14-15’inin en az bir kez kendine zarar verme davranışı gösterdiğini ortaya koymuştur (Laye-Gindhu & Schonert-Reichl, 2005). Üniversite öğrencileri arasında da yaygın olarak gözlemlenen bu davranışın en yaygın biçimi kesme, ardından yakma ve cildi ciddi şekilde çizme şeklindedir (Klonsky & Muehlenkamp, 2007).

Cinsiyet farkı konusunda bazı çalışmalar kadınların erkeklere kıyasla daha fazla kendine zarar verme eğiliminde olduğunu öne sürerken, bazı çalışmalar cinsiyetler arasında önemli bir fark olmadığını savunmaktadır (Morgan ve ark., 2017). LGBTQ+



gençler arasında ise kendine zarar verme ve intihar girişimi riski daha yüksektir (Jadva, 2023).

### **1.3. Kendine Zarar Vermeyle Üzerine Güncel Nitel Araştırmalar**

Davies'in (2020) yaptığı bir çalışmada, katılımcıların duygusal sıkıntılarla başa çıkmak için kendine zarar verdikleri ortaya konulmuştur. Ayrıca, Edmonson ve arkadaşlarının (2016) yaptığı sistematik bir incelemede, kendine zarar vermenin nedenleri arasında “sıkıntıyı yönetme, cezalandırma ve ayrışmayı yönetme” gibi temalar öne çıkmıştır. Bu nitel araştırmalar, ilişkilerin ve kültürel bağlamların kendine zarar vermede kritik bir rol oynadığını vurgulamaktadır. Türkiye’de bu konuda yapılmış nitel bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır.

### **1.4. Kendine Zarar Veren Kişilerin Aile Dinamikleri**

Çok sayıda çalışma, aile içi tartışmaların sıklığı, duygusal destek eksikliği, işlevsiz iletişim kalıpları ve güvensiz bağlanma ile kendine zarar verme riski arasında güçlü bir ilişki olduğunu göstermektedir (Gratz, 2003; Wagner, 1997). Aile içi etkileşimler, kendine zarar verme davranışında faktör olmaktadır (Karamat Ali, 2020). Freud (1917) Yas ve Melankoli’de, kaybedilen nesneye yönelik duygulara ambivalans ve düşmanlık hakim olduğunda yasin nasıl engellendiğinden ve bunun melankoli durumuyla sonuçlandığından bahseder. Nefret edilen nesne benliğin bir parçası haline gelir ve sanki nesne benliğin içindeymiş gibi saldırıya uğrar. Başka bir deyişle, kendine zarar verme eylemlerinde benlik hedef alınırken, bilinçsizce bu saldırılar kişinin nefret ettiği ve kaybettiği biri veya bir şeyle ilişkilendirilebilir. Dolayısıyla, kendine zarar veren bireylerin iyi ve kötü, ben ve öteki, iç ve dış arasındaki ayrımları karıştırır. Dış nesne ile özdeşleşme, nesnenin benliğin bir parçası olarak algılanmasına neden olur. Başka bir deyişle, nesneyle özdeşleşme, nesnenin benliğe introjekte edilmesiyle sonuçlanır (Menninger, 1938, aktaran Canbolat, 2018). Dolayısıyla, kendine zarar verme, mağdurun benliğinin yanı sıra içselleştirilmiş veya içe yansıtılmış nesneye yönelik bilinçsiz bir saldırı içerebilir. Bu nesneyle ilişkili bilgiler aile dinamikleri ve erken dönem çocukluk deneyimleri üzerinden anlamlandırılabilir.

### **1.5. Kendine Zarar Veren Kişilerin Doğum Hikayeleri**

Doğum hikayeleri, bireyin kimliği ve bakış açısına dair değerli bilgiler sağlayarak kişinin yaşam anlatısını şekillendirmede çok önemlidir (McAdams, 2001). Bireylerin doğum hikayelerini dile getirmeleri, kendilerine nasıl anlatıldığından ve bu anlatıları nasıl içselleştirdiklerinden kaynaklanır. Bu nedenle doğum hikayeleri, aile tarihi ile kişisel hikayeler arasında bir köprü görevi görür ve büyük bir teorik ilgi uyandırır (Andrews ve ark., 2015). Doğum hikâyeleri sıklıkla ebeveynlerin bakış açısından incelenirken (Antoniak ve ark., 2019; Corner ve ark., 2023; Downe ve ark., 2018), çocuğun bakış açısı genellikle göz ardı edilmektedir. Kişinin doğum anlatıları etrafında şekillenen fanteziler, aile içindeki yerine ya da yerinin olmadığına ışık tutmaktadır. Dahası, doğumla ilgili fanteziler, bireyin doğumunun içine geldiği aile sistemini nasıl etkilediğine dair fikirlerini yansıtır. Bu fanteziler ebeveynlerin çocukları hakkındaki arzu ve inançlarıyla yakından bağlantılıdır. Örneğin, çocuğun istenen ya da istenmeyen olarak algılanmasını belirleyebilir (Aron, 2014).

Literatürde, bireylerin doğum hikayelerini anlatarak kendilerine nasıl zarar verdiklerine ilişkin doğrudan bir araştırma bulunmamaktadır. Ancak, Raes (2001) klinik deneyimlerine dayanarak Lacan'ın istenmeyen çocukların intihara daha yatkın olduğu hipotezini incelemiştir. Makale, ölüm dürtüsünden bahsederken öznenin sevgi talebinin tekrar tekrar olumsuz yanıtlanmasının bir sonucu olduğunu savunmuştur.

### **1.6. Psikanalitik Yaklaşımda Kendine Zarar Verme**

Bick (1968), iç ve dış deneyimler arasında bir sınır olarak derinin “tutma işlevini” vurgular. Bireyler kendilerine zarar verdiklerinde, içsel acıyı dışsal olarak ifade etme girişimini simgeleyen bu sınırı kırarlar. Yakeley & Burbridge-James (2018) kendine zarar vermenin, tıpkı dili olmayan bebeklerin sıkıntıyı fiziksel olarak ifade etmesine benzer şekilde, ilkel bir iletişim biçimi olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Freud'un (1914) “dışa vurma” kavramı, işlenmemiş duyguların sembolize edilemediğinde veya söze dökülemediğinde nasıl davranış olarak ortaya çıktığını

açıklar. Bu durum, bireyler çözülmemiş travmalar üzerinde kontrol sağlamaya çalışırken geçmiş acı verici deneyimlerin kompulsif bir şekilde tekrarlanmasına yol açabilir (Freud, 1920). Klein'in (1935) teorisi, kendine zarar vermenin yaşam ve ölüm içgüdüleri arasındaki mücadeleyi içerdiğini ve bireylerin fiziksel zarar yoluyla “kötü” duyguları ortadan kaldırmaya çalıştığını öne sürerek bunu genişletmektedir. Nathan (2004) kendine zarar vermenin içselleştirilmiş olumsuz nesnelere saldırmanın bir yolu olduğunu ve geçici bir rahatlama sağladığını ekler.

Literatürde ayrıca, kendine zarar veren bireylerin kendilerini eylemlerinden kopuk hissedebilecekleri ve içlerindeki bir “avcının” onları kendine zarar vermeye itebileceği dissosiyasyona da değinilmektedir (Yakeley & Burbridge-James, 2018). Bromberg (1998), bu avcının bireyi kendine zarar vermeye zorlayan bir dış ses gibi hissettirdiğini öne sürmektedir. Eylemden sonra, yaralarla ilgilenme süreci, kendine zarar vermede ilişkisel dinamiklerin önemini vurgulayarak, erken dönem bakılma deneyimlerini taklit eder (Motz, 2010).

### **1.7. Lacanyen Yaklaşımda Kendine Zarar Verme**

Kendine zarar vermeyi Lacanyen bir perspektiften incelemek için, Lacan'ın psikanalize kazandırdığı bazı temel kavramlara değinmek gerekir. Bunlar imgesel, simgesel ve gerçektir. Lacan, öznenin kendi imgesiyle özdeşleştiği ayna evresinde “ben”in oluşumunu anlatır (Homer, 2005). Bu kavram kendine zarar verme davranışındaki “kendi” kısmına bakmamıza olanak sağlar. Kendine zarar vermenin iletişimsel yönünü anlamak için sembolik düzene bakmak gerekir. Sembolik düzen dil, yasa ve arzuyu düzenleyen yapıları kapsar (Evans, 2006). Sembolik olanla ilişkiyi keşfetmek, kendine zarar verenlerin ne mesaj ilettiklerini ve neyin söylenmeden kaldığını yorumlamayı sağlar. Kendine zarar verme, kişinin gerçek düzen üzerinden tartışılabilir bedenini hedefler. Gerçek, dilin dışındadır ve beden ham, dolaylımsız deneyimini temsil ederek sembolleştirmeye direnir (McLaughlin & Daffron, 2021).

Lacan'ın teorisinde kendine zarar verme olgusundan geniş kapsamlı bir şekilde bahsedilmemesine rağmen, intihar olgusuna ilişkin kendine zarar verme anlayışına

uygulanabilecek bilgiler sunmaktadır. Lacan zaman zaman intiharı ele alır ve fikirlerini ölüm dürtüsü gibi daha geniş kavramların içine yerleştirir (Canbolat, 2018). Lacan, diğer psikanalistlerden farklı olarak ölüm dürtüsünün psikanalitik kuramdaki önemini vurgular. Freud'un ölüm dürtüsü kuramlaştırmasına ek olarak, kendine zarar verme deneyimine uygulanabilecek bir acı verici haz modu olarak jouissance kavramını ortaya atmıştır (Lacan, 2006b). Son olarak, Lacan'ın Freud'dan türettiği “dışa vurma” kavramı kendine zarar vermeyi anlamada önemlidir. Dışa vurma, bilinçdışı düşünce ve duyguların sözlerden ziyade eylemler yoluyla ifade edilmesini içerir (Evans, 2006). Bu Lacanyen kavramların bütünleştirilmesi, kendine zarar verme olgusuna dair daha derin bir iç görü kazanılmasına yardımcı olabilir.

### **1.8. Çalışmanın Amacı ve Kapsamı**

Son yıllarda kendine zarar verme davranışı önemli bir gündem haline gelmektedir. Yakın tarihli bir makalede, son yılların salgını olarak tanımlanmıştır (Papadima, 2019). Kendine zarar verme olgusu kapsamlı nitel araştırmalarla incelenmiş olsa da, motivasyonlar ve deneyimler, özellikle de bilinçdışında kök salmış olanlar keşfedilmeyi beklemektedir. Bu çalışma, kendine zarar vermeyi psikanalitik bir mercekten inceleyerek bu boşluğa ışık tutmayı amaçlamıştır. Dolayısıyla, ilk araştırma sorusu (1) Kendine zarar veren kişilerin deneyimleri nelerdir? olarak belirlenmiştir.

İncelenen literatür, erken dönem ilişkisel deneyimlerin ve aile dinamiklerinin kendine zarar verme davranışlarının geliştirilmesi ve sürdürülmesi üzerindeki etkisini göstermektedir (Wagner, 1997; Yakeley & Burbridge-James, 2018). Bu nedenle, ikinci bir araştırma sorusu (2) Kendine zarar veren bireyler aile dinamiklerini ve kendi doğumlarını çevreleyen anlatıları nasıl değerlendirmektedir?

## **2. YÖNTEM**

### **2.1. Nitel Araştırma**

Nitel araştırma, bireylerin deneyimlerini ve bu deneyimlere yükledikleri anlamları öznellik perspektifinden derinlemesine ele alır. Nitel araştırmanın amacı, olgular için

zengin açıklamalar sağlamaktır; tahmine dayalı sonuçlar elde etmek değildir. Bu nedenle, nitel arařtırmacılar, insanların deneyimlerine atfettikleri anlamları ve çeřitli durumlarla nasıl başa çıktıklarını anlamaya odaklanır (Willig, 2013). Sayısal ölçüm yerine, dil üzerine yoğunlaşır; bu nedenle nitel veri, insan deneyimlerinin öznel doğasını vurgulamak için kullanılan birincil araçtır. Başka bir deyişle, nitel arařtırmacılar, bireylerden gelen yansıtıcı anlatıları inceleyerek daha geniş kalıpları ve temaları ortaya çıkarır (Biggerstaff, 2012; Willig, 2013).

## **2.2. Tematik Analiz**

Tematik analiz, teorik özgürlüğü ve esnekliğı ile detaylı ve karmaşık bir veri sunan güçlü bir araştırma aracıdır. Bu yaklaşım, önceden var olan teorik çerçevelerle kısıtlanmadan ortaya çıkan temaların keşfedilmesine olanak tanır (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ve kendine zarar verme eylemlerini çevreleyen anlatıların öngörülemeyen ve değışken doğasıyla uyumludur. Bu çalışma, arařtırmacının verilerle yorumlayıcı etkileşimini vurgulayan refleksif tematik analiz yaklaşımıyla uyumludur ve yorumlayıcı etkileşim psikanalitik bir bakış açısıyla renklendirilmiştir. Bu çalışmada, önceden tanımlanmış kategorileri dayatmak yerine temaların verilerden organik olarak ortaya çıkmasını sağlamak için tümevarımsal kodlama kullanılmış ve araştırma sorusunun kodlama süreci boyunca gelişmesine izin verilmiştir. Bu çalışmada hem anlamsal hem de örtük düzey analizler kullanılmıştır çünkü örtük analiz bilinçdışı unsurları yakalarken anlamsal analiz açık ve net bir anlayış sağlamaktadır.

## **2.3. Örneklem Yöntemi ve Katılımcılar**

Amaçlı örnekleme nitel arařtırmalarda sıklıkla kullanılır. Bu yöntem, özellikle küçük ve spesifik popülasyonlarda istatistiksel genellemeler yapmak yerine tercih edilir. Amaçlı örneklemin etkinliğini sağlamak için, katılımcıların seçiminde net kriterler oluşturmak önemlidir (Obilor, 2023). Bu nedenle, iki dahil etme kriteri belirlenmiştir: 1) birden fazla kendine zarar verme öyküsü, 2) son kendine zarar verme olayının bir yıl veya daha kısa bir süre içinde gerçekleşmiş olması. Birden fazla kasıtlı kendine zarar verme öyküsü gerekliliğı, daha devam eden bir davranış

örüntüsüne sahip katılımcıları yakalamayı amaçlarken, bir yıl içinde kendine zarar verme kriteri en güncel örüntüleri keşfetmeyi sağlar. Kendine zarar vermenin tüm türleri, daha geniş bir deneyim yelpazesini kapsamak amacıyla bu çalışmaya dahil edilmiştir.

#### **2.4. Prosedür**

Bu araştırma için Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi (ODTÜ) İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu'ndan etik onay alınmıştır. Katılımcılardan, çalışmaya dahil edilme kriterlerine uyup uymadıklarını teyit etmek ve bir görüşme tarihi belirlemek için kısa bir anket doldurmaları istenmiştir. Dahil edilme kriterlerini karşılayan altı kişiyle, verdikleri iletişim bilgilerine göre e-posta veya telefon yoluyla iletişime geçilmiştir. Görüşme öncesinde katılımcılara, görüşme formatına (çevrimiçi ya da yüz yüze) bağlı olarak elektronik ortamda ya da kalemle imzaladıkları bir bilgilendirilmiş onam formu verilmiştir. Yaklaşık bir saat süren yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmelerin ardından tüm katılımcılara ODTÜ AYNA Dinleme Noktası hakkında bilgi verilmiştir. Görüşmelerin kodlama sürecinden sonra eş danışmanımla yaptığımız toplantıda katılımcılardan üçü (Bahar, Yonca ve Kuzey) ile on beş ila otuz dakika arasında süren ek bir görüşme yapmaya karar verdik.

#### **2.5. Veri Analizi**

Bu çalışmanın veri analizi süreci, Braun ve Clarke (2006) tarafından önerilen altı adımlı çerçeve tarafından yönlendirilmiş olup, bu adımlar doğrusal ve aşamalı olarak takip edilmemiştir. Aksine tekrarlı olduğu ve gerektiğinde ileri geri aşamalara geçerek veri analizi tamamlanmıştır. Veri analizi aşamasının sonunda nihai hale getirilen üst temalar listesinde (1) Kendine zarar vermenin ardındaki dile getirilmeyen deneyim, (2) Kendine zarar vermenin öznel arası dinamikleri, (3) Kaotik aile dinamikleri ve bunların kendine zarar verme üzerindeki etkisi, (4) Doğum anlatıları ve bunların kendine zarar verme üzerindeki etkisi yer almıştır.

#### **2.6. Çalışmanın Güvenilirliği**

Nitel araştırma yöntemi, güvenilirlik ve geçerlilik sağlarken nicelden farklılık gösterir. Nicel araştırma bu kavramlara ölçülebilir bir perspektiften yaklaşırken, nitel

arařtırma bařka teknikler sunar. Nicel arařtırmada beklendiđi gibi, arařtırmacının znelliđini sınırlama ve kontrol etme abası vardır. Ancak yorumlayıcı ve eleřtirel kuramcılar, arařtırmacıların znelliđi kucaklamasını ve veri olarak kullanmasını nermektedir (Morrow, 2005, aktaran Demir, 2023).

Bu tezi okurken, iletiřimdeki aksaklıkların nasıl davranıř olarak ortaya ıkabildiđine ve dile getirilmeyen mcadelelerin, arzuların, kaygıların, mutlulukların, fkelerin vb. kendine zarar veren bireyler tarafından sembolik dzende nasıl ifade edilemediđine sık sık rastlayacaksınız. Benim iin bir arařtırma konusuna karar verme yolculuđu da bu deneyime benziyordu. Hayatım boyunca duygularımı, dřncelerimi ve arzularımı dile getirmekte zorlandım ve bu durum ođu zaman srekli fke duymama neden oldu. Ancak psikanalizdeki bu kiřisel ve profesyonel yolculuk, kendim hakkında daha derin dřnmemi ve daha aık konuřmamı sađladı.

### **3. BULGULAR**

Bu blmde, tematik analiz yoluyla ortaya ıkan temalar gsterilmiřtir. Analizin sonunda drt st tema belirlenmiřtir. Ortaya ıkan temalar arasında (1) Kendine zarar vermenin ardındaki dile getirilmeyen deneyim, (2) Kendine zarar vermenin zneler arası dinamikleri, (3) Kaotik aile dinamikleri ve bunların kendine zarar verme zerindeki etkisi ve (4) Dođum anlatıları ve bunların kendine zarar verme zerindeki etkisi yer almaktadır.

#### **3.1. Kendine zarar vermenin ardındaki dile getirilmeyen deneyim**

Bu st tema sembolik iřlevdeki bozulmayla ilgilidir. Sembolik iřlev, kiřinin duygularını ve deneyimlerini kelimeler veya diđer sembolik aralarla ifade edebilmesini sađlar. Bu bozulma genellikle duyguları iřleyememe ve iletememe ile sonulanır. Duygusal durumlarını kontrol altına almaya alıřan katılımcılar kendine zarar verme davranıřında bulunabilirler.

##### **3.1.1. fkenin rol**

Alt tema, fkenin kendine zarar vermede nasıl bir rol oynadıđına odaklanmaktadır. Toprak, Deniz, Lale, Bahar ve Yonca kendine zarar verme davranıřında bulunmadan nce fkeli hissettiđini belirten katılımcılar arasındadır.

Toprak'ın deneyimi, kendine yönelik öfke ile kendine zarar verme arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi vurgulamıştır. Toprak'ın fiziksel görünümünden duyduğu memnuniyetsizlik kendine yönelik öfkeye yol açmıştır. Toprak'ın bu öfkeyle hareket etme yollarından biri kusmak olmuştur; bu da fiziksel görünümü üzerindeki kontrolün yanı sıra bir tür kendini cezalandırmayla ilgilidir.

Kendime zarar verme durumları aynı zamanda çok hem kendime hem hayata öfkeliyken daha çok oluyordu. Böyle boğazımı yakacak kadar kusma davranışları şeyde biraz daha böyle yemek yediğim zamanlar ya da kötü hissettiğim zamanlar vücudumu çok taktığım zaman oluyordu.

### **3.1.2. Suçluluk ve utançın ikili varlığı**

Görüşmeler sırasında Toprak, Lale, Bahar ve Kuzey, sadece suçluluk duygusundan bahseden Toprak dışında, suçluluk ve utançtan önemli duygular olarak bahsetmişlerdir.

Kuzey, ortaokulda kadınlara olan ilgisini keşfettiği önemli bir dönemden bahsetmiştir. Suçluluk ve utanç duyguları, özellikle varoluşuna ilişkin bu farkındalığı takip etmiştir. Kendi varoluşunu hedef alan bu duygular kendine zarar verme davranışlarıyla ilişkilidir.

Ortaokuldaki şeylerimden en büyüklerinden bir tanesi bir de o dönem şey kadınlardan hoşlandığımı da fark etmiştim. Varlığımdan utanıyordum sürekli hani utanıyordum. Sürekli sadece utanıyordum hani sadece hani suçlu hissediyordum ve utanıyordum. Beni en kötü yapan iki şeylerden biri buydu.

### **3.1.3. Sorumluluktan ve olumsuz deneyimlerden uzaklaşma**

Hatırlayamama, bu anılarla ilişkili duygusal acıyı engelleyen bir kalkan işlevi görür. Bu olayları tam olarak hatırlamayıp ya da kabul etmeyerek, bunlarla bağlantılı sıkıntıdan ya da sorumluluktan geçici olarak kaçınabilirler. Bu tema tüm katılımcıların anlatılarında ortaya çıkmıştır.

Bahar, anne ve babasının boşanma haberinin etkisini ve duygularını akademik çalışmalara nasıl yönlendirdiğini anlatmıştır. Görüşmenin bu bölümünde su almak



için ayağa kalkması, üzüntü ve öfkesinden bahsederken sohbette bir duraklamaya neden olması dikkat çekicidir.

Mesela ilk boşanma haberini verdiklerinde de benim yine final jürim vardı. Kesin biz boşanıyoruz dediler, benim üç gün sonra jürim var falan çok sinirlenmiştim ama dedim ki “Okey tamam ben evden gidiyorum arkadaşım da kalacağım üç gün ödev yapmam lazım.” ve hiçbir şey düşünmeyip sadece maket yaptım mesela üç gün falan. O yüzden hep böyle bir şeye sinirlendiğimde yani zamanlaması çok komik bir şekilde jürilerimden pre-jürilerimden falan önceye denk geldi ve sürekli böyle üzgünlüğümü sinirimi falan akademiye yönelttim gibi oldu. Ben şuradan bir su alayım.

#### **3.1.4. Fiziksel acının zevke ya da rahatlatıcı bir duyguya dönüşmesi**

Bu tema, kendine zarar vermenin içsel olanın dışsallaştırılmasıyla ilgili olabilecek kısa süreli bir rahatlama nasıl yol açtığını araştırmaktadır ve tüm katılımcılar bu temayı tarif etmiştir.

Lale, kendini kanatmak için bıçak kullandığını ve bunu hacamat terapisine benzettiğini anlatmıştır. Kan akışının rahatlamasına yardımcı olduğuna ve olumsuz düşüncelerinin o kesikten uzaklaşmasını sağladığına inanmıştır. Bu durum içsel olumsuz düşüncelerin dışsallaştırılmasına dikkat çekmektedir.

Bıçak aldım elime ama bence o kadar da keskin değildi. Sadece tek bir yere uzun bir süre boyunca yani şöyle bir hareketle gösterebilirim. Şu şekilde yaptım sert sert yapmaya çalıştım çünkü şey istedim oradan kan aksın istedim. Hacamat olarak düşündüm buradan kan akarsa belki biraz rahatlarım. Belki işte olumsuz negatif düşünceler de böyle puf uçup gider gibisinden düşündüm, öyle yaptım.

#### **3.2. Kendine zarar vermenin öznel arası dinamikleri**

Bu üst tema, bireylerin kendilerini büyük Başka'ya göre nasıl konumlandıklarına ve kendine zarar vermenin Başka'ya yönelik bir iletişim aracı olarak nasıl işlev gördüğüne dair içgörüler sunmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, kendine zarar verme, konuşulmayan duyguları ve mücadeleleri ifade etme eylemi olarak yorumlanabilir. Katılımcılar kendilerine zarar vererek içsel acılarını dışsallaştırmaya çalışıyor olabilirler. Dahası, kendine zarar verme, jouissance olan haz ilkesinin ötesinde yatan şeye benzer ve dilin ötesine geçme girişimi olarak anlaşılabilir.

### **3.2.1. Kendine zarar vermede görünürlük ve gizlenme ihtiyacı**

Bu tema Başka ile olan ilişkiyi yansıtmaktadır çünkü kendine zarar verme Başka'ya verilen bir mesaj olarak işlev görür. Dolayısıyla, katılımcıların bu eylemleri nasıl açıkladıkları veya gizledikleri önem kazanmaktadır. Deniz, Bahar, Yonca ve Kuzey bu temaya atıfta bulunmaktadır.

Yonca, duvarları yumruklamaktan ve kollarını sertçe sıkmaktan kaynaklanan morlukları açıklama gerekliliğinden bahsetmiştir. Özellikle ailesinden gizleme eğiliminin altını çizdi ve onların bir şekilde bunu gördüğünü belirtmiştir.

Sonrasında insanlara o morlukları açıklamak zorunda kalıyorsun ya da ne bileyim şey sonrasında can acısıyla uğraşmak zorunda kalıyorsun ne bileyim sürekli bir yerlerime kremler sürmek hep, onu aileye belli etmemeye çalışmak[...]Bir şekilde görüyorlardı ediyorlar. Sürekli uzun kollu giyerek de saklayamazsın. Yaz geldiğinde uzun kollu giyince manyak bu deli mi falan diyorlardı. Hani kısa kollu giyince de zaten görüyorlardı.

### **3.2.2. Kendine zarar vermeyi durdurma mekanizması olarak diğer insanlar**

Bu alt tema, katılımcıların kendilerine zarar vermeyi bırakmalarını sağlayan başkalarıyla etkileşimle bağlantılıdır. Bu durum kendine zarar verme eylemi içinde taşınan mesajla ilgili olabilir. Deniz, Lale, Bahar ve Kuzey, bu davranışlarını başkalarına ifade ettikten sonra veya sadece onların yanında bulunarak kendilerine zarar vermeyi bırakabildiklerini belirtmişlerdir.

Lale, annesinin yanına geri taşınmasının kendine zarar vermesini engellediğini belirtmiştir.

Fırsatım olmayacaktır kendimi bu kadar kötü hissedersen de. Biraz da zaten bu yüzden (farklı şehre) geldim. Annemin yanına geri geldim. Zarar vermeyeceğimi düşünüyorum.

### **3.2.3. İntihara atf**

Toprak, Deniz, Lale ve Kuzey intihar düşüncelerini dile getirerek kendine zarar verme ve intihar motivasyonları arasında kesin sınırlar olmadığını veya bunların bir arada bulunabileceğini göstermiştir.

Lale hiçbir zaman hayatına son vermeyi düşünmediğini vurgulamıştır. Ayrıca, görüşme boyunca, intiharla ilgili herhangi bir soru sorulmamasına rağmen, hayatına son vermeyi asla amaçlamadığını birçok kez dile getirdiğinin altını çizmek önemlidir.

Yaptığım şey şuydu kalemligimdeki makasla hani ufacık ufacık çünkü korkuyorum hani korkar insan. İşte ufacık ufacık çizikler atmaktı. Ama şey amacım asla yoktu damarımı keseyim işte kan kaybından öleyim vesaire hani o şekilde bir şey değildi[...]Kendime zarar veriyordum diyeyim ama hani hiç hayatıma son verme olarak öyle bir amaçla değil.

### **3.3. Kaotik aile dinamikleri ve bunların kendine zarar verme üzerindeki etkisi**

Sembolik kastrasyon, babalık işlevi tarafından dayatılan jouissance sınırlamasına atıfta bulunmaktadır. İlk üst temada kısaca bahsedildiği gibi sembolik işlevdeki bozulma, kendine zarar vermenin ardındaki söylenmemiş deneyimden bahseden alt temalar için ortak bir faktördür. Aile dinamiklerinin incelenmesi, sembolik düzendeki bozulmanın nedenlerinin neler olabileceğine ışık tutabilir. Dört katılımcı ebeveynlerinin boşanmış olduğunu belirtirken, diğer ikisi ebeveynleri arasında ciddi geçimsizlik olduğunu ifade etmiştir.

#### **3.3.1. Aile içi şiddete atıf**

Bahar dışındaki tüm katılımcılar bu temayı gündeme getirmiştir. Bu tema, kişinin kendisine şiddet uygulamasının evde var olan şiddetle nasıl ilişkili olduğunu araştırmak için alan açmaktadır.

Yonca, kendine zarar verdikten sonra morluklarını gören ağabeyinin sözel şiddet uyguladığı ifadesini paylaşmıştır. Ayrıca, evde sürekli dayak atma olmadığını söylerken babasının önemsiz konulardan çatışma yaratma eğilimi nedeniyle evde sürekli gerginlik olduğunu belirtmiştir.

Abim görmüştü “Senin yerine ben bir tane suratına çarpsam daha mı iyi olur acaba?” falan demişti. Böyle “Hem belki o zaman vazgeçersin.” falan diye[...]Yani böyle sürekli dayak atma gibi bir durum yoktu ama hani evde

sürekli bir gerilim hali mevcuttu. Çünkü babam olmayacak bir şeyden mana çıkartan bir insan.

### **3.3.2. Ebeveynler arasındaki ilişkide yaşanan sorunlar**

Bu alt tema ebeveyn ilişkisi sorunlarıyla ilgili anlatıları incelemekte ve süregelen çatışma, iletişim eksikliği ve beklenmedik ayrılıkların psikolojik strese ve nihayetinde kendine zarar verme davranışlarına nasıl katkıda bulunabileceğini vurgulamaktadır. Tüm katılımcılar bu temadan bahsetmiştir.

Toprak, çocukluğu ve ergenliği boyunca ebeveynleri arasında önemsiz meseleler yüzünden çıkan tartışmaları hatırlamıştır. Bu sürekli çatışma, istikrarsızlık ve güvensizlik hissine katkıda bulunabileceği düşünülmüştür.

Sık sık saçma sebeplerden kavga ederlerdi. En azından benim çocukluğumdan ergenliğimden hatırladığım kadarıyla öyleydi.

### **3.3.3. Ebeveynlerden birinin yokluğu veya tutarsız varlığı**

Alt tema, ebeveynlerin katılımcıların hayatlarındaki tutarsız varlığını ve bu tutarsızlığın kendine zarar verme davranışları üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktadır. Tüm katılımcılar bu temaya örnek vermiştir.

Deniz, babasıyla tartıştıkları ve babasının neredeyse bir yıl boyunca evi terk etmesiyle sonuçlanan bir anısını paylaşmıştır. Annesi babasının eve dönmesine izin vermeyeceğini belirtmiş ancak babası geri dönmüştür. Babasının eve dönmesinden sonra Deniz, kendine ilk kez zarar vermiş ve birçok hapı birarada kullanmıştır.

Ben ilk başta, ilk olarak galiba 12 yaşındayken kendime zarar vermiştim. Biz çok ciddi bir kavga etmiştik ve babam o kavgasında beni evlatlıktan reddetmişti[...]Sonrasında da evi terk edip gitmişti. Babam evi terk ettikten sonra yaklaşık bir yıla yakın bir süre hiç eve gelmedi ve biz bir yıla yakın bir süre babamla neredeyse hiç konuşmadık[...]Annem de babamla ayrıldıkları dönemde şey diye bir şey söylemişti: “Eğer hani giderse söz bir daha eve almayacağım”.[...]Sonra babamın eve gelmesi beni çok etkiledi çünkü hem çok yakın olduğum bir insan bana verdiği sözü tutmadı tutmamış oldu hem de istemediğim bir insan ve asla benimle konuşmamış bir insan kendi çocuğunu

arayıp sormamış bir insan tekrar eve döndü. Hem güvenli hissetmediğim bir yer hem şey ilk defa o zaman kendime zarar vermeye çalışmışım.

### **3.4. Doğum anlatıları ve bunların kendine zarar verme üzerindeki etkisi**

Büyük Başka tarafından istenmeyen veya zorluklarla karakterize erken deneyimler öznenin psişesinde etki bırakabilir. Dolayısıyla, kendine zarar verme Başka'nın arzusuyla ilişkiden doğabilir ve bu anlatılardan etkilenen mesajla Başka hedef alınabilir. Katılımcıların kendine zarar verme anlatıları, Freud'un yaşam ve ölüm içgüdüleriyle bağlantılı olarak yaratım ve yıkımın döngüsel doğasını vurgulayan doğumla metaforik bir benzerlik taşımaktadır.

#### **3.4.1. Algılanan İstenmezlik**

Tüm katılımcılar, doğumlarıyla ilgili olarak algılanan bir istenmemişliğin altını çizmiştir. Bu hikayeler ebeveynler tarafından çocuklara anlatılmakta ve önemli bir mesaj taşımaktadır.

Deniz, annesi daha geç bir hamilelik geçirseydi ebeveynlerinin ilişkisinin başlamadan nasıl sona erebileceği üzerine düşündüğünü aktarmıştır. Doğumunun yanlış zamanda gerçekleştiğini ve doğumunun gerçekleşmemesinin ebeveynleri için daha iyi olabileceğini belirtmiştir.

A: Siz bu doğumunuzla ilgili anlatılanları nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

D: Eğer annemin daha geç bir hamileliği olsaydı belki birkaç yıl sonra belki ilişkileri başlamadan biterdi gibi düşünüyorum. Hani yani o ilişkiye devam edemeyeceklerini fark edip onlar kendi aralarındaki ilişkiyi bitirirdi. Belki daha iyi olabilirdi onların hayatları için o yüzden hani şey gibi geliyor bazen hani çok yanlış bir zamanda çok hızlı bir şekilde.

#### **3.4.2. Doğum sırasındaki komplikasyonlar**

Bu alt tema, katılımcıların annelerinin hamilelik ve doğum sırasında karşılaştıkları zorluklara ilişkin düşüncelerini incelemektedir. Bu temada Lale, Bahar, Yonca ve Kuzey'in anlatıları, anneye yönelik örtük saldırganlığın yanı sıra kendilerinden kaynaklanan bir suçluluk duygusu da taşımaktadır.

Lale, annesinin hamilelik sırasında karşılaştığı, hareket etmekte zorlanmak gibi zorluklardan hiç bahsetmediğini belirtmiştir. Yine de bu komplikasyonları düşünmesi ve görüşmede gündeme getirmesi dikkat çekmiştir.

A: Peki siz bu doğumunuzla ilgili anlatılanları nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

L: Güzel yani hamilelik süreci de çok sancısız geçmiş. “Bir kez bile kusmadım” diyor bana ne güzel onun adına çok sevindim. Güzel geçmiş bence çok fena değil. Sadece şeyi gördüm annemin fotoğraflarını görüyorum çok kilo almış gerçekten ama hiç şey anlatmıyor, çok zor hareket ederdim, şöyle zorlandım böyle zorlandım. Asla böyle şeyler söylemiyor hamilelik süreciyle ilgili.

### 3.4.3. Metaforik anlatımda içindekini serbest bırakma ihtiyacı

Doğum, bir çocuğun rahimden çıkmasını içerir; kendine zarar verme de bireylerin kan veya olumsuz duygu ve deneyimler de dahil olmak üzere içsel olanı çıkarmasının bir yolu olarak görülebilir. Bu metaforik ilişki Bahar, Yonca ve Kuzey tarafından anlatılmış ve ikinci bir görüşme aracılığıyla araştırılmıştır.

Kuzey, kendini kesmenin, içinde biriken bir şeyi bırakarak ona nasıl bir rahatlama hissi verdiğini anlatmıştır. Bu anlatım bir bebeğin anne karnında büyümesine benzemektedir.

K: Kesmede hani o anki hani keskin acı ve kan görmek bana çok iyi geliyordu. Yani iyi geliyordu.

A: Peki kan görmek nasıl iyi geliyordu?

K: Yani dediğim gibi şey hissettiriyordu. İçimde biriken bir şey var, onu dışarı atabiliyorum. Biraz onu hissettiriyordu[...]Nasıl diyeyim vücudumdan bir şey çıkarmam gerekiyor. Bu kan olduğu zaman en azından sakinleşebiliyorum, tarzında bir şey. Yani baş etmek için bir şey aramışım baş etmek için bir arayıştan kasıtlı çıktığını düşünüyorum[...]Kanı görmenin önemli şeylerinden bir tanesi büyük ihtimalle çok böyle vücudun temelinde olan bir şey olması olduğunu düşünüyorum. Hayat kaynağı gibi bir şey sonuçta onu çıkarmak o kadar derinde olduğunu hissettiğim şeylerle belki bağdaşıyordur.

## 4. TARTIŞMA

Sembolik kastrasyon, öznenin babasal işlev tarafından dayatılan sınırlamaları tanıması anlamına gelir. Bu sınırlama, mecazi olarak, anne ve bebeğin ikili ilişkisine

Baba-Adı'nın müdahalesidir. Sembolik kastrasyon, çocuğun dil ve kültür alanına geçişi için temel bir süreçtir (Soler, 2014, aktaran Gürsoy, 2023). Ancak, bu sembolik işlevdeki aksaklıklar, deneyimleri ve duyguları işleme ve iletme yetersizliğine yol açabilir. Başka bir deyişle, bu çalışmada tespit edilen kendine zarar verme davranışının ardındaki ifade edilemeyen deneyim, sembolik işlevde bir aksaklık olduğuna işaret eder. Bu bağlamda, kendine zarar verme, içsel durumları eylem yoluyla dışa vurma girişimi olarak ortaya çıkar. Bu çalışmada, kendine zarar vermenin ardındaki ifade edilemeyen deneyimler, öfke, suçluluk ve utanç gibi yoğun duygularla birlikte dissosiyatif durumlar ve eylemin acı verici zevki olarak tanımlanmıştır.

Soler (2015), öfkeyi insan psikolojisinde derinlemesine kökleşmiş ve davranış üzerinde güçlü bir etkiye sahip olduğu için temel bir duygu olarak konumlandırır. Ayrıca, öfkenin, öznenin sembolik ve gerçek düzen arasındaki kopukluğa tepkisi olarak ortaya çıktığını ileri sürülmektedir. Bu kopukluk, sembolik sınırlılığını açığa çıkarır ve gerçeğin bireyin inşa ettiği gerçekliğe müdahale etmesine yol açar. Miller (2006), utanç ve suçluluğun, Başka'yla olan ilişkileri temelinde birbirinden ayrılabilirliğini savunur. Utanç, birincil bir duygu olarak kabul edilir ve Başka'nın bakışıyla pekiştirilir. Suçluluk ise, öznenin değerleri ihlal ettiğine ve bu değerleri bünyesinde barındıran Başka tarafından yargılandığına inandığı durumlarda ortaya çıkar. Ancak, her suçluluk patolojik değildir; Soler (2015), babasal işlev etkin olduğunda suçluluğun hafifletildiğini belirtir. Aksine, bu sembolik işlev başarısız olduğunda suçluluk, bunaltıcı bir şekilde deneyimlenir. Bu, Başka ile suçluluk ve utanç duyguları arasındaki yakın ilişkiyle bağlantılı olabilir. Sembolik işlev etkin olduğunda, özne ile Başka'nın bakışı veya Başka'nın yargısı arasında bir bariyer vardır.

Sorumluluk ve olumsuz duygulardan kaçma, kendine zarar vermeye yol açan önemli bir diğer faktördür. Literatürde, bazı kendine zarar verme vakalarında, zararın gerçek özne tarafından değil başka bir ajan tarafından gerçekleştirildiği algısı ile dissosiyasyonun tartışıldığı belirtilmektedir. Bir başka dissosiyasyon biçimi ise hatırlayamama durumudur ve tüm katılımcılar bu durumu ifade etmiştir. Lacan'ın bakış açısından, sembolik kastrasyon, dilin edinilmesini ve öznelğin bırakılmasını

gerektirir ve bu, bireylerin daha geniş sosyal iletişim bağlamlarına erişimlerini sağlar (Lacan, 2006b). Ancak, katılımcıların deneyimlerinden açıkça görüldüğü gibi, kendine zarar veren bireyler tarafından dilin, vaat ettiği paylaşılan anlamı sağlamaktan ya da en azından bunun yanılması yaratmaktan yoksun olduğu algılanmaktadır (Straker, 2006). Bu nedenle katılımcılar, olumsuz olayları deneyimlediklerinde iletişim kurmak ya da hatta hatırlamak için herhangi bir araçtan yoksun kalmışlardır. Bu durum Bahar'ın şu ifadesinde de açıkça görülmektedir: “Sürekli böyle üzgünlüğümü sinirimi falan akademiye yönelttim gibi oldu. Ben şuradan bir su alayım.”. Su almak için ara vermeden önce, Bahar, anne babasının boşanmasından ve üzüntü ve öfkesini akademiye nasıl yönlendirdiğinden bahsetmiştir. Mülakat sırasında bu olayları anlatmanın dissosiyatif bariyeri bozması duraklamaya olan ihtiyaçla bağlantılı olabilir.

Kendine zarar verme davranışının diğer bir yönü ise fiziksel acının zevke ya da yatıştırıcı bir hisse dönüşmesidir ve bu, jouissance kavramı üzerinden incelenebilir. Lacan, bir öznenin katlanabileceği zevkin bir sınırı olduğunu ve bu sınırın ötesinde sadece daha fazla zevk olmadığını, bunun yerine acının olduğunu savunur. Jouissance, haz ilkesini aşan bir haz biçimidir ve zevk ile acının bir karışımıyla sonuçlanır (Lacan, 2006b). Sembolik işlev tarafından getirilen yasak nedeniyle bu sınırın ötesindeki hazzın elde edilebileceği yönünde nevrotik bir yanılma vardır. Jouissance'ın kurallara aykırı doğası, bireylerin aşırı zevk arayışında yasağı ihlal etmeye çalıştıklarında açıkça görülür, ancak bu, acı olarak tezahür eder (Evans, 2006). Ayrıca jouissance, bedenin gerçekliğinin bir ifadesidir ve ölüm dürtüsü ile yakından bağlantılıdır. Ölüm dürtüsü, zevk ilkesini aşmaya yönelik sürekli bir arayış olarak kendini gösterir ve bu, kendini yok etmeye ya da ölüme doğru bir yolculuğa neden olur (Evans, 2006). Bu nedenle kendine zarar verme, ölüm dürtüsünün bir ifadesi olabilir; öznenin eylemleri, kendine acı vererek jouissance'a ulaşma arzusuyla yönlendirilir. Bu davranışlar, geçici bir öznellik ortaya çıkışı ve jouissance ile başa çıkma yolu olarak işlev görebilir çünkü bir üçüncülük yaratma girişimi olarak görülebilir. Ancak bu strateji, kişilerarası öznelliği içermez ve kısa bir rahatlama döneminden sonra bile jouissance olarak kalmaya mahkûmdur. Bu, bu davranışların tekrar tekrar meydana geldiği kısır döngünün sebebidir.



Kendine zarar verme, ifade edilmeyen deneyimlerle yakından ilişkili olsa da, davranışın kendisi özünde kişilerarası bir boyutu hedef alır. Bu, saklanma ve görünür olma ikiliğini, başkalarını kendine zarar vermeyi durdurma yolu olmasını ve intihara gönderme yapmayı içerir. Kendine zarar verme, özel bir deneyim veya sessizce acı çekme olarak tasvir edilebilir ve bu kısmen doğrudur çünkü genellikle özel olarak yapılır. Ancak kişilerin saklama arzusu olmasına rağmen, izlerin bir şekilde gösterildiği ya da bilindiği gerçeği şaşırtıcıdır. Bu, izlerin saklanmak istenmesine rağmen kaçınılmaz bir şekilde görünür hale gelmesinde paradoksal bir durumu gözler önüne serer (Papadima, 2019). Kendine zarar verme, sembolik işlevde bir bozulmanın sinyalini verir. İletişim başarısız olduğunda, özellikle olumsuz duygularla ilişkili içsel deneyimler eylem yoluyla ortaya çıkar. Bu nedenle, kendine zarar verme, Freud'un bastırılmış olanın geri dönüşü ve tekrarlayıcı özelliklerinden dolayı "acting out" (dışa vurma) kavramıyla örtüşmektedir. Ayrıca Lacan'ın, dışa vurma eylemlerinin bir iletişim biçimi olduğuna dair açıklamaları, bu davranışlardan kaynaklanan izler veya işaretlerle örtüşür. Katılımcıların kendine zarar vermenin görünür sonuçlarına dair ifadeleri, dışavurum içindeki mesajın bilinçdışı olduğunu ve öznenin bile bu eylemlerinin bir mesaj taşıdığının farkında olmadığını öne sürer. Başka bir deyişle, izleri saklama isteğine rağmen, katılımcılar, izler ve yaralar aracılığıyla mücadelelerini ya da bastırılmış deneyimlerini bilinçsizce dışa vurur. Ayrıca, katılımcılar başkalarıyla etkileşimlerin kendine zarar vermeyi durdurmak için kritik olduğunu ifade etmiştir. Kendine zarar verme, bir dışa vurma biçimi olarak, Başka'ya yönelik bilinçdışı bir mesaj taşır; bu mesaj, görünme talebinden müdahale isteğine kadar çeşitli anlamlar taşıyabilir. Başkalarıyla etkileşim, mesajın alındığı hissini verebilir ve kendine zarar vermeye karşı bir durdurma oluşturabilir.

Kendine zarar verme davranışlarının arkasındaki motivasyonlar karmaşık ve çok yönlüdür; intihar ve intihara meyilli olmayan niyetlerin karmaşık bir etkileşimini içerir. Bu, intihar ve kendine zarar verme arasındaki ayrımın net bir şekilde yapılamaması nedeniyle, her iki motivasyonun da kendine zarar verme davranışları kapsamında ele alınmasını öneren araştırmacılar tarafından vurgulanmıştır (Kapur ve diğerleri, 2013; Linehan & Nielsen, 1981). Psikanalitik bakış açısından, kendine zarar verme, sürekli olarak sınırları aşma girişimiyle ilişkilidir ve jouissance arayışıyla ilgilidir. Jouissance, ölüm dürtüsü ile doğrudan bağlantılıdır ve bu dürtü,

ölüm yolunda ilerleyerek ajitasyon durumlarından tatmin elde eder (Evans, 2006; Vanheule, 2011). Kendine zarar verme, jouissance ve ölüm dürtüsü arasındaki derin bağlantı göz önüne alındığında, intihara yönelik referansların ortaya çıkması kaçınılmazdır.

Bu çalışmanın bulguları, kaotik aile dinamiklerinin kendine zarar verme davranışları üzerindeki önemli etkisini daha da vurgulamaktadır. Tehdit edici bir figür çocukların hayatında derin bir şekilde yer aldığı ve onlardan kaçmak zor olduğunda, özellikle tehdit edici figür sevilen ve güvenilen bir ebeveyn olduğunda, bu figürün içselleştirilmesi eğilimindedirler. Bu, iyi ve kötü, benlik ve diğer, iç ve dış arasındaki ayrımın bulanıklaşmasına neden olur (Bick, 1968). Kendine zarar verme durumunda, cildin sınır sağlama işlevi büyük önem taşır ve içsel deneyimler ile dışsal deneyimler arasında bir bariyer sağlar. Bu sınırın ihlali, içselden dışarıya geçişi içerir ve kendine zarar verme yoluyla gösterilir. Bu ihlal, olumsuz duygulardan kurtulmaya yönelik bilinçdışı bir malzemenin dışa vurumu ya da benliğin kötü parçalarını ortadan kaldırmaya yönelik bir girişimi temsil eder. Dolayısıyla, kendine zarar verme, aynı anda hem içselleştirilmiş nefret edilen nesneye hem de kurban benliğe yönelik bilinçdışı bir saldırı olabilir (Yakaley & Burbridge-James, 2018). Bu bakış açısı, kendine zarar veren bireylerin kişilerarası ilişkilerini ele almanın önemini vurgular.

Başlangıçta, Oedipus kompleksi, çocuğun Başka'nın eksikliğini fark etmesiyle ortaya çıkar. Bu durum, Başka'nın imgesel fallusu aradığı ve çocuğun bu fallus olması gerektiği yanılması yaratır. Başka'nın eksikliğini dolduran imgesel fallus olma girişimi, çocuğu bir özne yerine nesne olarak konumlandırır. Ancak, Başka'nın bakışı yalnızca çocuk üzerinde olmadığından çocuk, bu rolü Başka için asla tamamen dolduramayacağını fark eder. Oedipus kompleksinin sonunda, çocuk hem kendi eksikliğini hem de Başka'nın eksikliğini kabul eder. Ayrıca, Başka'nın bakışının yöneldiği Baba-Adı'nın müdahalesiyle çocuk, Başka'dan ayrılır ve nesne konumundan özne konumuna geçer (Evans, 2006). Katılımcıların tanımladığı uzun süredir gelen anne-baba çatışmaları durumlarında, Başka'nın arzusu üçüncü bir konuma yönelmemektedir. Oedipus kompleksinde babasal işlev arzu düzenleyemediğinde, ayrılma tam olarak gerçekleşemez ve bu durum özne konumunun ortaya çıkmasını engeller. Kendine zarar verme davranışının anne-baba

ilişki sorunlarından kaynaklandığını iddia etmek basit bir çıkarım olur. Ayrıca Lacan'ın Oedipus kompleksi anlayışı metaforiktir, dolayısıyla her ebeveyn çatışması yaşayan kişi kendine zarar vermez. Tanımlanan kesintisiz ikili bağ, yalnızca ebeveyn ilişkisindeki sorunlarla ilişkili değildir; bu bağ aynı zamanda ebeveynin yokluğu ya da tutarsız varlığı ve aile içi şiddetle birlikte gelir.

Doğum anlatıları, bir kişinin dünyaya ve ailesine girişini işaret eder. Önemli bir anlam taşırlar çünkü alınan bilgiyi iletirler. Bireylerin doğum öykülerini ifade etmesi, kendilerine anlatılan öykülerden ve bu öyküleri içselleştirme biçimlerinden kaynaklanır. Sonuç olarak, doğum öyküleri kişisel anlatılar ve aile tarihi arasında teorik olarak ilginç bir bağlantı sağlar (Andrews ve ark., 2015). Katılımcıların doğum hikâyelerine ve hamilelik süreciyle ilgili ebeveynlerinin tutumlarına dair anlatıları incelendiğinde, tüm anlatılarda istenmeme hissiyle algılanan ortak bir tema ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu anlatılar, kazanılmış bilgi oldukları ve genellikle ebeveynler tarafından anlatıldıkları için özellikle önemlidir. Bu anlatılarda, öznel bir mesaj bulma eğilimindedir. Başka'nın arzusu, kendine zarar verme ve dışa vurma açısından önemli bir rol oynar. Bir çocuk, Başka'nın arzusunda bir yer bulamazsa ve sevgi ihtiyacı karşılanmazsa, intihar düşüncelerine karşı daha savunmasız hale gelir (Raes, 2011). Buna ek olarak, katılımcıların anlatılarında kendilerine yönelik bir suçluluk ile anneye yönelik örtük bir saldırganlık vardır. Örneğin, Lale, şunu belirtmiştir: "Güzel yani hamilelik süreci de çok sancısız geçmiş. "Bir kez bile kusmadım" diyor bana ne güzel onun adına çok sevindim.". Bu ifadenin iki anlamı vardır. Birincisi, annesinin Lale'yi doğurmasının hiçbir olumsuz yanının olmadığıdır. Bununla birlikte, Lale'nin ifadesindeki diğer anlam, "Bir kez bile kusmadım" diyor bana ne.". Bu, anneye yönelik örtük bir saldırganlığı işaret ediyor olabilir.

Son olarak, çalışmadaki katılımcıların kendine zarar verme konusundaki anlatıları, doğum deneyimlerine çarpıcı bir benzerlik göstermektedir. Freud'un yaşam içgüdü ve ölüm içgüdü kavramları, bu ikiliği anlamak için bir temel sağlar. Bu içgüdüler, bireylerin hem yaratıcı hem de yıkıcı güçlere çekildiğine işaret eder (Freud, 1920). Kendine zarar verme, hem yıkım dürtüsünü hem de yeniden doğuş ve yenilenme dürtüsünü ifade eden bu ikiliği bünyesinde barındırır. Kuzey, "Yani dediğim gibi şey hissettiriyordu. İçimde biriken bir şey var, onu dışarı atabiliyorum." demiştir. Bu

baskı, tıpkı rahimdeki bir bebek gibi yavaş yavaş büyümektedir. Olgunluğa eriştiğinde ise serbest bırakılması gerekir. Bu durumda kendine zarar verme, bu içsel baskıyı hafifletmek için bir serbest bırakma mekanizması olarak işlev görür ve kısa bir süre için rahatlama sağlar. Bu bakış açısından, kendine zarar vermeyi, acıyı ve ıstırabı doğurma eylemi olarak yorumlamak mümkündür. Bu anlatı, kan hakkında yaptığı şu yorumu da destekler: “Nasıl diyeyim vücudumdan bir şey çıkarmam gerekiyor. Bu kan olduğu zaman en azından sakinleşebiliyorum, tarzında bir şey.”. Yaşam kaynağının serbest bırakılması, kendine zarar verme sürecinde yer alan yaşam ve ölüm döngüsünü ortaya koyar.

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