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## **Gender Differences in the Meaning of Dating and Marriage among International Students from Turkey**

Rakel Delevi<sup>1</sup>

Asli Bugay<sup>2</sup>

1) California State University, United States

2) TED University, Turkey

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# Gender Differences in the Meaning of Dating and Marriage among International Students from Turkey

Rakel Delevi  
*California State University*

Asli Bugay  
*TED University*

## Abstract

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In this qualitative study, we interviewed 12 female and 10 male graduate students from Turkey. All of the participants have been living in the US for at least a year. Given that the collectivistic Turkish culture is very different than the more individualistic American culture, we aimed at understanding how men and women's meaning of dating and marriage changed as a result of living in the US. We conducted semi-structured interviews to understand the gender differences in the experience of change as experienced by the participants. The results and implications for cross-cultural research are discussed.

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**Keywords:** Gender, dating, marriage, international students, Turkey

# Diferencias de Género en el Significado de las Citas y el Matrimonio para el Estudiantado Internacional Procedente de Turquía

Rakel Delevi  
*California State University*

Asli Bugay  
*TED University*

## **Abstract**

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En este estudio cualitativo, entrevistamos a 12 mujeres y 10 hombres estudiantes de grado de Turquía. Todas las personas participantes habían vivido en los Estados Unidos por lo menos un año. Dado que la cultura colectivista turca es muy diferente a la cultura individualista americana, tratamos de entender cómo los significados de hombres y mujeres sobre las citas y el matrimonio cambiaron como resultados de vivir en los Estados Unidos. Realizamos entrevistas semiestructuradas para entender las diferencias de género en la experiencia de los cambios vividos por los participantes. Los resultados e implicaciones para la investigación transcultural son discutidos.

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**Palabras clave:** Géneros, citas, matrimonio, estudiantes internacionales, Turquía

The topic of gender differences is one of the most commonly researched areas in the field of psychology. Researchers have long studied the role of gender differences across a variety of psychology. Researchers have long studied the role of gender differences across a variety of relationship variables such as mate selection preferences and criteria (Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer, & Kenrick, 2002; Higgins, Zheng, Liu, & Hui Sun, 2002), dating (Miller et al., 2005), sex and love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995), sexual attitudes and behaviors (Oliver & Hyde, 1993; Petersen & Hyde, 2010). Studies consistently highlight that meaning of dating and marriage differs for women and men (Hendrick, Hendrick, Slapion-Foote, & Foote, 1985; Oliver & Hyde, 1993).

In addition to gender differences, dating and marriage practices show great variability across cultures. Most people in individualist cultures choose their romantic partners, marry for love, and tend to believe that love is the most important factor for marriage (Zinn & Eitzen, 2005). On the other hand, in collectivistic societies, marriage is seen as joining of extended families and is a ‘huge responsibility’ that should not be handled by young people (Hamon & Ingoldsby, 2003; Sherif-Trask, 2003; Tepperman & Wilson, 1993, p. 73).

With rapidly growing number of international students in the U.S., several studies have examined factors helping or hurting their adaptation to another culture including language barriers, academic performance, interpersonal problems with American students, racial/ethnic discrimination, loss of social support, alienation, and homesickness. One of the overlooked areas has been if and how change occurs in international students’ expectations vis-à-vis romantic relationships. This is an important topic given the role of romantic relationships in predicting the mental health of college age young adults (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010). In addition, the cultural adaptation to another country could be highly effected by one’s romantic relationships.

### **The Meaning of Dating and Marriage in Turkey**

With a 99% Muslim population, Turkey has been referred to as collectivist culture by many scholars (Goregenli, 1997; Imamoglu et al.

1993). In the Turkish culture, dating and marriages remain to be traditional with clear gender roles. Although premarital dating and sex are seen as a part of “being a real man” in Turkey for men, it is commonly forbidden or frowned upon for women to date or engage in sexual activities outside of marriage. This negative attitude towards women’s dating and sexuality is evident by the prevalence of “medical virginity examinations” especially among the religious groups to ensure women’s virginity before marriage (Awwad, 2011; Frank, Bauer, Arican, Fincanci, & Iacopino, 1999) Virginity is still seen as representation of chastity, women’s status in the society and most importantly, family honor (Sever & Yurdakul, 2001).

Furthermore, premarital sexual relations or dating with the opposite sex (Shapiro, 2010) are still the leading reasons of “honor killings” which is one of the important social problems in rural parts of Turkey (Hayran, 2009). Honor killing is defined as “an extreme way of violence towards women because of honor in a feudal system” (Bilgili & Vural, 2011, p. 66). Also, in areas where premarital dating is not widespread, arranged marriages are the main way couples get married. The estimated rate of arranged marriages in Turkey is fifty percent, although this percentage is significantly lower among the urban, young, and educated (Atalay et al., 1992). Currently, approximately one-fourth of marriages are arranged in Ankara, the capital of Turkey (Hortacsu, 1999).

Along with the traditional and patriarchal values that are part of the Turkish culture, Turkey is also seen as a European country in the process of modernization (Hortacsu, 2003). Among the more educated and urban or “modern” youth, two dating trends are also on the rise. The first involves a process in which prospective spouses are introduced by one’s family, matchmaker friends or relatives but are free to make their own decisions after a few dates. Secondly, Western-style love marriages are becoming more common among the urban, educated youth (Atalay et al., 1992). However, while Western-style dating is on the rise, there is still a clear marriage “script” (Hortacsu, 2003) to be followed. In other words, choosing a partner is often a “family-involved mate selection process” (Day, 2010, p. 125) that is highly formal and structured. Through this process families of the youths inquire about each others’ backgrounds, position in the community, and socio-economic class to make sure that they are compatible with one another. Thus, consistent

with collectivistic values, harmony not only between the spouses, but also between the two families is highly emphasized, even when there is a focus on romantic love.

Overall, for most Turks, marriage follows a formal, non-sexual courtship period where parents are highly involved. However, with respect to possible effects of modernization on the meaning of dating and marriage, premarital dating and romantic love have become fairly prevalent among educated and urban Turkish youth (Hortacsu, 1999). Given the aforementioned gender and cultural differences in regards to meaning of marriage and dating, the aim of this study was to examine how the experiences of Turkish men and women have changed as a result of living in the U.S. vis-à-vis romantic relationships, and if these experiences varied by gender.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The sample was a convenience sample of 12 unmarried female (6 Masters, 6 PhD) and 10 male (7 Masters, 3 PhD) graduate students from Turkey who have been living in the U.S. for at least 1 year. The participants were between the ages of 23 and 32 years ( $M = 26.31$  years). Seven female and three male students were in a romantic relationship at the time of the interview. The length of these relationships varied: Four were in relationship for one month to six months, one was in relationship between 6 month-1 year, and two were in relationship for more than a year. 11 participants were in an intercultural/racial relationship. Out of these intercultural relationships, six of the romantic partners were American, one was French, one was Arabic, one was Lebanese, one was Indian, one was Scottish and one was Mexican. In terms of religious background, all of the participants identified themselves as a Muslim. More than half of the participants identified themselves as “somewhat” to “very” religious.

### **Procedure**

Informal, open-ended, semi-structured, and face-to-face interviews were

conducted in the native tongue of the participants. On average, the interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and were audiotaped.

Interview questionnaire was prepared based on the relevant literature by researchers. Because we were interested in several aspects of romantic relationships, we asked participants questions on three different topics: 1) Premarital relationships: Subtopics included dating, premarital sex, and premarital cohabitation 2) Marriage: Subtopics included marital roles, expectations related to finances and parenting. Some of the interview questions were as follows: “Have your views about marriage changed as a result of living in the US? If so, how?”, “Have your views about dating and sex changed as a result of living in the US? If so, how?”

### **Data collection and data analysis**

For this study, we used grounded-theory in analyzing our data. In addition to the interviews, research notes taken during the interviews also were included in the data analysis. Data analysis began immediately after data collection and was concluded when we reached theoretical saturation (Rafuls & Moon, 1996). The interviews were coded independently and themes were identified by two researchers. The inter-coder reliability was calculated yielding a kappa value of .74 which is satisfactory.

Data analysis involved a cyclical descriptive process of categorization, and coding and recoding of data with the aim of achieving an internal order by identifying themes, categories, and subcategories (Hoshmand, 1989). Accordingly, in analysing our data, we used an open, axial, and selective coding respectively (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In the absence of any existing theoretical framework, we aimed to conduct a data-based study (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin 1998). This inductive approach allowed us to identify factors underlying change and no-change in attitudes, expectations, and behaviours that happen during a specific aspect of acculturation: romantic relationships. Given that there is no existing theory or process model explaining shifts in romantic relationship experiences as part of acculturation, we also aimed at identifying a preliminary model explaining change. Purposive

and snow-ball sampling techniques were employed to obtain data; specifically, people of Turkish ethnic origin were contacted through the on-campus Turkish Student Association at a public south-eastern university. Emails were sent to an active member list to recruit participants to take part in an interview. Initially, we had 7 students who showed interest, and through snow-balling we reached a total of 22 students who agreed to participate in an interview.

## **Results**

Because we were primarily interested in understanding how men and women's meaning of dating and marriage changed as a result of living in the US, we reported findings across two genders. Our main point of interest was to identify how participants had or had not changed in the meaning of dating and marriage and explore the differences by gender. We used a coding system such as 'student 1', 'student 2' instead of using names of students to honor the participants' confidentiality.

### **Male themes**

We came across three main themes in regards to change in men's expectations. Namely, these were "lower and pessimistic expectations", "less responsibility", and "less romanticism" and "more sexuality". It can be clearly seen that most of the participants made references to at least two of the themes which could imply that there is commonality in men's experience in regards to romantic relationships (see [Table 1](#)). The themes are presented below.



Table 1  
*Male Themes*

	Lower and pessimistic expectations	Less responsibility	Less romanticism and more sexuality
Participant 1		x	
Participant 2	x	x	x
Participant 3	x		x
Participant 4	x	x	x
Participant 5		x	x
Participant 6		x	x
Participant 7	x		
Participant 8	x		
Participant 9			x
Participant 10			x

### **Lower and pessimistic expectations.**

A few male participants mentioned that after interacting with several American women and observing dating relationships in the U.S., they have gotten more pessimistic about relationships and their prospects for marriage. Some attributed this to linguistic, religious, and other cultural differences, Participant 2, (24 years old, 1 year in the US) said:

I can't express myself in English the way I do in my native tongue, I don't even know how I could be sexually intimate with someone in English.

Participant 8 (25 years old, with a Turkish girlfriend) said that he is pessimistic about relationships in the US.

In Turkey, if you have a decent job, you take the girl to a decent dinner, the girl would be open to marry you. But, in the US,

women are independent; they can accomplish everything on their own. In a way, they don't need men. In addition, language becomes an impediment to connect with women. For example, recently, I took a girl to a comedy club, but due to my cultural and language limitations, I couldn't understand much. We couldn't experience the show the same way. She picked up on this, and she stopped seeing me. I also think that the expectations of Turkish women are lower, so it's much easier to date them.

In general, these students saw language as a big barrier that prevented them from connecting romantically. These results are in line with previous research suggesting that language proficiency is the most significant indicator in international students' overall adjustment (Olmedo & Padilla, 1978; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Language barriers can possibly hinder international students' social interactions with their American peers (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Jacob & Greggo, 2001). One could argue that this could also spill over their romantic relationships.

Other participants mentioned their traditional understanding of dating being incongruent with the American way of dating. For example, Participant 7, (26 years old, Masters student) said:

In the U.S., people change partners very quickly, divorce rate is high. I don't think I could have a long term relationship in this country. There were so many good women in Turkey who could be good housewives, good wives, good potential mothers, but here the women are too independent and I don't think I can find someone I can marry. And even if I did, we would probably get divorced.

Participant 4 (25 years old, Masters student), mentioned that he feels temporary in the U.S. which makes him see his romantic relationships temporary as well. He said:

Because I feel temporary, I don't have the same expectations/relationships as I would in Turkey.

### **Less responsibility.**

A lot of the male participants talked about the traditional gender roles and the responsibility that comes with romantic relationships in the

collectivistic Turkish society. As described earlier, dating in Turkey is a public event where families often get involved. Because of this involvement, the dating couple, especially the male might feel like he is being watched and might be careful not to overstep the boundaries set by the society and by his partner's family.

Participant 1 (25 years old, PhD student and with a French girlfriend), mentioned:

In Turkey, I used to feel very responsible towards girls. If I had a Turkish girlfriend here, maybe I would feel more responsible. But in general, I don't feel any responsibility towards women here.

In addition, Participant 2 reported:

Dating in Turkey meant, holding her hand, kissing her on the forehead and being responsible for her overall well-being. In the US, I see that I can hang out with a girl as friends during the day and have sex with her at night, behind closed doors. Everybody is responsible for themselves, does their own thing. It's so much better.

Similarly, Participant 5 (27 years old, Masters student, with an American girlfriend said that in Turkey relationships require the male to take on both emotional and financial responsibilities. He elaborated:

When you go out, you pay for things, if she doesn't work, you provide, if she wants a gift, you get it for her. In the US, I don't feel such responsibility. When I go out with someone to a restaurant, she pays for her own dinner: Some women even take offense to a male paying for things. At first, I had hard time adjusting but now, I rather enjoy having less responsibility.

In addition, Participant 6 (28 years old, PhD student, with an American girlfriend) touched upon the sexual responsibility involved in romantic relationships. He reported:

If you get sexually involved with a girl in Turkey, it is automatically expected that you are responsible of her. In fact, I

could say that it is expected that you get married to her. This puts a lot of pressure on men which pushes them to propose, get engaged, and get married. But in the US, sex is like a sport. It's recreational. So, when I have a sexual encounter with someone here in the US, I feel like I just enjoyed myself. No sense of responsibility what so ever.

Participant 4 talked about the connection between dating and marriage. He said:

In TR, relationships are viewed as the stepping stone to marriage. Your girlfriend starts treating you like your mother. She shows extreme care towards you. She cooks and bakes for you. She expects that you call her at least once a day and, if you don't, she gets mad. An alternative can not even be imagined. Given these interactions, as a guy, you immediately feel responsible for her; you feel attached. However, American girls do not expect much, and as a result, men do not expect much of themselves. So, there is not a much of an attachment or a sense of responsibility.

### **Less romanticism and more sexuality.**

Some of the participants mentioned that they have found it difficult to be chivalrous with girls (their attempts were often misinterpreted or taken advantage of), and observed that romantic relationships in the host culture are more sexual compared to the relationships in the home culture. Few male participants referred to this observation in explaining that "they have become less romantic and chivalrous and adopted a more sexual approach to romantic relationships".

Participant 3, (25 years old, Masters student, with a, Mexican girlfriend) said:

Relationships here are more focused on sex, and are less romantic. I expect much less emotionality from an American girl, and as a result am less emotional in return. I don't think I can have a long term relationship here, culturally I can only see myself dating an Asian girl.

Participant 9, (26 years old, Masters student) reported:

My expectations from relationships have lowered. Given the cultural, linguistic and religious differences, I don't expect relationships to be romantic, deep, or emotional. I see my life here to be temporary which causes me to think of relationships as less romantic, and more sexual.

Participant 6 also referred to a similar theme:

Because I feel less responsible towards American girls, I don't feel guilty when I get sexual with girls. As a result, I have been enjoying my sexuality a lot more here. I feel more carefree, and can behave as I wish without any worries.

Participant 10, (29 years old, Masters student) talked about the gender differences in terms of sexuality. He said:

In Turkey, it is expected that females have no sexual experience before marriage, whereas for men, it's expected that they have as much experience as possible. This double standard can be very confusing and makes it hard for men to find good sexual partners. However, in the US, this is experienced very differently. I can gain a lot of sexual experiences without feeling responsible or having to get married. I do think that these experiences will serve me well both among my male friends and with the opposite sex.

Overall, male students' expectations from sex are much lower but their likelihood to engage in sex and frequency with which they do is higher. It seems like for these male participants, consideration of virginity is still seen as representation of chastity and women's status which actively influence their sexual behaviors (Sever & Yurdakul, 2001).

### **Female Themes**

When we examined the reports of the female participants, four main themes emerged: "lower and pessimistic expectations", "separation of dating and marriage", "expectation of less traditional gender roles", and "value of marital sex". Similar to their male counterparts, most female

participants also referred to at least two of the themes which implies that these is an overarching experience in regards to how change is experienced (see Table 2). Another interesting observation about the table was that even the female participants who started to think of dating and marriage as separately still saw sex to be connected to marriage. The themes are discussed below.

Table 2  
*Female Themes*

	Lower and pessimistic expectations	Separation of dating and marriage	Expectation of less traditional gender roles	Value of marital sex
Participant 11			X	X
Participant 12	X	X		X
Participant 13	X			X
Participant 14				X
Participant 15	X		X	
Participant 16			X	
Participant 17				X
Participant 18				X
Participant 19		X		X
Participant 20	X	X		
Participant 21	X		X	
Participant 22		X	X	

**Lower and pessimistic expectations.**

Similar to the male participants, the female participants also voiced a decrease in their romantic relationship expectations. Few participants have mentioned that language, religious, and other cultural differences made them believe that they would not be able to find a marriage partner in this country.

In addition, unlike their male counterparts, female participants

reported being disappointed by the dating etiquette in the US. More specifically, they mentioned that miss rituals such as paying for dinners, opening doors, and other chivalrous acts.

Participant 12, (23 year old, PhD student, with an American boyfriend) said:

Ok, we are equal but there are certain gestures that men should do because of chivalry such as taking the girl out for dinner, open doors etc. I just find American men to be rude at times.

Participant 21, (27 year old PhD, with an Indian boyfriend) said:

My expectations from relationships have been lower since I have been living in the US. I find romantic relationships in the US to be very short and superficial. I sometimes miss the chivalrous gestures of Turkish men. That's why I prefer dating people from similar cultures to mine. Men from collectivistic cultures seem to be more similar to Turkish men.

Participants 13, (26 years old, dating a Christian Lebanese) reported that there are huge difference between Turkey and US. She said:

After I moved here, I realized my expectations from men. I expect Turkish men to buy flowers on a first date, take me to nice dinners, and not have sexual expectations for long while. However, in the US, men expect something sexual on a first date. So, relationships become really focused on sex. Therefore, I don't think I can ever find my prince charming in this country.

### **Separation of dating and marriage.**

Most of the female participants mentioned a strong association between dating and marriage in Turkey however, they reported that as a result of living in the host country, they have learned to appreciate that dating does not always have to lead to marriage. Some participants mentioned that "they take their relationships less seriously, and enjoy them while they last as opposed to thinking immediately about the future implications and marriage".

Participant 12, (32 years old, living in the US for more than 3 years,

and who has an American boyfriend) said:

I used to think of dating as tied to marriage, but not anymore.

Participant 19, (27 years old, living in the US for more than 3 years, with an American boyfriend reported):

In Turkey when girls start dating, we immediately start dreaming about our wedding date, start thinking if families would get along. But, now, I am actually thinking that dating and marriage are different things; I only date to have fun.

Similarly, participant 22, (27 years old, PhD, with a Scottish boyfriend) shared her feelings about the difference between dating and marriage:

In Turkish, we have an expression that says ‘there are girls to marry and then, there are girls to have fun with’. I used to hate this expression; however, living in the US, this is my reality. I have dated people here that I would never even think of marrying or dating in Turkey. For instance, I dated a waiter here. In Turkey, I would never really date him because of our socio-economic differences but here I knew that it was just dating, and it was just for fun. Because of this separation, I feel more liberated.

Overall, these accounts are highly similar to males’ accounts of responsibility and their shift from romanticism to sexuality. It seems like both genders are experiencing dating as a separate, more recreational activity rather than an experience tied to marriage.

### **Expectation of less traditional gender roles.**

Few participants mentioned their experiences and observations in the host culture made them revisit and reevaluate the traditional values that they grew up with in the home culture and made them want more egalitarian relationships. This was true for dating interactions (such as paying) as well as their expectations from their future husbands in regards to child rearing, household chores etc.

Participant 11, (26 years old, Masters student) said:



I used to think that every time I went on a date, the man needs to pay, however, I don't think like that anymore. Actually paying for my dinner with my own money empowers me and makes me proud.

Participant 15, (30 year old PhD, with an Arabic boyfriend reported:

I want an egalitarian relationship with my partner. This includes household chores, providing, parenting etc. But along with the equality, I want my partner to remind me that I am a woman who deserves to be treated kindly. So, just because we are equal, it doesn't mean that he can treat me like a friend. I want my partner to have nice manners.

Participants 16, (24 years old, Masters student) commented on her conflicted feelings about gender roles by saying:

I am really confused about this topic. Based on traditional values, I like it when a guy picks me up at home, pays for food, and opens doors for me. However, I have to say that I have been also fascinated by the way Americans share responsibilities in child care and household chores. So, in a way, I want a world here I can have the traditional values along with postmodern egalitarianism. So, in a way, I pick and choose between the two cultures depending on my preferences. I am pretty sure just like I am confused; this contradiction would confuse my future boyfriends as well.

### **Value of marital sex.**

Unlike their male counterparts, for most of the female participants, sex remained to be a sacred concept strongly tied to marriage. These participants explained that this was mainly due to their religious values which were independent of where they were in the world.

Participant 13 reported:

Living in the U.S. softened my views about sex. I was against sex outside of marriage, living here made me think that it's an individual choice based on one's religion and spirituality. But I

personally wouldn't do it.

Similarly participant 14, (27 year old, Masters student), who has only had Turkish boyfriends said that she is not against sex but that she doesn't think it is worth engaging in premarital sexual relationships. It is important to note that this participant also mentioned her wish and plans of going back to Turkey in the long run. More specifically, she said that if she knew for sure that she would stay in the US, or that she would partner with someone who does not value or expect virginity, she could view her sexuality differently.

Participant 18, (26 years old, highly religious) shared her observations about the two countries.

I also see some sexuality being experienced in Turkish premarital relationships but it seems like in the US, sex is the main thing about the relationship. However, in Turkey, it's the emotions that make up the relationship. In Turkey, people can be in romantic relationships for 6-7 years, and still not experience sexuality. But, I can't think of that being a possibility here in the US. No man would ever tolerate that here. I think being patient sexually is a precious thing, it shows how much people value each other.

Overall, we see that plans of going back to Turkey shape women's expectations and experiences of sexuality. Concerns around societal judgements about virginity, family honor in the home country could play a role in sexual behaviors in the host country.

## **Discussion**

In the light of the above mentioned themes, it seems like living in an individualistic culture impacted certain aspects of romantic relationships for these participants. When we examined the gender differences, we noticed that the change trajectories of males and females have had significant overlap. Both genders expressed a decrease in their expectations vis-à-vis dating and marriage. Language barriers seem to be a commonality between both genders along with cultural and religious differences.

Male participants emphasized their reluctance to be chivalrous and their shift towards being more sexual in their romantic relationships. On the other hand, females expressed disappointment in lack of chivalry in the American dating culture. It is important to mention that there was some contradiction in women's experiences. More specifically, while some of them expressed a disappointment in lack of chivalry which is based on traditional gender roles, other reported a desire for more egalitarianism in their relationships. It was also interesting that the female participants' views of sex remained mainly unchanged because of religious beliefs and traditional Turkish cultural values. These findings suggest that premarital sex is still a sacred concept among Turkish women, more so than men. This can be explained by the fact that the Turkish culture holds more traditional values about women's sexuality and that women's sexuality is harshly punished (i.e. honor killings). In addition, it could be argued that some of these female participants are holding on to the sexual values of their home country because of their probability of returning back. On the other hand, men experience sexuality in the US very differently. Turkish men experience sexuality in the US with less responsibility and sense of guilt which allows them to enjoy it more. In addition, men expect that their sexual experiences in the US are making them more socially acceptable among male peers and even better partners for women. So, it is clear that despite of the cultural shifts experienced in the US, the discrepancy between the male and female sexuality remains.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

This study provides an important step towards understanding gender differences in the acculturation process of international students and/or immigrants vis-à-vis their romantic relationships. Given the increasing number of international students in the US, it's very important to understand how living in the US changes attitudes and expectations of international students and/or immigrants. This line of research is also important in better understanding the adjustment process of international students to the host culture given the importance of romantic relationships on overall well-being (Demir, 2008; Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010). It could be argued that international students

who are more satisfied with their romantic relationships would have an easier time adjusting to living in the U.S.

Future research should focus on various factors that might impact change in regards to romantic relationships including demographic factors like SES, religiosity, language skills, having an American romantic partner, having American or international friends, and personality traits. In addition, acculturation level of the participants and the intention about going back to the home country should also be taken into consideration. It would be important to see how these factors encourage both male and female international students to change or prevent them from changing in the host culture. Future research could also investigate the behaviors of participants so that we could understand how change in expectations translates into behaviors.

The study's contributions should be considered in the light of some limitations. This study is qualitative in nature and is not generalizable to all Turkish or all International students. Given that all of the participants were graduate students, the participants' level of educational attainment was not representative of the Turkish population which could have influenced the results. In addition, this study inherently has self-report biases due to the way the data was gathered through interviews.

Lastly, this study presents important implications for practitioners who work with international students especially in a college counseling setting. International students are more likely to have specific relationship adjustment problems, so understanding these needs would be important in helping them. Lastly, given sex related violence towards women (i.e. honor killings) in Turkey, there is a need to better understand the attitudes and beliefs of Turkish men and women with the hope of putting an end to such violence. The experience of living in the U.S. might change men and women in a positive way which then could translate into more egalitarian relationships back in the home country. We hope that positive attitudes towards relationship dynamics and sexuality will eventually translate into social policy protecting women.

Lastly, this study might be used to better understand the adjustment process of international students after coming back to their home culture. It is very really normative for international students to go through an adjustment process. This process might be more accentuated for Turkish students who had the chance to experience greater freedom

in the US, especially in their personal lives. Having gotten accustomed to personal freedom, greater self and sexual expression might be hard for returning Turkish students who are faced with stricter moral values and social regulations. It might be important to consider counseling services targeting such individuals in order to facilitate their transition back to their home culture.

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Raquel Delevi, Ph.D., MFTI, CFLE, is an Assistant Professor at California State University, Los Angeles. Her research focuses on various aspects of relationships including the impact of technology on relationships, interparental conflict, and cross-cultural meaning of romantic relationships.

Asli Bugay, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Guidance and Psychological Counseling at TED University (Ankara/TURKEY). Her research interests include forgiveness, self-forgiveness, romantic relationships, and rumination.

Contact Address: Direct correspondence to the authors at Department of Child and Family Studies, California State University, 5151 State University Drive Los Angeles, CA 90032. E-mail address: rdelevi@calstatela.edu