

MATERNAL REACTIONS TO  
AUTONOMOUS BEHAVIORS IN TODDLERS  
IN THE CONTEXT OF DIFFERENT MATERNAL REPRESENTATIONS



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Maternal Reactions to Autonomous Behaviors in Toddlers  
in the Context of Different Maternal Representations

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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## ABSTRACT

### Maternal Reactions to Autonomous Behaviors in Toddlers in the Context of Different Maternal Representations

The present study aims to investigate a sample of first-time mothers' reactions to emerging autonomous behaviors in their toddlers in the context of different maternal representations. With this purpose, five mothers-of-sons and five mothers-of-daughters who have a child of twelve to eighteen months of age from different socioeconomic backgrounds were interviewed. Thematic analysis method was used in the analysis of the semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Analysis of interviews yielded 4 themes regarding the mothers' reactions to autonomous behaviors: (1) interpretation of autonomous behaviors in toddlers, (2) subjective assessment of caregiving to an increasingly autonomous toddler, (3) maternal emotional reactions, and (4) maternal behavioral reactions. Furthermore, analysis of mothers' narrations indicated three types of maternal representations: Connected-Autonomous, Connected-Non-Autonomous, and Non-Connected. Mothers with different types of maternal representations displayed slight differences in their emotional and behavioral reactions to autonomous behaviors in their toddlers. While mothers with Connected-Autonomous representations reported generally positive emotions and autonomy supportive behaviors; mothers with Connected-Non-Autonomous representations reported higher levels of ambivalent emotions and considerable amount of autonomy supportive behaviors with some controlling behaviors in certain contexts. Lastly, mothers with Non-Connected representations reported limited affective and behavioral engagement with their toddlers.

## ÖZET

### Farklı Annelik Temsilleri Bağlamında

#### Yürümeye Başlayan Çocuklarda Özerk Davranışlara Anne Tepkileri

Bu çalışma, ilk kez anne olan bir grup annenin doğum öncesi ve doğum sonrası annelik temsilleriyle ilişkili olarak yürümeye başlayan çocuklarında ortaya çıkan özerk davranışlara tepkilerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, farklı sosyoekonomik geçmişten 12 ila 18 aylık çocuğu olan 5 erkek çocuk ve 5 kız çocuk annesi ile görüşülmüştür. Bu annelerle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış, derinlemesine görüşmeler tematik analiz yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir. Görüşmelerin analizi, annelerin özerk davranışlara karşı öznel tepkileriyle ilgili 4 tema ortaya çıkardı: (1) yürümeye başlayan çocuktaki özerk davranışa annenin yorumu, (2) gittikçe özerkleşen bir çocuğa bakım vermenin öznel değerlendirmesi, (3) annenin duygusal tepkileri ve (4) annenin davranışsal tepkileri. Dahası, annelerin anlatılarının analizinin sonucunda üç tip annelik temsili ortaya çıktı: Bağlı-Özerk, Bağlı-Özerk Olmayan ve Bağlı Olmayan. Farklı annelik temsillerine sahip annelerin, çocuklarının özerk davranışlarına karşı duygusal ve davranışsal tepkilerinde küçük farklılıklar göstermişlerdir. Bağlı-Özerk temsillere sahip anneler genel olarak olumlu duygular ve özerkliği destekleyici davranışlar bildirirken; Bağlı-Otonom Olmayan temsillere sahip anneler, daha yüksek düzeyde kararsız duygular ve önemli miktarda özerklik destekleyici davranışlarına ek olarak belirli bağlamlarda bazı kontrol davranışları bildirmişlerdir. Son olarak, Bağlı Olmayan temsilleri olan anneler, çocuklarıyla sınırlı duygusal ve davranışsal etkileşim bildirmişlerdir.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The physical unity of the baby and the mother during the pregnancy ends with birth. However, the baby continues to be dependent on parental care to meet his/her primary needs after the birth. With an optimal parental care, the baby moves away from a state of relative dependence towards a state of independence, becoming an autonomous functioning being. Both in theory and research, this transition has been primarily addressed from the perspective of the child while indicating the parental involvement as a crucial environmental factor in this process. However, although this process also signifies an important change for the mother, maternal subjective experience during this transition is rarely explored.

The aim of the present study is to investigate how a sample of mothers in the Turkish culture experiences the development of autonomous behaviors in their toddlers. With this aim, the maternal reactions of 10 primiparous women who have a child of twelve to eighteen months of age from different socioeconomic backgrounds were investigated. The effect of prenatal and postnatal maternal representations on maternal experience of emerging autonomous behaviors in their toddlers were explored.

In this chapter, firstly the developmental psychology literature on the child's transition from dependence to independence will be reviewed. Following this review, relevant literature on maternal subjective experience during this transition will be presented. Lastly, the literature on prenatal and postnatal maternal representations related to toddlers' emerging independence will be presented.

## 1.1 Attachment theory

In the field of developmental psychology, many studies on the mother and the child relationship in the early years of life has been addressed within the framework of attachment theory (Deci & Ryan; 2005). In his pioneer work, Bowlby (1969) suggested that infants are innately inclined to form relationships with others. He suggested that infants are dependent on parental care to meet not only the biological needs such as food and temperature regulation but also the interpersonal needs such as contact, comfort, and love. As the infant's signals for these needs are appropriately satisfied, the infant experiences the self as the initiator of the action and develops a sense of agency.

In this regard, he defined two innate behavioral systems in human beings: the attachment system and the exploratory system. He suggested that while the aim of the attachment system is to attain contact and maintain proximity to a familiar other who is perceived as better in coping with world; the aim of the exploratory system is to explore and master the world around. Although these two systems are seen in opposition at the first sight, it is shown that they work in a complementary manner. Thus, to the extent that the infant's needs are satisfied by an available and responsive parent, the child experiences the emotional security; hence the child develops a sense of self that is capable to explore the environment with a genuine interest.

As the initial orchestrator of this early relationship, the mother's behaviors were suggested as the most crucial determinant for the course of attachment relationship. Especially, the broad term of maternal sensitivity appeared as the most emphasized parental behavior which contributes to the security of the attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Maternal sensitivity was defined as the mother's availability and

responsiveness to the infant's needs in a consistent and appropriate manner (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Lamb and Easterbrooks, 1981).

It was suggested that the term maternal sensitivity can be divided into its two main components, namely: the mother's involvement and autonomy support behaviors (Cicchetti & Cohen, 2006). In this regard, while maternal involvement refers to the mother's behaviors to meet the infant's attachment needs such as need for comfort, love, and protection; maternal autonomy support refers to the mother's sensitive responsiveness to the child's initiations, signals, and needs, which contributes to the child's development of sense of agency and autonomy.

In the context of child's exploration, the mother is expected to function both as a safe haven whom the child can apply for the emotional refueling in cases of threats and as a secure base which encourages and supports the child to venture forth to explore. Both the theory and the research suggested that infants who are provided with both sensitive involvement and autonomy support experience secure attachment to the attachment figure and begin to develop a sense of personal autonomy. However, infants who develops an insecure attachment monitor their parents closely, hence fail to show healthy attempts to explore and develop a sense of autonomy. In this regard, it was obvious that although infants are innately equipped with the tendency to explore and master their environments, parental behaviors are suggested as critical in the development of the sense of autonomy and autonomous behaviors. In the following pages, the recent literature on the concepts of the autonomy and the autonomy support will be briefly reviewed.

## 1.2 Autonomy and autonomy support

Many theories on human development have suggested autonomy as a universally significant human need with some cultural and individual differences in how it is experienced in the socialization process (Waller, 1988; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996; Chirkov, Ryan, Kim & Kaplan, 2003). As a widely cited theory in autonomy literature, self-determination theory (SDT) suggested relatedness, competence, and autonomy as the basic human needs which pave the way for psychological health and effective interaction with the world (Deci & Ryan, 2015). Within SDT, the concept of autonomy is defined as one's volitional functioning in the direction of his/her goals, interests, and choices rather than being controlled by rewards or coercion. Then, autonomous behavior refers to behaviors that are intrinsically motivated, self-initiated, and regulated behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Although the various theories of motivation, child development, and psychoanalysis have addressed the concept of autonomy from different perspectives with different terminologies (Erikson; 1963; Winnicott; 1960, 1965; Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000); they shared a well-documented view that the sense of autonomy and autonomous behavior are developmental issues that unfold gradually within a supportive environment.

The infant's transition to toddlerhood was suggested as a critical developmental period due to marked increase in autonomous behaviors in the child (Erikson, 1963; Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975; Yarrow, Morgan, Jenings, Harman & Gaiter, 1982). With the transition to the second year of life, the toddlers experience some rapid changes in their locomotor, cognitive, and social-emotional abilities which enables them to explore and interact with the environment on their own will (Kochanska, Coy & Murray, 2001; Tomis-Lemanda & Bornstein, 1994; as cited in Kwon &

Elicker, 2012). Moreover, these growing abilities dramatically affect how toddlers interact with their social environments, primarily with parents. Due to these growing skills in mobility and communication; toddlers start to express their own will and behave accordingly in their daily activities even if these are counter to the parental requests (Mascolo & Fisher, 2007). Thus, the toddler shifts from the stage of passive compliance to the stages of direct defiance, non-compliance, and committed compliance sequentially as he/she grows older (Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990, Kochanska & Aksan, 1995).

This transition also necessitates some adjustments in existing parental behaviors and new set of skills and strategies in the parenting practice (Fagot & Kavanagh, 1993, Shaw et al., 1988; as cited in Kwon & Elicker, 2012). For instance, Waters, Kondo-Ikemura, Posoda, and Richters (1991) suggested that while caring for an infant involves warm and sensitive parental behaviors; caring for a more mobile toddler who has his/her own agenda may require more supervision and instructions. Similarly, Sroufe & Rutter (1984) suggested that maternal sensitivity and autonomy support may have a sequential importance in the child's attainment of security of attachment. Thus, it was suggested that while the maternal sensitivity is the more salient feature in infancy, maternal autonomy support is developmentally more relevant in toddler years.

### 1.2.1 Maternal autonomy support in toddlerhood

It was suggested that children are more likely to explore their environments, eager to acquire new skills, search for new challenges, and extend themselves especially if their environment supports their need for autonomy rather than controlling their attempts (Deci & Ryan, 2002). In this regard, supporting the child's self-initiated

expressions and behaviors in the direction of his/her goals, interests, and choices underlies autonomy support (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Whipple, Bernier & Mageau, 2011). Based on the same theoretical background, Clark & Ladd (2000) defined autonomy support “as a feature of the parent's behavior-specifically, as the degree to which parents were responsive, reflective, and validating of the child's opinions, feelings, and perspectives” (p. 485). All in all, autonomy support is conceptualized as the parent’s moderating their parental behaviors in accordance with the child’s agenda rather than imposing their own agenda by means behavioral (reward, punishment, coercion) or psychological (guilt induction, love withdrawal) controlling techniques (Barber, 1996; Whipple et al., 2011; Marble & Grolnick, 2013).

Autonomy supportive parental behaviors are subject to the developmental age of the child (McCurdy, Williams, Lee, Gomez & Fletcher, 2020). While most of the research on parental autonomy support dwells on the school-aged children and adolescents, infancy and toddlerhood periods are less frequently studied (Hughes, Lindberg & Devine, 2018; McCurdy et al., 2020). Accordingly, there are limited measures to assess the construct of autonomy support in toddlerhood years. Parental autonomy support behaviors are mostly aimed to be assessed in observational studies on parent-child interaction during semi-structured tasks such as puzzle/block-building, block-sorting or clean up tasks (McCurdy et al., 2020).

Whipple et al. (2011) developed a manual to assess maternal autonomy support during a puzzle-building task. They informed mothers who have a child of 15 months of age that the puzzle task was a slightly challenging task for their toddlers so that it would require their assistance to complete it. Based on the Grolnick, Frodi & Bridges (1984)’s autonomy support manual which consisted of two scales of verbal and non-verbal maternal behaviors, they grouped autonomy



support behaviors into four categories, namely: (1) the mother's degree of involvement to task according to the child's need and her adaptation of the task to an optimal challenging state for the child; (2) encourages the child to keep with the task by giving hints, suggestions and using a positive tone of voice; (3) takes the child's perspective and shows flexibility; (4) follows the child's lead, allows the child to determine his/her actions, provides opportunity to the child to feel that he/she is the active one in the completion of the task. Hughes et al. (2018) named these categories of maternal autonomy behaviors under the titles of Concern for Competence, Verbalizations, Flexibility and Perspective Taking, and Following the Child's Pace and Providing Opportunities for Choice, respectively. In addition to Whipple et al. (2011) and Hughes et al. (2018), many studies have also used Whipple et al. (2011)'s four component scale to assess maternal autonomy support during toddlerhood in the context of task completion (Bernier, Carlson, Deschenes & Matte-Gagne, 2012; Regueiro, Matte-Gagne & Bernier, 2020; Cimon-Paquet, Bernier, Matte-Gagne & Mageau, 2020).

On the other hand, few studies aimed to assess maternal autonomy support in toddlerhood via self-reports of parents (Zimmer-Gembeck, Webb, Thomas & Klag, 2015; Anderadakis, Joussemet & Mageau 2018; Andreadakis, Laurin, Joussement & Mageau, 2020). For instance, in the exploratory study on parental autonomy supportive practices in toddlerhood, Anderadakis et al. (2018) developed a questionnaire which consisted of 26 items of parental behaviors in the context of unenjoyable parental request such as take a bath, pick up toys or wear a hat. Parents of toddlers whose average age was 27 months were asked to convey how often they use the listed parental behaviors like: "acknowledging your toddler's feeling (e.g., anger, fear, etc.), explaining the reasons behind your request by giving short

explanations (you should give boots because it is cold)”. Eight parental practices were found as significantly related with the maternal autonomy supportive attitudes (The Parental Attitude Scale, Grolnick, Deci & Ryan, 1997). These practices can be listed as: providing short explanations, explaining the importance of the task, describing the problem in a neutral way, flexibly considering the toddler’s desire while making request, modeling the action that is requested, and listening, acknowledging, and accepting the toddler’s both positive and negative feelings. A questionnaire based on these 8 items was used in some other studies to assess maternal autonomy support (Andreadakis, Laurin, Joussement & Mageau, 2020).

### 1.2.2 Consequences of maternal autonomy support in toddlerhood

Maternal autonomy support during toddlerhood has been related with a range of positive cognitive and socioemotional child outcomes including better task persistence (Grolnick, Frodi & Bridges, 1984; Frodi, Bridges & Grolnick, 1985), competence (Matas, Arend & Sroufe, 1978), executive functions (Regueiro et al., 2020), math ability in school-age (Cimon-Paquet et al., 2020), rule internalization (Laurin & Joussement 2017), committed compliance (Kwon & Elicker, 2012) and security of attachment (Whipple et al., 2011).

Grolnick, Frodi & Bridges (1984) studied the effect of maternal autonomy supportive behaviors in the context of 12 months old infants’ exploration of a novel toy. They found that infants whose mothers showed more maternal autonomy supportive behaviors were more persistent to figure out how the toy operates. The authors followed the sample of this study and conducted a new study on stability of maternal autonomy support and its effect on child’s competence at the age of 20 months (Frodi, Bridges & Grolnick, 1985). They found a stability in the mother’s

autonomy support scores between 12 and 20 months. Additionally, they found that toddlers whose mothers were more autonomy supportive at 20 months showed more task persistence and competence in operating the novel toy.

Similarly, in the study on the relationship between attachment security and child competence, Mates, Arend & Sroufe (1978) also investigated the role of maternal autonomy supportive behaviors in the context of child exploration. They assessed attachment security of children at 18 months via Strange Situation Paradigm and their competence at 24 months via observing the mother-child interaction during two problem-solving tasks. Mothers' supportive presence and quality of assistance was assessed while their children are given tasks that are slightly challenging for them. Mothers are given a high score on supportive presence if they provided a secure base for exploration as well as being involved in the task, by such behaviors like helping the child when he/she was in need, regulating the child's mood, make the child feel that he/she has achieved the task. They are given a high score on quality of assistance if they provided some cues, kept the child on task, and followed the child's lead. As a result, in addition to a significant relationship between attachment security and child competence in the second year of life; they found that mothers whose toddlers are securely attached provided more supportive presence and appropriate assistance during a novel task. They suggested that there is an adaptive continuity in maternal behaviors as much as positive continuity in child outcomes.

Whipple et al. (2011) aimed to study whether the maternal autonomy support is predictive of attachment security independent from the maternal sensitivity at early toddlerhood. With this aim, they assessed maternal sensitivity via the home visit observations on mother-child interaction when the children were 12 months old. They assessed maternal autonomy support within a laboratory environment in which

they asked the mothers and toddlers to complete a puzzle task when the children were 15 months of age. They assessed the security of attachment at 15 months old via attachment behaviors Q-set based on home visitation observations. They reported that in addition to maternal sensitivity predicting the attachment security of the toddler, the maternal autonomy support provided a significant independent contribution in the prediction of attachment security with a comparable magnitude to the maternal sensitivity. They provided support for the idea that maternal autonomy support is a distinct construct from maternal sensitivity and emphasized that studies which investigate more the exploration side of the attachment is needed.

Research has been conducted to investigate the relationship between maternal autonomy support and executive functions at early childhood (Matte-Gagne & Bernier, 2011; Distefano, Galinsky, McClelland, Zelazo & Carlson, 2018; Rgueiro, Matte-Gagne & Bernier, 2020). Rgueiro, Matte-Gagne & Bernier (2020) investigated the role of attachment security and maternal autonomy support at early toddlerhood on executive function abilities in school-age. While attachment security predicted higher scores on all three executive function tasks namely the Digit-Span, Dimensional Change Card Sort and NEPSY Tower at school-age; maternal autonomy support in toddlerhood predicted higher scores only on NEPSY Tower which is developmentally a more challenging task which requires more complex planning strategies. They suggested that children whose parents were more autonomy supportive would internalize from their parents the strategies that are required to handle such a novel task.

Distefano et al. (2018) has investigated the role of maternal executive functions and maternal autonomy support on the child's executive functions at early childhood. They found that in addition to the significant correlation between

maternal and child executive function abilities, maternal autonomy supportive behaviors during a problem-solving task predicted the child executive function more strongly than the maternal executive function. Furthermore, they suggested that autonomy support behaviors in early childhood mediated the relationship between the mother and child executive function.

In their longitudinal study, Cimon-Paquet et al. (2020) investigated the role of maternal autonomy support at early toddlerhood on math ability in the first grade (Cimon-Paquet et al., 2020). They found that if the toddler's initial general cognitive ability was lower, having maternal autonomy support during early toddlerhood predicted higher math abilities at first grade. However, this relationship did not hold if the child already has higher general cognitive ability at toddlerhood.

Some studies investigate the role of maternal autonomy supportive behaviors in toddler's social-emotional development. For instance, Kwon & Elicker (2012) investigated the role of parental control strategies on toddler's committed compliance in the context of clean-up task. Committed compliance was defined as the child's engagement of the task with a sincere and pleasurable attitude and the parental control behavior was coded over 5 dimensions: no-interaction, task irrelevant communication, parental directiveness, power-assertion, and gentle guidance (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995). Toddlers' committed compliance was significantly related with parental gentle guidance, which is a closely related construct with autonomy support. Similarly, Anderadakis, Joussemet, and Mageau (2019) claimed that mothers who reported more maternal autonomy supportive behaviors mentioned more rule internalization behaviors (such as picking up toys without being asked) in their toddlers. On the other hand, in a study which was conducted to explore the toddler's food refusal, children of mothers who used more controlling strategies

during mealtime interactions showed more food refusal (Fries, Martin & van der Horst, 2017).

### 1.2.3 Antecedents of maternal autonomy support during toddlerhood

The above-mentioned studies show that maternal autonomy support as early as late infancy and early toddlerhood years has been linked with various positive child outcomes concurrently and longitudinally. Thus, maternal autonomy support is considered as one of the important parental practices during early childhood years and some researchers have aimed to investigate the factors which underpin and hinder autonomy supportive behaviors in mothers.

Some researchers aimed to investigate the effect of parental personality characteristics and child temperament on maternal behaviors. Clark, Kochanska & Ready (2000) investigated how maternal personality characteristics and child temperament affects mother's control strategies during a clean-up and prohibition task with their toddlers. They found that higher level of maternal neuroticism was significantly related with more maternal power assertion, which was defined as the mother's use of forceful intervention, directiveness and physical assertiveness. Above and beyond the main effect of maternal neuroticism, the toddler's negative emotionality in interaction with maternal neuroticism predicted more maternal power assertion, especially in showing limited perspective taking behaviors.

Similarly, Hughes & Lindberg (2018) also aimed to study the role of some parental, child, and environmental factors on maternal autonomy support. They investigated the effect of family SES, parental personality characteristics, child temperament and gender on maternal autonomy supportive behaviors during a puzzle

task. However, they failed to show support for any parental, child, and family factors to be significantly related with maternal autonomy support.

On the other hand, many research have been focus the link between parental attachment style and parenting behaviors during early childhood. Some documented that having a secure state of mind compared with having an insecure state of mind has predicted more adaptive parenting behaviors like more emotional availability and less intrusiveness at infancy (Slade, Belsky, Aber & Phelps, 1999) and toddlerhood (Crowell & Feldmann, 1988; 1991; Cohn, Cown, Cown & Pearson, 1992; Whipple, Bernier, Mageau; 2011).

Whipple, Bernier & Mageau (2011) investigated the relationship between maternal behaviors and maternal attachment security by using a dimensional approach. They found that while there is a negative correlation between the maternal dismissing state of mind and maternal sensitivity; there is a negative correlation between the maternal preoccupied state of mind and maternal autonomy support. Similarly, some other studies also reported similar results that mothers who are classified as dismissing showed less supportive behavior while mothers who are classified as preoccupied showed more coercive-intrusive behaviors toward their toddlers (Crowell & Feldmann, 1988; Adam, Gunnar & Tanaka, 2004).

Therefore, it was well-documented that the infant's transition to toddlerhood has a developmental significance due to the marked increase in autonomous functioning. Moreover, a growing literature suggests that the mother's parenting behavior during this transition as one of the most crucial factors affecting the child's developing autonomous functioning. However, the mother's personal experience of this transition and the resultant autonomous functioning in the child remained as under investigated.

### 1.3 Maternal subjective experience during toddlerhood

Although no previous study could be identified which specifically addressed the mothers' subjective experience of the development of autonomous functioning in their toddlers, a few studies have been conducted to investigate the maternal subjective experience during toddlerhood. In this regard, some studies investigated the parental emotion during early toddlerhood, as a construct which predicts the maternal well-being and parenting behaviors (Dix, 1991).

Aber, Belsky, Slade and Crnic (1999) studied changes in mothers' affective experience while parenting their toddler boys. Specifically, they investigated the changes in three conceptually and empirically independent categories of maternal affective experience (Lieberman, 1994; Slade & Aber, 1986), namely: Joy-Pleasure/Coherence, Anger, and Guilt-Separation Distress from 15 to 28 months of age. They also aimed to investigate the effect of observed mother-toddler interaction and daily hassles on maternal affective experience. They found a significant increase in the mother's experience of anger in relation to the increased daily hassles from 15 months to 28 months. In addition to that, mothers who got high scores on Joy-Pleasure/Coherence category of affective experience at 15 months were found less likely to report Anger at 28 months. It was speculated that because getting a high score on coherence was related with higher reflective and meaning making capacity; mothers' reflecting on their own and toddlers' experience may prevent them from getting angry in the face of developmentally normal toddlerhood difficulties. Furthermore, it was suggested that mothers who showed more positive parenting behaviors (sensitivity, positive affectivity, and cognitive stimulation) reported more Joy-Pleasure/Coherence.



Some studies have investigated parental emotion during toddlerhood in relation with the mother's adult attachment style. Slade, Belsky, Aber & Phelps (1999) investigated the relationship between maternal attachment style, parental emotion, and parenting behavior during early toddlerhood. They found that mothers with secure-autonomous attachment got higher scores on Joy-Pleasure/Coherence dimension of maternal affectivity. On the other hand, mothers with dismissing attachment got higher scores on Anger dimension. Furthermore, maternal affective experience predicted the observed maternal behavior. While the higher scores on Joy-Pleasure/Coherence dimension predicted more positive and less negative parenting behaviors, higher scores on Anger predicted less positive parenting.

Adam, Gunnar & Tanaka (2004) investigated the relationship between stable affective functioning of the mother, maternal attachment style and observed parenting behavior during toddlerhood. They found a significant relationship between the maternal attachment style and parental affectivity. Mothers with dismissing attachment are found less in positive affectivity while mothers with preoccupied attachment are found to have more anxiety and negative affectivity compared to mothers with secure-autonomous attachment. Furthermore, mothers with preoccupied attachment scored the highest in all dimension of maternal affectivity: positive affectivity, negative affectivity, anxiety, and depression. They also found a significant relationship between maternal affectivity and observed parenting behaviors. Mothers with preoccupied attachment showed more intrusiveness and mothers with dismissing attachment and higher levels of depressive symptoms showed less warmth and responsiveness.

On the other side, a special construct was suggested to describe the maternal subjective experience when she stays apart from her child. Maternal separation

anxiety is defined as the mother's experience of unpleasant emotional state which involves the intense feelings of sadness, worry, and guilt regarding short separations from the child (Hock, McBride & Gnezda, 1989). Bowlby (1973) suggested that just as the adaptive functioning for the child is to maintain the balance between closeness and distance with the mother, the mother's task is also to maintain this balance with her child starting from the first days of life. In this regard, it was suggested that the mother's having a firm, differentiated sense of self enables her to establish a close tie with her child while being able to manage separations rather than experiencing the loss of the other as the loss of the self (Edward, Ruskin & Turrini, 1981; as cited in Hock & Schirtzinger, 1992). Mothers who have a differentiated sense of self enjoyed the closeness with their children but also encourage the autonomy of the self and the child. However, mothers who lack such a differentiated sense of self can interpret the child's age-appropriate autonomy development as a rejection and loss of self; experience higher levels of separation anxiety and could prevent the child from developing further autonomous functioning (Hock & Schirtzinger, 1992).

Some studies provided empirical support for the view that higher levels of maternal separation anxiety were related with the higher levels of maternal intrusive behavior and mother's discouragement of further autonomous functioning in the child (Cooklin, Giallo, D'Esposito, Crawford & Nicholson, 2013; Stifter et al, 1993; Aber, 1987). For instance, Cooklin et al. (2013) investigated the effects of maternal separation anxiety in infancy (3-12 months) and the parenting behavior in toddlerhood (2-3 years) in a sample of Australian mothers. They found that mothers who reported more separation anxiety reported more overprotective parenting behavior which prevents their toddlers from experimenting independent mobility, age-appropriate challenges, and experience the feeling of mastery. Furthermore,

higher maternal separation anxiety is found to be related with lower levels of autonomy supportive (Wuyts, Soenens, Vansteenkiste & Petegem, 2017) and higher levels of controlling parenting behaviors (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Duriez & Goossens, 2006) at adolescence as well.

Some studies suggested that maternal separation anxiety was subject to various maternal, child, and environmental factors. For instance, Levy (1970) suggested that maternal separation anxiety may have a link with the mother's early relations with her parents. Mothers who have not experienced a loving, warm, sensitive parenting during their childhood become overprotective parents which show up in overvaluation and overinvolvement with their children when they become parents. It was argued that in their parenting experience, they mentally transformed their need for parental love, referred as affect hunger, as the need of their children to them. Thus, although they needed the love of the child and want to maintain closeness while avoiding separations, they interpreted it as the wish of their children.

In this regard, some empirical studies have investigated the relationship between the mother's representation of relationship with her parents and maternal separation anxiety. Lutz & Hock (1995) found that mothers who have insecure attachment representations which are characterized by negative childhood experiences with parents, especially the feeling of rejection and discouragement of autonomy, reported higher levels of maternal separation anxiety at 2 months.

Another study examined the relationship between maternal attachment style and their behavioral response in separation-reunion episode (Crowell & Feldman, 1991). Results showed that mothers with autonomous-secure attachment style form a warm connection with their toddlers and prepare them for the upcoming separation with little anxiety at separation. Mothers with dismissing attachment were not

anxious but did not prepare their toddlers for separation as much as secure-autonomous mothers. Mothers with preoccupied attachment showed higher levels of separation anxiety, had much difficulty leaving the room, and showed the least level of preparation behavior. These results provided support for the hypothesized link between the mother's childhood experience with her parents and maternal separation anxiety with her child.

The mother's perception of the child temperament was found related with maternal separation anxiety. Mothers who perceived their infants temperamentally negative or difficult to adapt reported higher levels of separation anxiety (McBride & Belsky, 1988; Hsu, 2004). Furthermore, Fein, Gariboldi and Boni (1993) reported that mothers who are younger, less educated, having less social support, less varied stimulation in home and having a temperamentally negative child reported more maternal separation anxiety. The maternal employment preference and social support resources have been found to be effective in mother's experience of separation anxiety. Mothers who preferred to return their work-life reported more adaptation to be separate from their infants and less maternal separation anxiety compared to the mothers who preferred to stay at home (DeMeis, Hock & McBride, 1986; Hsu, 2004; Cooklin et al., 2014). In this regard, mothers who have reliable others who can participate in childcare reported less separation anxiety, especially if they have grandmother support.

Beyond all these maternal and child variables, family socioeconomic status was also found related with maternal separation anxiety. Cooklin et al. (2014) claimed that mothers who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and live-in poor-quality neighborhoods reported higher levels of maternal separation anxiety. Thus, they argued that the maternal separation anxiety is not only related with mother's

individual characteristics, but also the social circumstances that the mother lives in should be considered.

#### 1.4 Maternal representations

Theory and research have suggested that the mother-child relationship starts well before the birth of the infant, in the mind of the mother as mental representations (Stern, 1995). In pregnancy, mothers construct highly elaborated fantasies, dreams, expectations, worries, and fears regarding their unborn babies, themselves-as-future-mothers, and the relationship between them. Furthermore, it is often documented that mothers' prenatal representations has an enormous influence on their postnatal representations and the real mother-infant relationship. Thus, for the last 4 decades, infant research pays great attention to the relationship between the maternal representations, parenting behavior, attachment security, and the probable psychosocial conditions that may affect the network of those relationships.

Zeneah et al. (1985) found that both mothers and fathers' prenatal representations of their infants' temperament on several dimensions are significantly correlated with their perception of their babies' temperament postnatally. Thus, this study provided support for the view that there is a stability between the parental prenatal and postnatal perception of the baby.

In another study of Zeneah and his colleagues (1997), they investigated the stability of the maternal representations over time and the relationship between the mother's infant representations and infant's attachment security at 1-year-old. They used a semi-structured, 1-hour lasting interview, called as Working Model of the Child Interview (WMCI) to understand the parents' perception of their children, subjective experiences, and the relationship with them. WMCI yields 3 categories of

maternal representations: balanced, disengaged, and distorted. Mothers who have balanced representations are found as psychologically open to experience their infants' expression of both positive and negative emotions and individual personality characteristics; and describe a positive tie between them and their infant. Mothers who have disengaged representations are found as having limited openness to the affective signals that comes from their infant and showing decreased affective involvement. Mothers who have distorted representations are found as showing heightened affective involvement with their infant but unable to be open to the actual, idiosyncratic signals that come from their infant or view their infant as the parent. They found a stability between the late pregnancy and one year after WMCI classifications of mothers. They also found a concordance between the mothers' balanced representation of their infants and infants' attachment security at 1 year of age.

Similarly, Ammaniti (1991) studied the effect of the prenatal maternal representations on parent-infant relationship and attachment security at 1 year of age. In his longitudinal case study, two mothers are interviewed about the representations of themselves as mothers and their babies in pregnancy and their children's attachment security is assessed by Strange Situation Procedure at 1 year of age. In comparison of two mothers' representations and real interactions between them and their infant, a strong impact of the prenatal maternal representations on real parent-infant interaction, especially those involving affect, is found. For example, the mother who represented her infant in detail but left space for transformation of it through the real interaction with the infant was found more sensitive and responsive to the needs of her infant; while the mother who had rigid representations of her baby was found incapable of reading and responding to her babies' spontaneous affective

signals. While the first couple form a secure relationship, the second one formed an insecure relationship.

In addition to numerous studies that investigated the link between the maternal representations and attachment security, another line of research focuses on how mothers' mental representations affect their parenting behavior while in interaction with their individual child. For example, Dayton, Levendosky, Davidson & Bogat (2010) investigate the relationship between mothers' prenatal representations of their infants and their parenting behavior at 1 year of age. Mothers with balanced representations were found more likely to show positive parenting, which is characterized by being warm, joyful, sensitive, and engaged compared to mothers with non-balanced representations. Mothers with dismissing representations were found more likely to show controlling parenting and mothers with distorted representations were found more likely to show hostile parenting.

Similarly, a few other studies also suggested that mothers who have more pleasurable and coherent representations showed more positive and less negative interactions with their toddlers while mothers whose representations of their infant is colored by anger and confusion showed negative interactions (Slade et al, 1999) and mothers with dismissing representations showed less sensitivity, encouragement and guidance (Sokolowski, Hans, Bernstein & Cox, 2007).

Beside the research within attachment theory and parenting behavior, a group of studies aim to investigate the role of other psychological and socio-cultural variables on maternal representations. For example, Lee and Hans (2015) investigated the role of prenatal depression on young, low-income mothers' perception of their infant and their relationship. Mothers with prenatal depression perceived their children and relationship with their children as more difficult than

non-depressed mothers both in pregnancy and at 4, 12, 24 months of postpartum even if they were no longer depressed. Additionally, older and more educated mothers are found more likely to perceive less difficulty irrespective of depression status. In another study, the relationship between mothers' psychological distress and their way of representing their toddlers was investigated (Sokolowski et al, 2007). Mothers with higher hostility on Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) found to be more prone to provide non-balanced representations of their toddlers, which are more colored by disappointment, anger, difficulty, and indifference. Like Lee and Hans (2015), maternal education is suggested as one of the factors that increase the probability of mother's having a balanced representation of her child (Sokolowski et al., 2007).

Ammaniti, Tambelli and Odoriso (2013) examined the role of psychosocial risk factors on mothers' prenatal representations of their infant and themselves as mothers. They compared the representations of mothers who are classified as at-risk group and non-risk group via Psychosocial Risk Interview (Ammaniti et al., 2006). Mothers who have more than 3 risk conditions such as low educational attainment, low socio-economic status, single motherhood, history of abuse, lack of social support, and like classified as at-risk group. They used the revised version of the Interview of the Maternal Representations during Pregnancy (IRMAG-R, Ammaniti et al., 2010) in order to stimulate mothers' narration of their past experiences, their experience of pregnancy and motherhood, and their progressive representations of their fetus. The content and structure analysis yields 3 categories of representations: Integrated/Balanced, Restricted/Disinvested, Not Integrated/Ambivalent. In Integrated/Balanced group, mothers provide coherent, detailed, and affectively colored representations of their past experiences, their infants and themselves as



mothers which are open to changes. In Restricted/Disinvested group, mothers' narrations are away from personal and affective experience, lack detailed fantasies but highly colored by rigidity and control. In Not Integrated/Ambivalent group, mothers provide rigid and conflicted representations which oscillate between excessive involvement and struggle to maintain distance. Results showed that mothers in non-risk group are found more likely to have Integrated/Balanced representations than at-risk mothers. While the dominant category of representation was Integrated/Balanced representation in the non-risk group; it was Not Integrated/Ambivalent representations in the at-risk group. Thus, this study provides support for the adverse effect of the psychosocial risk factors on maternal representations. Therefore, such results confirmed that mothers with prenatal depression, low level of education, income, socio-emotional well-being, among other risks, are significantly more prone to have negative representations of their infants and themselves as mothers.

### 1.5 Gender

The baby's gender is suggested as a trigger for significant associations and identifications in mother's mind, which in turn affect the real relationship (Winestein, 1989). In this regard, Chodorow (1999) suggested that because women have the same gender with their daughters, mothers of girls showed stronger identification and more difficulty in recognizing their daughters' separateness from them than mothers of sons. Mother-daughter relationships are more likely to be characterized by patterns of fusion, projection, denial of separateness, and narcissistic overidentification than mother-son relationships, furthermore; daughters themselves fail to recognize her separateness and experience themselves as

extensions of their mothers. On the other hand, because mothers are of different gender from their sons, they experience their sons as “sexual the other” and further push them for differentiation. Bibring (1953; as cited in Chodorow 1999) suggested that in industrial societies, the decline of the man’s presence in family life and childcare resulted in father-absence for children and husband-absence for wives. The wife is found to divert her attention and affection to the next opposite-sex other, to her son, and behaves seductively. Thus, while the daughters are experienced as the self in mothers’ fantasy, boys are experienced as the other.

Some recent studies have investigated whether parents display gender-differential parenting behaviors toward their sons and daughters. In terms of autonomy development, a group of researchers have proposed gender-differentiated pathways for girls and boys based on their previous studies on affect regulation (Robinson, Little & Bringen, 1993) and walking experience in toddlerhood (Biringen, Emde, Campos & Appelbaum, 1995). Robinson & Biringen (1995) suggested that while the male trajectory of autonomy involves a greater sense of agency (by eliciting more matched emotions in their mothers) and physical separateness (by showing more protest behaviors in response to higher intrusiveness, more frequency in mothers’ following their sons’ lead); female trajectory of autonomy involves maintaining proximity to mother and active participation in emotion regulation (by eliciting more matched emotions by more creation of shared states). Thus, these results provided support for Chodorow’s argument that boys are more socialized to be autonomous while girls are more socialized to be related.

Furthermore, a more comprehensive, meta-analysis on the relationship between child-gender and parental autonomy support versus controlling behaviors has suggested a negligibly more supportive behaviors towards boys than girls

(Endendijk, Groeneveld, Bakermans-Kranenburg & Mesman, 2016). Moreover, a time effect has been found regarding gender-differentiated parental practices. While studies published in 1970s-1980s indicated more autonomy supportive parental behaviors toward boys than girls; studies published in 1990s to today indicates more autonomy supportive parental behaviors toward girls than boys.

## 1.6 Culture

While autonomy appears as a well-established and highly valued construct in Western societies, a growing body of cross-cultural research investigates the similarities and differences in conceptualization and socialization of the autonomy in non-Western societies. While individualistic cultures mostly endorse the socialization of an independent sense of self which is defined as being autonomous, decontextualized, self-expressive, and self-maximizing; collectivistic cultures mostly endorse the socialization of an interdependent sense of self which is defined as feeling connected to others, contextualized, obedient and maximizing group coherence (Hofstede, 1980; Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Triandis, 1995). These differences in the relative importance given to relatedness and autonomy in different cultures were also reflected in parental beliefs, values, and practices. For instance, in a study which investigates the socialization goals of a sample of Anglo American and Puerto Rican mothers of toddlers, Harwood et al. (1996) reported that while Anglo American mothers indicated self-maximization (consisted of three items of independence, self-confidence/happiness, development of personal skills) as the desired qualities in their children; Puerto Rican mothers indicated the Proper Demeanor (consisted of three items of being a respectful, calm and gentle person) as the desired quality in their children.

Moreover, the cultural differences between Western and non-Western societies appeared in the parental perception and interpretation of autonomous behaviors. For instance, Edward (1995) suggested that the desire for autonomy and separateness from the mother is not a valid theme of toddlerhood for non-Western community of Mayan in Chiapas, Mexico. Similarly, while Japanese mothers pleurably reported their children's obedience behaviors and initiation of relationship with others as the examples of independent behaviors in their preschoolers, Israeli mothers reported their ability to occupy themselves (like playing by themselves) and take care of themselves (clothing, cleaning, eating etc.) as the examples of independent behaviors. Furthermore, Puerto Rican mothers who reported more collectivistic orientation were found to encourage and support their toddler's mastery motivation in the relational domain rather than object domain.

Furthermore, various studies reported that mothers in some collectivistic cultures valued and endorsed bodily contact (carrying, co-sleeping, grooming), proximal relationship (hugging, kissing, praising), and breastfeeding more strongly than Western individualistic societies. However, in the study comparing two Western (Greek and German) and three non-Western (Cameroonian Nso, Costa Rican and Indian Gujarati) societies, Keller et al. (2004) suggested that mothers in two Western societies show proximal expression of warmth as much as mothers in non-Western societies do. Furthermore, what differs in two groups of mothers is that mothers in Western societies engaged in more object stimulation, function as playmates and diverted their children's attention to the environment more frequently than the non-Western mothers. Additionally, Western mothers and children are more likely to experience separation-reunion scripts in their daily routine than some non-Western mother-child dyads.

Although Turkey is characterized as a collectivistic culture, some intracultural differences in Turkish society have been suggested due to the changes in education, urbanization, and socioeconomic development for three decades (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). According to the results of the Value of Child (VOC) study; a general increase in psychological VOC, decrease in economic VOC, and increase in girl preference are observed among young mothers of three social strata: rural, urban/low SES, and urban/high SES. However, economic VOC and boy preference are found higher among rural mothers, followed by urban/low SES and urban/high SES.

Moreover, over three decades, while there is a general decrease in desire for having a child who is minding parents (obedient child) among all groups; rural and urban/low SES mothers differ from urban/high SES mothers in terms of the qualities that they desire in their children. The first group favored minding parents, popularity, success at school more strongly and independence/self-reliance less strongly than urban/high SES group. These desired qualities of both minding parents and being self-reliant bring the combination of the control and autonomy orientations in child-rearing practices and endorsement of emotional interdependence across generations, but certainly with varying degrees in different strata of the society.

On the other side, a few studies on the parental attitudes and behaviors regarding autonomy socialization in early childhood have been conducted in Turkey. For instance, parallel with the results of VOC study, Yağmurlu, Çıtlak, Dost & Leyendecker (2009) reported that while highly educated urban mothers wanted their children to be autonomous and self-maximizing individuals more strongly than the less educated urban mothers; less educated urban mothers wanted their children to be compliant, respectful toward elders and well-behaved people who values family

relationships more strongly than highly educated mothers. Similarly, Nacak, Yağmurlu, Durgel and van de Vijver (2011) investigated the developmental expectations of urban and rural mothers with preschoolers. They reported that while urban mothers reported earlier ages for the development of skills in most of the domains (physical, cognitive, social, self-regulation, autonomy, family inclination, and self-sufficiency); rural mothers reported earlier ages for the development of skills in moral values and obedience. In comparison of high and low educated urban mothers, highly educated mothers reported earlier ages for all skills and reported lower levels of obedience from their children and permissiveness in their parenting style.

In terms of the observed parenting behaviors, compared to lower SES mothers, higher SES Turkish mothers are found less controlling and more responsive during the interaction with their toddlers in naturalistic home observations (Akçınar & Baydar, 2014). Furthermore, Corapci, Benveniste & Bilge (2018) studied the relationship between maternal self-construal style and maternal sensitivity in dyadic interactions between mothers and their preschool children. Mothers who have autonomous-related self-construal are found more likely to combine warmth, responsiveness with autonomy supporting behaviors. As expected, autonomous-related self-construal and more sensitive maternal behaviors were found more frequently among the mothers from high SES.

### 1.7 Present study

As it is well-documented in the literature, the transition from infancy to toddlerhood signifies an important change both for the child and the mother due to the marked increase in child's autonomous functioning. While this transition was mostly

studied from the perspective of the child while suggesting the mother's autonomy support as a critical factor, the mother's subjective experiences during this transition and reactions to the development of autonomous behaviors in their toddlers appeared as a neglected area.

The present study aimed to study how mothers in Turkish culture has been experiencing their children's transition from infancy to toddlerhood and the resultant increased autonomous functioning in their children. With this aim, a qualitative method was preferred to explore the internal subjective experiences of these mothers in a more in-depth way. Furthermore, maternal experience of development of autonomous functioning in their toddlers were investigated in relation the mothers' prenatal and postnatal representations regarding their infants, themselves-as-mothers, and the relationship between them. Lastly, the role of child's gender on maternal experience was aimed to be investigated in this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHOD

The main aim of the present study is to investigate a group of first-time mothers' experience of development of autonomous behavior in their toddlers in relation with their prenatal and postnatal maternal representations. To study this subject, a qualitative research method was preferred for several reasons. Firstly, because the child's development of autonomous behavior mostly addressed from the perspective of the child; there is limited literature and no validated scale which comprehensively addresses this issue from the perspective of the mother. Secondly, a qualitative research method was preferred to get a depth grasp of these mothers' subjective inner processes starting from the pregnancy to their children's transition to toddlerhood. In-depth interview method was preferred to create opportunities to the emergence of conscious and unconscious individual motivations, beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in mothers' narrations regarding these critical periods of feminine life. Thirdly, a qualitative method is preferred to explore how a group of mothers from the different strata of Turkish society conceptualize and experience the concept of autonomous behavior in their toddler boys and girls. Thus, to have a sense of the possible cultural, intracultural, and gender-based similarities and differences in maternal experiences; a qualitative method is applied in this study.

From a developmental point of view, although there is a growing body of quantitative research on the role of maternal autonomy support on various positive child outcomes, qualitative studies on the maternal subjective experience of autonomy development in early toddlerhood is very scarce. Thus, the emergence of relevant themes regarding the maternal experience can contribute to the identification



of the mechanisms which give rise to autonomy supportive or controlling behaviors in mothers of toddlers, which in turn can contribute the literature on positive parenting behaviors and the individual well-being of the mothers.

From a cultural point of view, Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca (2005) reported a change in Turkish family model in terms of how the relationality and autonomy are negotiated within the family. This change in the family was reflected itself in parental values ascribed to the children. In this regard, this study aims to investigate how a group of Turkish mothers experience the relationality and autonomy in their early relationship with their children, starting from pregnancy to the transition to toddlerhood. Especially, the maternal experiences regarding their children's transition from a dependent state to a more independent, autonomous functioning state was aimed to be explored via a qualitative method because there is no validated instrument to study this subject in Turkish culture.

## 2.1 Sample of the study

The participants of this study were 10 first-time mothers who have a child of twelve to eighteen months of age ( $M=14,5$ ). While five of these mothers were mothers-of-daughters, the other five were mothers-of-sons. Mothers purposefully chose from 3 different socioeconomic background: low SES, middle SES, high SES.

Socioeconomic status of participants was decided by considering their education level and life conditions that they live in. The number of mother-of-daughters and mothers-of-sons was kept equal in each socioeconomic group. As a result, the sample consisted of 2 mothers-of-daughters and 2 mothers-of-sons from low SES, 2 mothers-of-daughters and 2 mothers-of-sons from high SES, and 1 mother-of-daughter and 1 mother-of-son from middle SES. The age of mothers ranged from 26

to 38 (M=30,9) and they were married for 2,5 to 9 years. Except for one mother who was in divorce process, all mothers were from intact families. Demographic information is presented in Table 1.

All participants were employed before the pregnancy. While all mothers from high SES and 1 mother from middle SES returned to their work or academic career and are assisted by a grandmother or a babysitter in childcare; all mothers from low SES and 1 mother from middle SES did not return their work and took up childcare by themselves. Except two mothers, all mothers continued to breastfeed their toddlers. Six mothers reported that their toddlers can walk independently while four of them reported that their toddlers just crawl or walk with help. Mothers who participated in this study were received story books that are appropriate for their children's age.

In this study, participants are purposefully chosen from mothers who have a child of twelve to eighteen months of age, thus just in the transition from infancy to toddlerhood. This age range includes the developmental period of life which the child develops a growing interest to the outside world, displays a marked increase in locomotor behaviors and elation of mood while functioning autonomously (Mahler, 1963). Thus, this age range was preferred to investigate how mothers who are currently experiencing this transition reacts to the emergence of autonomous behaviors in their children.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Id	Maternal Age	Maternal Education	Paternal Education	SES	Maternal Employment Status	Gender of Child	Age of Child (in months)
P1	26	Two-year degree	High school	Low	Unemployed	Girl	16
P2	30	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	High	Employed	Girl	14
P3	30	High school	Primary school	Low	Unemployed	Boy	14
P4	38	High school	High school	Low	Unemployed	Girl	18
P5	30	High school+ religious education	Bachelor's degree	Low	Unemployed	Boy	17
P6	29	PhD student	Bachelor's degree	High	Employed	Boy	15
P7	34	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	High	Employed	Boy	14
P8	33	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	High	Employed	Girl	12
P9	26	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	Middle	Unemployed	Boy	12
P10	33	Bachelor's degree	Two-year degree	Middle	Employed	Girl	13

## 2.2 Instruments

The data of the study was collected through a semi-structured interview that is developed by the authors. In the phase of pilot study, 3 mothers-of-sons and 3 mothers-of-daughters from different socioeconomic background were interviewed. These interviews gave rise to some revisions in questions. The revised form was used in data collection (See Appendix A and B for interview questions in English and Turkish, respectively). Except one interview which lasted about 4 hours, interviews lasted approximately 1,5 hours. The form consisted of 5 main parts which involves 40 questions and 1 closing question to give a space to the participants to add anything related with the issues talked on during the interview. The first part was designed to get retrospective information about the mother's experience of pregnancy and her prenatal representation of the child and self-as-a-mother. The second part was about the mother's experiences after birth and her postnatal

representations of the child and the self-as-a-mother. The third part was mainly about the current relationship between the mother and the child and mother's reaction to the child's developing autonomous behaviors. The fourth part was on the mother's parental representations. The last part was about the perceived maternal efficacy. However, the mothers' narrations regarding only first 3 parts of the interview were utilized for the purpose of the present study.

The interview form used in this study was mainly constructed based on the previously designed maternal representation questionnaire that was used in Buldur & Fişek (2009), which was also an author-developed questionnaire based on questionnaires that were developed by pioneers of the field such as Working Model of the Child Interview (Zeanah, et al., 1995; as cited in Ilıcalı, & Fişek, 2004), IRMAG (Ammaniti et al., 1992; as cited in Ilıcalı, & Fişek, 2004). Unlike Buldur & Fişek (2009) study, in the present study we added the part on the mother's reaction to the toddler's developing autonomous behaviors. Questions of this part were constructed based on the existing literature and the issues that emerged in the pilot interviews done for this study.

### 2.3 Procedure

The mothers who met the desired criteria for inclusion are informed that the present study is about the first-time mothers' subjective experience of early motherhood. Convenient sampling method was used to reach the participants. Mothers were visited by the same researcher in their home or offices. The interviews were done in a silent room where nobody's presence was allowed except for the researcher, the mother, and the child. An informed consent form was given to each participant. Each participant's permission for recording her voice was taken. All interviews were taped

via a voice recorder. Before starting the interview, participants are informed that this interview was designed to investigate their experience of motherhood during pregnancy and after birth. They were reminded their right not to answer questions that they do not want to answer and their right to quit the interview whenever they want. After each interview, the participants were thanked and given their promised gifts for their participation.

#### 2.4 Method of analysis

In the present study, thematic analysis method was used to analyze the semi-structured, in-depth interviews of 10 participants. Thematic analysis is defined as a way of searching, identifying, and analyzing the certain themes or patterns across the data set by following six main steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First step involves the analyst's review of the existing literature, transcribing the data and reading the data several times back and forth. Second step involves generating initial codes by going through each participants' narrations by line-by-line. Third and fourth step involves clustering the initial codes into broader themes and reviewing and restructuring them until reach a most refined but inclusive set of themes. Fifth step involves giving clear and explanatory names to the themes. And the last step involves the reporting the result of the analysis in an organized and concise form.

#### 2.5 Reflexivity

Beside the content of the interviews, the process between the interviewer and the respondents during the interviews is also important. Firstly, while most mothers were very eager to participate an interview on their maternal experiences, a few of them presented a more neutral or hesitant attitude. Most mothers were open to share their

experiences and provided detailed and affectively involved narrations while a few of them was less open to share their personal experiences and provided less detailed, affectively disengaged, and pedantic narrations. Except for two mothers, the emotional tone of the interviews was predominantly positive. Only one mother displayed a clear refusal about thinking about her toddler's further autonomous functioning. Lastly, some mothers questioned the interviewer's subjective position in relation to the research subject. The female interviewer, who had no children, was perceived by some mothers as someone who cannot understand them, while some mothers perceived her as a prospective mother and share some of their experiences in more detail to prepare her for motherhood.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

Results will be given in two parts. Firstly, the themes regarding the maternal reactions to autonomous behaviors in toddlers will be presented. Following this part, the effect of maternal representations on mothers' reactions to autonomous behaviors in their toddlers will be presented.

#### 3.1 Themes on maternal reactions to autonomous behaviors in toddlers

The analysis of the interviews yielded four main themes regarding how mothers react to development of autonomous behaviors in their toddlers. The first theme refers to the mothers' subjective interpretation of autonomous behaviors in their toddlers. This theme consists of three sub-themes, distinguished by the perspective from which the mothers interpreted their children's autonomous behaviors: from the perspective of the child, of the mother's self, or that of the mother-child relationship. The second theme comprises the mothers' subjective assessment of providing care to an increasingly more independent child. This theme consists of two sub-themes, namely, the caregiving task as becoming easier, or conversely, as more difficult on behalf of the mother. The third theme refers to the mothers' emotional reactions to their children's transition from relative dependence to independence. This theme consists of three sub-themes: positive, negative, and ambivalent emotions. The last theme refers to the mothers' parenting behaviors in the context of their toddlers' developing autonomy. This theme consists of three sub-themes: supportive-encouraging, interfering-restrictive, and pushing behaviors.

### 3.1.1 Mothers' interpretation of the autonomous behavior in their toddlers

Mothers' interpretation of the autonomous behaviors in their toddlers appeared as a crucial theme in understanding how the mothers internally experienced and reacted to their toddlers' developing independence. This theme refers to the ways in which mothers understood, interpreted, conceptualized, and made attributions to their toddlers' autonomous behaviors. The analysis of mothers' narrations yielded three underlying sub-themes in terms of the perspective that the mothers took to interpret the autonomous behaviors in the child: from the perspective of the child, of the mother's self, or that of the mother-child relationship.

#### 3.1.1.1 From the perspective of the child

This sub-theme refers to mothers' interpretation of their toddlers' emerging autonomous behaviors from the perspective of their children. In other words, this part refers to what these behaviors indicate about the child himself/herself, what kind of implications that the child's autonomous behaviors would have for the child himself/herself. All mothers' narrations included their interpretation of autonomous behavior from the angle of the child. They interpreted the various kinds of autonomous behaviors in their toddlers as either sign of the child's healthy development and natural growth, the child's developing competence, his/her individual characteristics, or as the child gaining independence as well as the capacity to function by himself/herself.

To begin with the first way of interpretation, five mothers (P1, P3, P5, P6, P8) interpreted their toddlers' self-directed walking, exploration, and individual play as signs of their toddlers' healthy development and natural growth. They reported joy, satisfaction, and pleasure in response to their toddlers' autonomous behaviors.



He grows, you see that he is very beautiful and healthy... This is something you really like, because you see that the baby's development continues. Here he was born, crawled and walks now, you know that he maybe running in a few months. It's a nice thing when you think that way. Something that also indicates that he is healthy. It is something that gives you pleasure and happiness because you see him developing, something that requires joy. (P5, mother-of-son, low SES)

I: So when you see her doing something on her own? C. may be doing something without you somewhere, like playing with her toys-

M: I like it incredibly, I like it very much. So you see her growing actually. You see her discovering something. You see that she can do things. Or you see that you can add something to her life, teach her something. I love it. (P8, mother-of-daughter, high SES)

Secondly, two mothers (P1 and P3) interpreted their toddlers' exploration and manipulation of the environment or their recently emerging loco-motor behaviors that enable them to function by themselves, as the child's own accomplishment and attributable to his/her developing competence.

She is very curious. She shuffles the drawers, looking at what she can do with them, and plays games. She takes the pot and stirs it. After that, she tastes the things she cooks, for example. She succeeds that way. (P1, mother-of-daughter, low SES)

Thirdly, most mothers attributed certain autonomous behaviors of their toddlers to the child's individual characteristics. For instance, four mothers (P1, P2, P4, P10) attributed autonomous behaviors of their toddlers, such as acting according to their own wishes, insisting on doing whatever they want, resisting if anything is done without their will, etc. to their child's stubborn, headstrong or resistant personality. While three of these mothers (P2, P4, P10) mentioned such behaviors and the personality of their children in a positive light while also expressing their satisfaction;

She had stubbornness when she was 10-11 months old. When she quits supplementary food and starts eating completely normal. That's when she started to say no. So, she was closing her mouth and not opening her mouth. I mean, she doesn't lean on me or she doesn't rely on someone else... I try, I like it. It's okay to get stubborn. Because if she is stubborn, she will get what she wants from life. Yes, a resisting child, she resists. If she doesn't want to sleep,

it's not possible; you can't put her to sleep. Or if she does not eat anything, you can't feed her... She determines how much she wants to eat. Even if she does not want to eat, she doesn't eat. She's such an interesting kid. (P4, mother-of-a-daughter, low SES)

one mother (P1) expressed her discontent and stated wishing that her daughter would give up her stubbornness.

C.'s zodiac sign is Leo. She's a bit of a thing in that way... conservative; I mean she's headstrong, so if she's going to do it, she will. A very angry, angry child... I want to let go of our stubbornness. (P1, mother-of-daughter, low SES)

Two mothers (P3 and P7) interpreted similar behaviors of her son within more negative terms. One of them attributed her son's exploration and insisting behaviors to his manipulative, mischievous, stubborn personality while expressing her dissatisfaction and intolerance towards such behaviors of her son.

I understand right now that he's a little manipulative baby. So he is not a very accepting child. Now here he is pointing something with his hand, making a noise, trying to take things. And you can't make him accept not to give it. In that sense, well, a child, stubborn and, well, a boisterous child. (P7, mother-of-son, high SES)

He's a pretty mischievous boy. So, he's a very active kid... When he meets with his peers, they are children who can keep themselves entertained and play with toys. I'm looking, and C. is after pouring the drawers and then lifting them up again. A kid like this, let me put my hand in there, take out the socket. When I take care of him on the weekend, I say let the week begin and go to work and rest. (P7, mother-of-son, high SES)

Similarly, another mother anxiously interpreted some of his son's exploration behaviors as his aggressiveness in an anxious manner.

Sometimes he becomes very aggressive. Such a combative. He has vicious movements. He scatters the books, the notebooks. When something is placed properly in front of it, it will not stop like that, he will definitely scatter it, I say "okay, my son. (P3, mother of son, low SES)

One mother (P5) attributed her son's autonomous behaviors primarily to his male gender, and additionally to his personality traits of being an idealist, self-confident boy.

He is very idealistic, yes he really, his gender... That is, C. has the attitude of 'I am a boy'... So girls are softer, more moderate. Even in this period, a girl becomes a child who sits next to the mother and plays house. But C. likes to hang out more individually. Moreover, he's a kid who presses to impose his decisions. But I say 'you are seventeen months old, son, what are you in your head?' But he really is. So he has the feeling that I am a boy, in C. He shows himself very well in his decisions and requests. I mean, he shows very well that he is a boy... So you can't get C. to accept something that he doesn't want. He's a very determined child on that. Not stubbornness, something other than stubbornness, a determined child ... On that subject, you notice a lot of male gender. (P5, mother-of-son, low SES)

Lastly, three mothers (P1, P6, P8) attributed autonomous behaviors of their toddlers to their developing independence, individuality, or capacity to function by themselves:

After 8 months C. became free... Well, now, incredibly individual. Well, I think she's a complete individual right now. Pretty free. She is aware that she can do whatever she wants whenever she wants. For example, if C. wants to climb the stairs, she surely crawls out. We built a door. But she shakes the door so that it seems to break. Just to open that door. If you don't open it, that door will break. You open the door and you're after her, and she goes up the stairs in front and then goes back ... Or here's about food ... You put this today, if she wants to eat, she eats. If she doesn't want to, you can never feed her! (P8, mother-of-daughter, high SES)

I think this is what should happen. Well, she grows; her personality is being formed now... As I said she is more independent from me. She is gaining her freedom. (P8, mother-of-daughter, high SES)

### 3.1.1.2 From the perspective of the mother's self

This sub-theme refers to mothers' interpretation of their toddlers' autonomous behaviors from their own perspective. To be more precise, this part relates to what the mothers expected from the child's developing autonomous behaviors, what they signal the mothers for their own selves and lives. Most mothers interpreted various kinds of autonomous behaviors of their toddlers as opportunities to get some rest or as signals that at last, they can return to some of their previous life routines. For example, most mothers reported that they made use of the times that their children

were playing on their own or with others as occasions for taking much-needed resting time and expressed their satisfaction with those opportunities.

Then I relax when someone takes care of her...When someone plays with her, she can forget me. But if you don't play and leave her alone, she focuses directly on me. When someone takes care of her, of course I relax and breathe a little. Okay, it's nice and great to spend time with your child, but sometimes you just need time to take a breath. (P10, mother of daughter, middle SES)

...the three of us sit together first. Then I suddenly get up quietly and go from the living room to the bedroom or the kitchen, and the two of them stay together. After that, he spends some time with the father in the evenings. Meanwhile, I have the chance to breathe a little. (P9, mother of son, middle SES)

I: Are there times when he does things by himself?

M: It is 5 minutes maximum, looks at his toys, but 5 minutes maximum.

I: How does that feel to you?

M: Relaxing. Oh, I don't feel like he can have fun without me. (P7, mother of son, high SES)

It was important that while most mothers spoke about the above-mentioned behaviors of their children with feelings of happiness and satisfaction, two mothers (P4 and P7) reported that they were not satisfied with the current independent functioning level of their children. They were looking forward to their child gaining further independence, which in turn, would enable them to return to their previous life routines involving social activities or work-life. For instance, one of them (P7) reported that she was looking forward her son's walking independently and reported that the current independent functioning of her son does not arouse any emotion in her.

Frankly, he doesn't act independently...I'm waiting for him to walk...You can't get a crawling baby out very easily.... If you go somewhere, he's constantly bored in the highchair. Since I expect him to walk, his current state doesn't make me feel much. (P7, mother of son, high SES)

You know, after the age of 3, he can speak and understand what is being said... I say it will probably be more comfortable then. On the one hand, the last 6 months are slightly different from the first 6 months. At least I can entrust him to someone else, he can play a little with his father, he can play a little with his grandmother. When a toy is shown, he plays with it for 10 minutes, but still not

much has changed. In terms of his need for attention or difficulties. (P7, mother of son, high SES)

The other one (P4) reported her impatience about her daughter's walking and getting toilet training in order to return her work-life, which she conceptualized as the benefit of her daughter again.

I said "Get off... Get off from my lap..." Because kids tire you when they are in your arms... Later on C. Started to take steps slowly at around 11th month... after that I said "now it is ok... There is no body stronger than you... Better than you... Take your child and go out..." (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Now my goal is to give her toilet training. I bought her something[potty]... I think that I will teach her slowly, because of that, I want to get her to kindergarten and return to work. Kindergartens that are suitable for my budget do not accept diapered children. That's why I started. They get angry with me, isn't it too early? It's early, but she's learning. I'm gamifying this. I'm not forcing her. I do not remove her diaper completely. We're just playing. How does she do the puzzle? Does an 18-month-old do puzzles, does it make sense to you? You can't teach an old dog new tricks. She is learning... My reason for wanting to return to work is to offer C. a better life. I will take whatever she wants so that she will not hanker for anything. Because I grew up like that. I want my child not to grow up like that... So, I have to get a job and C. needs to learn some things. They tell me it's too early. I say it's not early! (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

### 3.1.1.3 From the perspective of the mother-child relationship

This sub-theme refers to mothers' interpretation of their toddlers' autonomous behaviors from the perspective of their relationship with the child, or in other words, to the perceived implication of the toddlers' developing independence on the mother-child relationship. On the one hand, some mothers reported an increase in communication and reciprocity, interpersonal sharing and the sharing of activities with them, in parallel with the development of certain autonomous behaviors in their toddlers. For example, one mother who had been having trouble communicating with her baby preverbally reported her delight in her daughter's developing certain autonomous behaviors such as bringing the book she wants or saying no to the mother, which enables far better expression and communication.

M: It was happening before... There is no activity you can do, okay? I told and they laughed a lot: 'Well, I understood everything, I feed this child, put her to sleep, diaper her, she wakes up, and so on. But, what do I do with this child while she is awake?'...What am I going to do with this? You feel bad inside. Because there is nothing to do. For example, now you are playing games with her, doing things.

I: Do you like the kid who can walk a little bit, maybe start talking a little and do something? Compared to both pregnancy and infancy...

M: I like it! I even like her reaction. She yells at me! I did something recently. She did 'nooo' like this, I was shocked. No no no. She brings her toys. She brings whatever game she wants to play. For example, she loves the book. She brings the books... Then you know what she wants to do, it's nice. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

Similarly, the other three mothers (P1, P5, P6) reported their pleasure about the increased communication and sharing between their toddlers and themselves:

In the other period, you feel C. emotionally. For example, she is sleeping, you kiss her, you smell her and you put her in her place. You know, you can't share much with her at that moment. You can only feel her, but it is nice because we share the moment.... And right now, for example, I am happier because C. is doing what I say. For example, I say 'my daughter, come sit down' .... For example, I'm cooking, I'm preparing soup for her. I say 'come on, my daughter, let's have dinner in the kitchen.' C. is coming right behind me. I say come sit down girl.. We eat together, for example. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

The more your child learns and understands such things, the happier you become. Really it is. So the moment I think that C. understands me, I feel more happy. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

At that time, I was breastfeeding him, I was putting him on sleep. But it gets different as he grows up. The more he grows up, the more your love grows. The older he gets, the more he's cute. Because you like his movements. He comes and plays with you. The period after those first six months is actually better. (P5, mother of son, low SES)

He's a very active kid now. I think a kid who has come to the stage of playing games right now. You can do everything together. You can play actively, walk together, go out to eat. I can say that there is nothing we can't do together right now. So there is nothing in my daily activities that I cannot do with him. (P6, mother of son, high SES)

On the other hand, three mothers (P3, P6, P8) touch upon an entirely different angle regarding the effect of autonomous behaviors of their toddlers on their relationship. These mothers reported that along with their toddlers' development of some autonomous behaviors, they felt a kind of separation, a change in the sense of

connectedness they had experienced during the pregnancy and infancy periods. However, the mothers differed in how they interpreted this separation. For example, one mother of a son (P3) reported that seeing her son walk away and leave her behind made her think of all the separations that are to come, such as the child starting kindergarten or primary school. She anxiously wanted to avoid thinking about such times.

M: It's a different feeling. For example, he moves ahead of me. I say, 'Boy, when did you grow up and go ahead of me?' He runs after the cats. So now he will grow bigger, bigger and bigger. He's going to go to school or something. I say myself, how am I going to send him to school? He will put on his bag and go to school on his own. These periods are so beautiful that I want to live this moment to the fullest. Frankly, I don't want to think ahead. I want to enjoy the moment. So, I don't want to think about the rest. I really want to enjoy the moment.

I: What will it be like when he goes to school?

M: Oh, frankly I don't know it at all (loud and laughing). I don't know, maybe I can sleep at the school door. Now, I can't even think of when we'll send C. to kindergarten. So, C. won't be with me for a couple of hours. What will he do, what will I do? (P3, mother of son, low SES)

Another mother (P6) interpreted her son's transition from infancy to toddlerhood as a very rapid growth and a kind of loss of the previous bond between her and her son. She expressed her feelings of amazement, chill, and longing to the previous bond between them.

It is a very different thing. First of all, he is very fast. It's also creepy that he's so fast. You just ask yourself whether this was recently the lentil in your womb. Because, you know, there are programs now, you follow them weekly. Here it starts from the size of the lentil and goes all the way... He becomes big white cabbage and the child is born. I mean, that rapid development both scares me... I tell my husband very often. "So," I say, "we'll miss it so much, I guess these days are passing by so fast. If we do not understand when we are inside, we will probably say "Oh God" in the future, "How quickly those days have passed! (P6, mother of son, high SES)

A third mother (P8) also indicated a change in the bond between her and her daughter. However, she interpreted this change as a natural and pleasant process in which both the mother and the child liberates while still being connected.

C. became free after 8 months of age...So now C. doesn't feel my absence much. For instance, she couldn't fall asleep at night without me. Now she can...As I said, she is more independent of me. But, our emotional relationship, I'm not saying that in a bad sense. She gains her freedom, but when we come together, I feel that we are connected to each other... So, I don't find it strange. It doesn't scare me. It feels natural and sounds beautiful. And of course, the fact that she is getting a little freer means that I am getting also freer! (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

### 3.1.2 Mother's subjective assessment of caregiving to an autonomous child

This theme refers to mothers' subjective assessments of caregiving to an increasingly more independent child, rather than an infant. Three mothers who took up the childcare by themselves (P1, P4, P5) pointed to the difficulty in caring for a toddler who is enthusiastically experimenting with his/her independence. They reported some behaviors of their toddlers which made caregiving a more difficult and tiring task for them. Some challenging behaviors of toddlers that were reported by the mothers can be listed as:

the child's exploration of the environment without awareness of the potential harms (P1, P4, P5):

...at nine or tenth months she started walking by holding on to places. I haven't done anything for two months. C. is walking standing up from here, I was always like that so she wouldn't fall down on her back or hit her head ... That was the hardest thing at that time ...I relaxed a little after she started walking. But this curiosity and messing-up habit forced me. I was afraid she would hurt herself...But when opening a drawer or something, there might be something harmful in it. Or right now I was so afraid that she might hurt herself because her teeth were itching or she was putting everything in her mouth. That's why I was always behind C., so I was always with her. (P1, mother-of-daughter, low SES)

the transition to supplementary food and the child's being food selective (P5):

M: But the first six months was great. You have not entered the supplementary food period yet...This stress is also absent. You are more comfortable because milk already exists, milk and formula. You breastfeed him and put him in its place...After six months, you wonder what to give him to eat today.

I: Getting harder?



M: Exactly. You are looking for the freshest of everything, you are looking for the organic. You worry about whether it causes allergies or not. It was such a worrisome period. C. is a child who gets bored very quickly. Because he gets bored very quickly, the mother has to be very productive. Since C. is a child who chooses food, you have to give something different at every meal. (P5, mother of son, low SES)

messing up the house (P4):

Okay, well done to my daughter, she does what she wants, but she also tires me out. Because she loves to be naughty....I get tired and very tired...Because she is a very active and naughty girl. Sometimes something happens suddenly, I turn my back when C. grabs the can of vinegar in her hand. How can an 18-month-old child topple a 5-pound can? I was shocked, I said no, she can't do it. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

and interfering with the mother's daily agenda by becoming a more active agent (P1, P4, P5):

M: Well, I was more comfortable than now. She was always asleep then. When she slept, I could do all my work.

I: Now more...

M: No. Whatever C. says. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

You breastfeed him, you put him back later. He sits or sleeps there, and you do your work. However, this is not possible after the period when he starts to eat supplementary food. When he gets more active after a certain age, it can't be like that anymore. For example, I clean the house every day, but we couldn't vacuum it today. It happens quite often. Because C. is a very active child. The first six months were fine. I mean, compared to the current period. The first six months were good in terms of activeness, he was not active then. (P5, mother of son, low SES)

On the contrary, a few mothers pleasantly indicated that caregiving gets more easier task for them due to the child's increased mobility and communication abilities.

...She brings her toys, whatever game she wants to play. For example, she loves the book. She brings the books. She brings the book she wants, what she wants to read and what she wants to see. Then you know what she wants to do, it's nice. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

After six months we relaxed. When she starts to crawl or sit down, when she starts to eat supplementary food; that's when we relaxed. (P10, mother of daughter, middle SES)

### 3.1.3 Mother's emotional reaction to the autonomous behavior of the child

This theme refers to various kind of emotions that were aroused in the mothers as a response to their toddlers' emerging autonomous behaviors. This theme consisted of three sub-themes in terms of the valence of the affectivity that the mothers experienced: positive, negative, and ambivalent emotions. Except for three mothers who reported only either their positive or negative emotions, most mothers reported various combinations of positive and negative emotions while mentioning their toddlers' developing autonomous behaviors. During the interviews, all mothers presented emotional attitudes congruent with their reported emotions.

#### 3.1.3.1 Positive emotions

All mothers, except for one, reported their positive emotions in reaction to their toddlers' developing autonomous behaviors. Positive emotions that were reported by mothers can be outlined as: joy-pleasure, excitement, admiration, and pride.

First of all, most mothers reported the joy and pleasure that they get from their toddlers' autonomous behaviors such as the child playing by himself/herself.

I'm cooking in the kitchen. I see C. is playing by herself here talking with her toys. I like it very much too. So I leave her alone, she plays her own game (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

I get very happy, sometimes I leave him like this, go and lie down. He plays by himself, he puts it. Well done, I say to myself, I never get involved, if I cut it, her concentration will be disrupted (P3, mother of son, low SES)

I like it incredibly, I like it very much. I mean, you see her growing actually. You see her discovering things. You see that she can do things. Or you see that you can add something to her life and teach her something. I like it very much (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

For example, he goes to his room by himself and sees the toys I have not shown before, sees them and starts playing with them while he sits. Because they are different to him. This makes me very happy of course (P9, mother of son, middle SES).”

Two mothers (P2 and P4) reported their joy-pleasure about their toddler's saying "No".

I like it, I like it even when she reacts. She screams at me. I did something recently, she did like that: 'Noooo!', then I was shocked. 'No no no!' (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

I like her spirit of resistance. She even resists me. She says no, shakes his finger at me. Sometimes she goes up on the table. I come from the kitchen, I see and react. I say 'no, girl.' Now she says to me. 'Come on girl,' I say 'you will eat this.' She says no. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Three mothers (P1, P3, P4) reported their joy-pleasure about expressing her needs.

For example, she wants me to open that door. For instance, she wants to come when she gets hungry, she says 'mum, breast' or something like that. I love it. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

Four mothers (P1, P2, P4, P5) reported their joy-pleasure about imitating adult behaviors.

She has some books, books at the level I want. She chooses them and brings them to me: 'Read this.' And she does this: 'miniminiminimini'. My mother taught her, she does it like this: 'mini miniminimini'. She cleans the house with my mother ... She was hanging laundry with my mother. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

For example, the other day, I was saying like, "I am tired of this... I am tired of this", then she imitates me and acts like "I am tired of this... I am tired of this." My daughter got it right away. I say "would you be a little quiet", she acts like "shhh". (P4, mother-of-daughter, low SES)

Three mothers (P1, P4, P6) reported their joy and pleasure about the sharing of activities with their toddlers.

Every day with C. is getting more enjoyable. Why? Because she understands everything right now, whatever I do. For example, I clean this place, C. comes after me and cleans it too. I take the broom in my hand, and she takes it and tries to sweep the floor. We clearly play games at home. Everything is very enjoyable with her, that is, spending time at home with the child... Oh, I love it. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

Secondly, five mothers (P4, P6, P8, P9, P10) reported their excitement while observing their toddlers' first attempts in some autonomous behaviors such as crawling, walking, and reacting to objects.

So like when it started to the thing first, ehm first... To see his first crawls, to see his rolls, to see his reactions to toys or, for example, his laughter at you from where he lays was a big thing (P6, mother of son, high SES)

I was so excited for him to crawl. So, I bought a crawling rug for him to crawl, I performed crawling massages... (P9, mother of son, middle SES)

Her walking is very exciting, you know, even when she takes 1-2 steps, you get excited, yes, her walk is a little bit different so her sitting on your lap, her crawling while sitting as well as her crawling was definitely something different as well... (P10, mother of daughter, middle SES)

Thirdly, three mothers (P1, P3, P4) expressed their admiration and pride regarding their toddlers' acquisition of certain autonomous behaviors.

I get very happy, sometimes I leave him like this, I lie down, he plays by himself, he puts down and so forth, I say "good job" from inside... I say "take and put it to its place"... for example, I take a look at, he grabbed things and put into their places, then I say "how he understands and does"... so well, it is different, I say "how do you do this thing". But it is a very nice feeling, it is a completely different feeling to see him do or learned something. (P3, mother of son, low SES)

So when I look around, when I compare...I like to see that my child is better than them. So let me say that. For example, when I compare her actions with other children, peers, I say "I can do this, look; I can educate my child very well". It seems a little self-loving but I don't like this anyway, I do not like such a thing like bragging, I even hesitate when they say "Look, M.'s child is good like this"...

I: It also makes you feel proud.

M: Of course. That thing is a very beautiful thing. The feeling of "my child made this". You also appreciate yourself. You know, it is the fact that the mother's role is very high in child development at the end, actually, the more you care, the more self-confident the child feels and learns. After all, where will C. learn these? I say one two three, C. jumps. She says three and jumps, otherwise, how can she understand it (P1, mother of daughter, low SES).

### 3.1.3.2 Negative emotions

Most mothers' narrations about their toddlers' developing independence also involved some negative emotional reactions. Most prominent negative emotions that were reported by the mothers can be outlined as sadness, anxiety, anger, feeling of being rejected, jealousy, and envy.

Only one mother (P6) voiced her sadness/sorrow about her child's transition to toddlerhood. She reported her amazement as well as slight chills and fear regarding her perception of the extremely rapid development of her son. She reported her longing for the bond between her and her son during the pregnancy and infancy.

So, for example, you miss the smell of his first stages, you miss his being snuggle and lay down on your lap like this. So, C. wouldn't lay down now. He sucks, finishes and goes... he never sits down, he turns around continuously. Sometimes don't do anything, he just spins, walks up and down inside the house. So now you can't keep him like that for example.(P6, mother of son, high SES)

Furthermore, she reported being worried that she will long for those early days even more in the future.

...rapid development both chills me, because sometimes, actually I have been telling my spouse very often lately. I say "so", " We will miss it very much, these days are going very fast."If we don't understand when we're inside, we'll probably say "Allaah," "How quickly those days passed! (P6, mother of son, high SES)

He usually wakes up in the mornings from the good side. " He says "I am going to bed, here is "Mommy!", "Mommy!" and kisses one by one my cheeks, my hands, my arms. Then you say ehmm, so "These are probably to be missed." (P6, mother of son, high SES)

She reflected on the process of her son's growing up, gradual development of his independence, and her role in this process. She conceptualized this process as one in which the mother contributed a lot, but also as the loss of something very precious. She indicated that the ambivalence in her feelings stemmed from this complex process.

It's also a bit of a thing, knitting after and after with your labor... You think of your efforts, you know but I don't know it is very fast paced and on the other hand it feels scary to me. So it is very very fast...You also say well, I say by myself: "It goes so quickly, then we will miss it so much". So it is very very very fast. (laughters) (P6, mother of son, high SES)

Secondly, some mothers reported anxiety about their toddler's developing autonomous behaviors. However, the mothers differed in terms of the source of their

anxiety. They reported anxiety about either the child harming himself/herself or the about their separation from the child.

To begin with the former, four mothers (P1, P4, P5, P10) reported having felt anxiety regarding their toddlers inadvertently harming themselves due to their state of increased autonomous functioning. They reported that this state requires mothers to be constantly alert and ready to protect their children from potential harms, while their toddlers are exploring the environment by themselves.

You are always on alert like this, so you are in fear, will he fall, will he hit his eye, can something sting in his eye, here, will he fell and crack his head. Or, I don't know...what if it falls from somewhere. You always experience these. That period will probably continue until he grows up, maybe until he gets married... You know, it will grow up by falling down and standing up again, but even though you know it, you cannot feel that comfortable. From that period on, fear has always existed. you even think about whether something will happen, God forbid it falls off, and if there is any damage to the spinal cord and a stroke. (P5, mother of son, low SES)

On the other hand, one mother (P3) reported her anxiety about separation from her son. She mentioned that her toddler's emerging autonomous behaviors reminded her the further separations. She anxiously avoided thinking about the future.

M: It's a different feeling. For example, he goes ahead of me. I say "oh boy", when you grew up, you walk in front of me and run after the cats or something. I mean, now it will grow older and older, will go to school or something, or I say how will I send you to school. He will wear his bag and go to school on his own. These periods are so beautiful that I want to live the moment as much as possible. I don't want to think ahead at all, I want to enjoy the moment. Now let me live it, let me see it. So I don't want to think about the rest. I really want to enjoy the moment.

I: What do you think will be during the time he goes to school?

M: ohhh I don't know it at all [loud and laughing]. I don't know if I will go to the school and sleep at the door, now I even don't know the moment I will register him to kindergarten I don't know how many hours he will be gone. what he will do at that moment. (P3, mother of son, low SES)

Thirdly, only one mother (P6) reported feelings of being rejected by her son when he did not include her in his play even though the mother was very eager to play with him.

M: It is even more of a kid who likes to play by himself. For example, we're sitting on the ground together, saying we're going to construct a lego... We put one or two together, then he turns his back on me and continues to play by himself. A child who likes to play individually more.

I: How do you feel in such situations?

M: Sometimes I feel rejected because I am so prepared to play with him, then I look at him... he's gone. Sometimes, we can throw the ball at each other, or here we can drive the car towards each other. It has increased a little more, but he still plays on his own. He is not too much... Too much thing to you... I mean to you... Looks like it is okay whether you play with him or not.(P6, mother of son, high SES)

Similarly, another mother (P3) reported an instance in which his son refused her participation in his feeding. Even though she described her eagerness and insistence in feeding her son by herself and her disappointment was quite apparent, she did not verbalize her feelings in such a situation.

I want him to eat his eggs... kid doesn't want it! ....I want to feed him by myself or do something. But he is already eating by himself, he says leave me by himself. He only has that habit. He says I don't want it when I try hard. He shows himself to me. He tries to get up right away. (P3, mother of son, low SES)

Fourthly, only three mothers (P1, P4, P5) verbalized their anger and intolerance regarding some autonomous behaviors of their toddlers. One of them (P1) reported the emergence of intolerance in her after having a child, who then took on the central place in her life. Furthermore, she reported an increase in her intolerant, aggressive attitudes as the child increasingly became an active agent, which in turn affected her daily agenda more and more substantially.

The other mother (P4) reported that as her daughter became more mobile, she engaged in some exploration behaviors which lead to her messing up the house. She reported that such behaviors of her daughter made her especially angry.

The kid doesn't listen anything, especially in the kitchen. She mixed dish soap, vinegar and everything all together and sprayed them on the walls. I called my neighbor. Take this kid or I'm going to kill. She stares at me like that. Because I can't shout, I don't want her to be afraid but I am I getting so much angry, who's going to clean this now! (P4, mother-of-daughter, low SES)

Fifth of all, one mother (P8) reported her jealousy about her daughter forming close relationship with others. She reported that she was jealous of her daughter's baby-sitter, whom she conceptualized as a better mother than herself, and she was particularly jealous of her daughter's relationship with her. She reported her initial fear that the baby-sitter and her daughter will form a mother-daughter relationship.

I mean, I turned into such like mother, I feel so sad, very upset... So when she took C.'s hand and kissed them, I cried sobbingly. But what was the reason for crying here: was I jealous? Maybe. Is it better holding than me? Maybe. She may be trying to make up for it in C., because she can't kiss or smell her own daughter. I see her, she affected me and stuff. I mean, I had such mixed feelings at that time. (P8, mother-of-daughter, high SES)

However, she gradually got rid off these anxieties when she realized that there was a special bond between her and her daughter.

And sometimes C. would be silent with her, would cry with me, and would silent with her again. Therefore, I had such a period of jealousy, in the beginning periods. After that, I accepted, but I said this is actually a good thing. Because when I start working, she will always be with this person, she will always spend time with her, so it is nice that she loves her and depends on her. Then I consulted a few of my friends, I also consulted a psychologist at that time. I felt the need to get confirmation to see if she wouldn't put her in my place. Well, you are the mother and she has instincts too, and she depends on you as much as you depend on her, so I accepted after that (P8, mother-of-daughter, high SES)

Lastly, one mother (P4) reported her feelings of envy/jealousy about her daughter's developing some autonomous behaviors. As a mother who expressed a narcissistic bliss and pride about her daughter's developmental abilities, she complained that her daughter was the only one appreciated and applauded for the progress, with no appreciation of her role in her daughter's learning such behaviors.

For example, I teach something, I say no to C., and now she is saying no as well. That side [the family of father] says something like, look, smart kid.



Okay, smart kid, I have no doubts about her intelligence, but I do it, I teach. Nobody praises me, nobody says her mother does. This child learns everything herself. I said yes, she's learning by herself. [expostulatory] I'm leaving her and going to sleep... she's learning by herself... Let them surrender my rights, my friend [laughter], let them chat with you here they praise C.... C. is this and that but they do not say that C.'s mother take care of her so much. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

### 3.1.3.3 Ambivalent feelings

The development of autonomous behaviors in the toddler is a very important, distinctive process for the mother, as well. It arouses various kind of emotional responses in the mother. In this regard, this sub-theme refers to the simultaneous arousal of both the positive and negative emotions in the mothers. Most of the mothers reported ambivalent feelings while mentioning their toddlers' developing autonomous behaviors. Only two mothers (P2 and P9) reported just their positive emotions (joy-pleasure) and one mother (P7) reported only negative emotions (dissatisfaction and intolerance). The rest of the sample reported various combinations of positive and negative emotions. For example, four mothers (P1, P4, P5, P10) reported the simultaneous presence of joy-pleasure and anxiety about the child harming himself/herself. As another example, three mothers (P1, P4 and P5) reported both their joy-pleasure and anger.

### 3.1.4 Mothers' behavioral reactions to the autonomous behaviors in their toddlers

This theme refers to the mothers' parenting behaviors in the context of their toddlers' developing independence. As in the variability in mothers' interpretation, assessment and emotional reactions; mothers differed in how they behaviorally reacted to their toddlers' autonomous behaviors. Thus, this theme consisted of three sub-themes in terms of mothers' behavioral reactions: supportive-encouraging, interfering-restrictive, and pushing. While most mothers' narrations involved their supportive-

encouraging parenting behaviors, some mothers reported some instances in which they displayed either interfering-restrictive or pushing behaviors or both.

#### 3.1.4.1 Supportive-encouraging parenting behaviors

This theme refers to the mothers' several parenting behaviors that support and encourage their toddlers' autonomous behaviors in several contexts. The narrations of mothers yielded several supportive-encouraging behaviors that can be clustered in three main domains: the mother's observation of the toddler, allowing space for the toddler's autonomous behaviors, and encouragement of further independence.

Firstly, the observation behaviors of mothers were appeared as a crucial step in recognizing and supporting the toddlers' autonomous behaviors. This domain involves the mothers' reading of the idiosyncratic signals that come from their toddlers and the observation of their individual needs, abilities, and preferences in order to moderate their behaviors accordingly. Almost all mothers, except 2, indicated the reading and observations of their toddlers to guide their parenting behaviors.

For instance, seven mothers (except for P4, P7, P9) reported that they observed their toddlers' verbal and non-verbal behaviors to understand their individual needs, wants, and preferences.

C. Now she has just started to express her wishes and needs, even if not verbally, she points out if she wants water, if she wants to go somewhere she is pulling you in that direction. Well, I mean, she's doing it using physical body language. Well, or now you can understand the ways of crying...Observing the child from the moment she was born, for example, if she hurts herself, it becomes such a sincere cry. But if there is such a spoiled cry, she may be crying to make you do what she want, for example to drink or eat something, or to go somewhere. You can solve the differences in such crying patterns after a while, but you have to observe them well for her. (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

Her things are also important, of course her reactions. For example, I give the pacifier and if she does not take it, I say thirsty. I give her pacifier again, if she does not take it again, it means she will suck again. If she sucks a little more and then takes it, then it is done... she will continue to sleep after she finishes. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

When he wants something, for example if he wants water, C. touches to the water container, and I give water for instance. For example if he's hungry, he'll do hmm hmm, I know he wants food. I'll give him something, such a bite-sized snack. He likes it because we do it a lot, and I give him a snack every now and then. He expresses himself that way. (P5, mother of son, low SES)

After that, a feature that he acquired spontaneously, for example, C. likes to read book a lot. This is C.'s self-developed one... He directed us according to himself. Dad and mom, I like this, he showed us to buy books to him. He was very interested in reading books, looking at books, telling about books. I mean, he showed himself. (P9, mother of son, middle SES)

Another mother (P1) reported that she purposefully engaged in observation of her daughter's abilities in order to support her further independence.

I am looking at the development of the C. I am be like, she was not able to do that last week, and for example, she is now able to do that. She couldn't reach the third drawer the other day. She couldn't able to grab contents in it for example, she is able to do that now. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

For example, we are doing this right now, when we go out, I take the stairs... I am holding by her hand to let her walk up the stairs. I am not carrying it in my arms. Let his muscles develop and learn. To be able to do it by herself, to make it by herself. I think this is very important for the child. You know, I always follow a few psychologists in the articles I read, I read their writings or something, they are always in this direction, leave your children alone, observe what they can do, what they cannot do. You know, support your children in that direction. I am trying to do it like this; I think I did it, that way. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

Secondly, all mothers' narrations involved some parenting behaviors which allow space for their toddlers' autonomous behaviors. These behaviors of mothers can be listed as: letting the child to determine his/her activities, offering choices, taking the child's perspective, letting the child's exploration-functioning by himself/herself, adapting the environment for the child's exploration, providing

supportive presence during the child's exploration, and generally not engaging controlling behaviors.

For instance, eight mothers (except for P1, P3) reported that they allowed their toddlers to determine their activities rather than insisting on their own will on them. The contexts that they allow their toddler to determine can be listed as feeding, dressing and playing. For example, seven mothers (except for P2, P3, P9) mentioned let their toddlers to determine what to eat.

I want her to eat A, but if she wants to eat B, I don't limit too much there. The things she wants... I mean, the thing like that, I'm trying to give some freedom. I think there are different schools on this subject [laughing]. I mean, will you adapt to the child or the child will adapt to you? I think the parent should adapt to the child at this early stage. Because she is an individual who has not yet fully expressed herself, whose brain and character are just beginning to form, and her brain is newly developing. So, well, there are points where we conflict, but it usually evolves towards her will. (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

There is a "If he doesn't eat, he doesn't eat." mind set. If he is not eating, he does not eat it, so I do not force it... For example, he did not eat anything last night. I gave soup, he did not eat, I gave meatballs, he did not eat. Well he didn't eat. Then we removed the table. Then before we went to sleep, I gave one banana because he likes banana and ate it. I mean, eat it during that meal, eat this ... I'm very, very tired of this. I am very overwhelmed with him while forcing him. I also don't like to be insisted on something.. (P6, mother of son, high SES)

Two mothers (P4 and P8) mentioned that they let their toddlers to determine when to eat.

These Hero Babies, C. is now 1.5 years old. She does not get enough with one, I put 2 in front of her, I feed one, I say "my daughter shall I open the second one", she says no. After 10 or 15 minutes, she comes back to show the food. Give me mom. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Not when I want it, but when she wants it, that's exactly what her character is. She does what she wants whenever she wants, i.e. if she want to have food, she will eat whenever she wants (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

One mother (P5) mentioned that she let her toddler to determine how to eat.

C. doesn't want a spoon anymore, he doesn't like when I feed him, so I always put it in front of him. He's eating bite. (P5, mother of son, low SES)

One mother (P8) mentioned that she let her toddler to determine what to dress.

For example, if she doesn't wear what I want, I offer an alternative. Here, if she is not wearing this cardigan, I offer another alternative. (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

Three mothers (P2, P5, P7) mentioned that they let their toddlers to determine what to play and read.

... I bought a giant toy for him. I even wonder and want him to take care of it but he is not playing with it.

I: What are you doing in such situations?

M: I'm letting it go. He does what he wants. I have no way to do anything; I have no situation to say you will play with this. (P7, mother of son, high SES)

Four mothers (P6, P7, P8, P10) reported that they offered choices to their toddlers when their toddlers refused the first one:

M: Sometimes she doesn't eat the first spoon. She's definitely pushing with her hand and covering her mouth.

I: What are you doing in such situations?

M: I don't force it at that time; I just let it go if she doesn't eat. Later on, I give different food. She eats anyways, and I follow it like that, I do not try to make her eat by too much pressuring. (P10, mother of daughter, middle SES)

I bought sea fish, I prepared and put it before him, and he didn't eat it. I gave something else. I did not force him. (P7, mother of son, high SES)

For example, if she doesn't wear what I want, I offer an alternative. Here, if she is not wearing this cardigan, I offer another alternative. (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

Two mothers (P6 and P8) reported that they engaged in perspective taking in some cases when their toddlers did not comply with their requests:

So I think about myself too. He's a human too, after all. Ok, small but a human. If he doesn't want it, he doesn't want it. He didn't like the taste. After all, I made that food, but I don't always make it taste the same. For example, he normally loves lentil soup. Maybe the child didn't like it this case. Maybe he doesn't want to eat. (P6, mother of son, high SES)

Because if she doesn't want to wear it, there is something bothering her. (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

Eight mothers reported that they let their toddlers' free exploration and playing by themselves without interfering their independent functioning.

He wants to play individually, sometimes he wants not to interfere with his game, sometimes I sit there and observe him. I am following. Now, kitchen attracts his attention. He takes the pots from there, takes them from the cupboard, opens the drawers and puts them in the drawers...Now he has individuality, yes he also wants to play individually. When he does that, I don't get involved, I watch him without intervening. (P5, mother of son, low SES)

Furthermore, three mothers (P1, P6, P9) reported that they made some adjustments in their home so that the child could explore in a safer environment:

These days, he's after a little more trouble. Looking after the lamps and the wires. But all precautions were taken in the house. (P9, mother of son, middle SES)

There was a table here, for example, we removed it. We said that there should not be a table in our house, but a place to play. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

Two mothers (P6 and P9) reported that they purposefully place the toys within the reach of their toddlers so that their children could choose and manipulate by themselves. ("... his toys are all over in general... I meant... They are all at his height. he can grab and play whatever he wants"-P6). Four mothers (P3, P5, P6, P9) reported that they provided supportive presence during their toddlers' exploration behavior and intervene if they were in need.

For example, he goes to his room by himself and there are toys that I did not show him, he sees them and starts playing with them while sitting there... This makes me very happy, of course. I never mess up with him at that time. I'm watching right from the door until his attention is distracted. As soon as he gets distracted, I step in immediately (P9, mother of son, middle SES)

Lastly, the third domain refers to the mothers' parenting behaviors which they actively encourages the child's further independence. These behaviors of

mothers can be listed as: modeling, scaffolding, and actively creating opportunities for the child's further independent functioning.

Firstly, modeling refers to the mothers' demonstration of some desired actions to the child either before the child's experimentation or alongside with the him/her. Five mothers reported that they modeled some behaviors to their toddlers. While four mothers' (P1, P5, P8, P9) narrations involved their modeling behaviors in the context of playing,

For example, when we buy a toy, we sit down, start playing games, you know I try first, C. does it after that. That thing is a very beautiful thing. The more you care, the better I think the child will be, so that she can learn to grow and grow in the future. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

My sole job is to play with C., because I am a person who has the mindset that children grow up by playing games... I want him to love the toys and that he can set up and play with toys. I play a lot with him so that he can play games on his own. (P9, mother of son, middle SES)

one mother (P6) reported her modeling behavior in house chores by intending to support the child's further independent functioning.

C. loves the washing machine very much. The other day, I looked at him and he was not behaving well. In the basket there were dirties as well. I throw one, and said "C. throw them in one by one like that. I'm coming in a bit." I said. He put them there. Of course he did not understand that it was a house task... Also, there are all kinds of states of the world. It is not clear when he will be alone, when and what will happen. You know, he should be capable enough to take everything from the tip, his own thing... for example, when he gets older, when he reach the age of 18, he should know how this machine works. For example, I might not be at home. He might stay alone for a week, he shouldn't miss anything because he doesn't know. He should be able to hold a cleaning cloth. He will know when necessary. He should be able to mop, or, you know, know the dishwasher or things like that. I think, these are very healthy for his own development, and he will not have any problems with anything when he gets married afterwards or wants to live alone. (P6, mother of son, high SES)

In addition to these behaviors of mothers, some mothers reported that they showed an active effort to create opportunities to support their toddlers' independent

functioning. For example, four mothers reported that they actively encouraged their toddlers' forming relationship with others;

...bond he established with me, I mean, I don't want this bond to be too much with me. You know, I want this to be divided to my husband as well, so that, I isolate myself a bit in the evenings and pass it on to the his father after that. F. [father of the toddler] is a little coward about this: "I can't do it, I can't play like you, I can't play with him like you, I can't let him play, I don't think he's happy with me, I don't think he likes me as much as you." He goes into this or something like that. For that reason, in order him to overcome these, look F. "we will let him play like that, like this. Three of us sit together at first. Then I myself get up quietly from the living room and go to the bedroom or to the kitchen, and the two of them stay and continue quite nicely after I guide them. (P9, mother of son, middle SES)"

one mother (P3) reported that she built an separate room for his son to support his independence:

but now I said even that tiny house should have a child's room, it was a very shabby place. We cleaned it up and organized it. I said there should be a child's room... I want it to be an individual. Let him sleep in his room. (P3, mother of son, low SES)

#### 3.1.4.2 Interfering-restrictive parenting behaviors

This theme refers to mothers' various parenting behaviors that they interfere or restrict their toddler's naturally developing autonomous behaviors. During the interviews, a few mothers reported some of their interfering-restrictive behaviors in several contexts, which can be listed as: at feeding, exploration, staying apart from the mother and relationship with others.

Firstly, three mothers (P2, P3, P9) reported some cases in which they showed interfering-restrictive behaviors in the context of feeding. Two of them (P2 and P9) reported that they sometimes force-fed their toddlers for the well-being of their children. Contrary to independence-supporting parenting practices, they did not allow their toddlers to determine what to eat.



You want her to have dinner every evening. She has to eat. For example, she needs to drink milk, now she has to get that milk from somewhere because my milk is running low. I make her formula with milk, I have to feed her. She takes two or three spoons if she is hungry. After that, with the help of games, you have got to see us, grown people...I try to feed her in such a way, but I feed. Even if by force. Again is everything for her. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

I, myself, love eating. And I love feeding and I wanted my child to be a child who always eats. But he actually eats, not very much...He only wants to eat what he wants, so lets say, he always eats carbohydrates or something. This is his mood as of now. "I am going to eat sweets, I don't want to eat vegetables or meats" he says. In that mood a little bit. I'm pushing a little too. I have a habit of insisting him to eat. (P9, mother of son, middle SES)

On the other hand, another mother (P3) mentioned an instance in which she insisted to feed her son by herself although her son has already developed the ability of eating independently. Contrary to the supportive parenting practice, she tried to dominate the activity that the child attempted to accomplish by himself. Due to the toddler's persistence resistance, she gave up her will and let her son function independently.

Sometimes, I am constricting him too. I'm a little guilty about that, but I want that to be eaten. I want him to eat an egg a day. Why am I pushing? Kid doesn't want it! Then I let go, I put the fork in front of him, I leave, I look, the kid is already eating, he says don't force me, but he is already eating by himself, he says leave me. I want to feed him by myself or do something. Nope. But he is already eating by himself, he says leave me. By himself. He only has that habit. He says I don't want it when I try hard. He shows himself to me. Trying to get up immediately... okay, I say myself 'don't push any more so he will finish'. (P3, mother of son, low SES)

Secondly, one mother (P4) reported that she sometimes interfered the child's agenda in the context of exploration. She reported the conflicting agenda of her and her daughter about which area that her daughter should explore. She reported that although her daughter's agenda was to explore the area mostly occupied by adults, she restricted her to explore the area which is designed for children. She reported her

daughter's running away from her because she believed that her mother would bring her to the area that she thought as appropriate for her.

The interesting thing is that there are children here, there is a park, and there are old people there, C. goes there. Stop where are you going my daughter, there is plenty of time for you, you live your childhood, you will live them eventually. I want her to play with the kids... but when we'll go to the park," let me go" she says. Then she looks behind where is mom. I'm always after her in the park. C. does not go next to the children; she goes next to big aunts and uncles there. When I look at her, she runs away. In case my mother takes me and takes me to another place. Because it's the place for you. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Similarly, she mentioned another behavior of her which restrict her daughter's exploration in the playground. She reported that sometimes she allowed her daughter only for one toy in the park to teach her to function according to the rules.

Sometimes we go to the park. There are many toys in the park. I am saying "My daughter, you're going to get only one, you won't want the second one". "Otherwise, I will take you to home" I say. My husband says "if this child could understand you?" She will understand. I never touched when she was crying. She understands now. I ask "My daughter which one?" she chooses. Then she plays and runs a little in the park. I say "let's go home"; she is coming and holding my hand. She will learn. She wears me down not you until she learns but she will learn. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Thirdly, it was appeared that the restrictive-interfering behaviors of mothers were generally seen in the context of the child's staying apart from the mother and relating with the others. Two mothers (P1 and P4) reported that they have never stayed apart from their toddlers. Thus, they did not allow their toddlers to relate with others independently. They reported their own difficulty in staying apart from their toddlers. They reported that even the short separations from their toddlers caused the feelings of sadness, anxiety, and guilt that they could not manage.

I cannot leave C. to anyone. Even if I leave to someone, I try to go and come right away. I left it to my mother last time when I went. She said "go to the market, you will refresh yourself"... "go and leave it to me" she said. I went. For example, C. looked after me in the rooms until I return. She said "Mother mother" for example. She stood in front of the door. Mom... mom... such like

that My mother said “ you know, I felt very bad my daughter”. I also think about C. until I returned, what is she doing at home or something like that. You know, I cannot do such a thing, I cannot separate from her. Because why? I am thinking. I think that S. needs me. You know, I think that she should always be with me. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

Both two highlighted the specialty of the mother in childcare and their concerns about the adequacy of the alternative caregivers.

Okay, they are my family, To which closest person I can leave her? I can leave her either to my mother or mother-in-law. Okey, they can take care of her as much as I do but- It feels like they cannot approach to C. like me. It is not a substitute for a mother. As far as I have observed, it is also same in my environment, so you know, it is always like this. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

Although they reported having social support sources who will provide alternative caregiving, they refused their help in caregiving to their toddlers. One of them (P1) reported her belief that if the mother is not be with her child all the time, they could not have a bond in the future. The other mother (P4) reported her opinion that she was the only one who can understand and respond her daughter’s needs.

But you [family of the father] do not understand the language of this child. Or you don't want to understand. According to you, put the child down, let her play by herself. And when it is the case, she always wants me. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Furthermore, she expressed her wish that no one should interfere to childcare and her relationship with her daughter. She mentioned that she did not trust her husband and his family members in childcare and interpreted their involvement in childcare as a mean of control on herself.

They shouldn't interfere with me with something about C. I haven't taught my child anything wrong until now. Look, I stay at home with her, I am having conversation with her, and ...I do not do yada yada, I always teach something...But my husband's family is not like that. What are you feeding, what have you put in it? I put poison; it is none of your business [shouting] I'm the mother of this child. I know it... none of your business. At first I liked it... you know... how well they are interested and such like that... Then I saw that it is not like that. They are checking me not the child. They think I'm not enough. Or that I can't be a good mother. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

For example, my sister-in-law is unmarried and doesn't has a children... when I will change my child's diaper; she said do not do it like that. I exploded one day, I said what do you say sister, what are you saying? Ehmm this is my child! [By shouting and slamming her hand on the table.]... Here they are trying to establish control on me about the child... Now, my sister-in-law cannot give my child anything extra without asking me. My mother-in-law cannot come unannounced. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Contrary to the comments that she heard of from her social environment, she reported that she did not aim to make her daughter dependent on her by doing so.

My husband's side says M. made the child dependent on herself. No, why should I make her dependent on myself? You know, they are thinking something like: I want the child to cry when she comes to us, so, she would say that her daughter is depending on her. No, I don't want such a thing. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Even though these mothers preferred to be always together with their toddlers, they also reported the negative effect of such situation on them. They reported that intensive and exclusive work of caregiving for a toddler causes tiredness, exhaustion, intolerance, anger and feeling of loss of previous sense of self in them.

Maybe, I'm a little intolerant, I want to do whatever I want. I am like that. As I am a person who gets angry very quickly, I say right now, yes I am a mother as I guessed... and I also want everything to be perfect for C. With that attitude, I sacrifice a little more from myself, I cannot take care of myself, and I cannot spare time for myself. This, inevitably, is doing something in me, such a nerve.... You know, when I cannot do something, I eat my heart out why I could not do it. Because at that time I have to take care of C., because that's my priority, I'm doing it. But I always say that it happened after her, after C.... (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

Even though they indicated that they were in need of some separations from their toddlers, they could not do that because of their above-mentioned beliefs and emotions regarding separation. Thus, as if they both cling their children and crave for distance.

... I say, let me go out with my friends in comfort. There is C., she has a bedtime; I'm going to feed her. Here... how I will go, how will I come? It is really hard for me. I mean, I always delay myself because I always take these into consideration. I can't think without her either. You know, there are some

mothers, you know, she leaves it to her grandmother, she says let me travel like that. No, I'm not that much... I mean, I say "if I go out a little bit, if I were more active, I could meet with my friends", but I just can't leave C. You know, these two contradictions are killing me. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

In addition to these two mothers, a third mother (P3) also reported some restrictive attitudes regarding her son's forming relationship with others. Even though she could manage short separations from the child and accept the other's support in childcare, she reported that she sometimes did not let her son to go to his grandmother. By doing this, she aimed to teach her son that he can leave home only by getting her mother's permission. She reported that she believed that mothers should have rights to regulate their children's behaviors.

Look... We, for example, although we live at upper and lower floors, I do not send it to my mother-in-law when I do not want it, even if they want it. I want the child to know her house that he must go with her mother. Or they, for example the other day my husband says; When he gets older he will open the door and go or something, I said; it is not like I just don't let him go but I want him to know to ask for my permission. He shouldn't go without my permission. Therefore, it is necessary to be a little dominant in this matter. I think mothers should be proactive on their children. (P5, mother of son, low SES)

#### 3.1.4.3 Pushing parenting behaviors

This theme refers to some parenting behaviors that the mothers push their toddlers to further independence without considering the toddler's developmental needs and abilities. Although two mothers reported that they were dissatisfied with the current independent functioning level of their toddlers and looking forward for their children's gaining further independence, only one of them (P4) reported some of her parenting behaviors which can be considered as pushing.

As the mother herself expressed, she perceived her 18-month-old daughter as an adult rather than a child ("...I don't see her as a small child anyways... rather I see her like an adult"-P4). Concordantly, she failed to recognize and adjust her behaviors

according to her daughter's individual and developmental needs and abilities. For instance, she reported that she started to give toilet training to her daughter without considering the toddler's biological and psychological capacity for this transition. She reported that even she heard of that her daughter was not mature enough to get toilet training, she justified her attempt by pointing her method of teaching and her daughter's special learning capacity. Furthermore, she reported that she was very eager to give toilet training to her daughter as soon as possible because it is the only way that her daughter can start daycare, which in turn, she can return her worklife.

As another instance, she reported that she did not provide supportive presence during her daughter's exploration behavior. She reported that she refused to help her daughter when she was in need in order to support her independence. However, contrary to her intention of supporting her daughter's independence, she failed to display the supportive behavior of providing secure base while the child was exploring around.

If it falls, I never catch it, let it run and falls... my husband runs immediately. No... I say no, let her get up, let her learn. You know, there is the girl, independent girl; Nil Karaibrahimgil has an advertisement for Aptamil... let her get up when she falls and prepare herself for life. Sometimes she screams when she wants to get on the chair, I say no, if you want to get on, get on by yourself. She does it, she tries and succeeds. Because I won't always be with her. She should do it by herself. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Similarly, she reported that with the intention of supporting the child's independence, she failed to set developmentally appropriate limits for her toddler.

She reported that she did not set limits to the child's diet or sleep routine.

Yes, if a resisting child does not want to sleep, it is not possible, you cannot put her to sleep, or if she does not eat anything, you cannot feed her. I'm giving an example chocolate. If I give one, her eyes are like radar like this, you cannot reduce her energy for 3 hours, but if she says no, I will eat 3, she eats 3. She determines how much she wants to eat. Even if she doesn't want to eat, she doesn't. an interesting kid. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

My husband says ‘Sleep time hasn't come?’ Dude is this remote control! This kid sleeps at 12, but if I start shaking at 10, I'll be tired, I will be the one worn out. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

### 3.2 Prenatal and postnatal maternal representations

This section refers to how the mothers’ prenatal and postnatal representations have affected their experience of the toddler’s developing independence. The analysis of the mothers’ narrations regarding their maternal representations indicated two main themes: the feeling of connectedness with the child and the recognition of the child as an autonomous being. While the first theme refers to the mothers’ prenatal and postnatal experience of an intimate, warm emotional bond with their children; the second theme refers to the mothers’ psychological openness to experience their children as they are and recognize and respond their individual signals and characteristics. In this regard, the analysis of the mothers’ narrations indicated 3 types of maternal representation in terms of how these two themes of connectedness and autonomy were emerged in their narrations. These 3 type of maternal representations were called as: Connected-Autonomous, Connected-Non-Autonomous, and Non-Connected.

In the following part, how these three types of maternal representations have affected the mothers’ experience of their toddlers’ developing autonomy will be discussed.

#### 3.2.1 Connected-Autonomous representation

Mothers whose representations involved the themes of both connectedness and autonomy were constituted this group. They provided clear, detailed, and affectively involved prenatal and postnatal representations about their children and themselves-as-mothers. Four mothers in the sample provided this type of maternal

representations: P6, mother of son, high SES; P8, mother of daughter, high SES; P9, mother of son, middle SES and P10, mother of daughter, middle SES.

To start with the pregnancy, these mothers reported their happiness and excitement about the news of pregnancy. Beside the mention of naturally occurring pregnancy-related physiological and psychological difficulties, they described their pregnancy as a happy and enjoyable period of their lives. They reported detailed and coherent representations regarding their unborn babies and themselves-as-future-mothers. They imagined their unborn babies and themselves mostly in positive terms. While imaginig their unborn babies they emphasized that they wanted that their children will be well-intentioned, lovely adults who will form good relationships and also be self-expressive and self-reliant individuals.

I would like C. to be a free-spirited person, I think she will be. I would like her to have high self-confidence. I think self-confidence is very important ... without depressing herself or her emotions by saying “ehm what would she think?” “What would my mom think if I do like that?” or “what would my neighbors or people around me think?”... By saying such like “I want to do this, I want to go there, and I want to wear this”... I want her to be able to do these. (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

While imagining about their infants, three of them (except P8) reported that they wanted their babies’ resembling both themselves and their husbands. Thus, on the one side, they indicated an identification, connection with their babies; on the other side, they indicated a disidentification, separateness from the baby.

With her self-confidence, I want her to be like her father in the sense that she can do whatever she wants against such people. But I want her to love people like me, and to be like myself in terms of loving society and environment. I am such a person who loves people, friends, environment and relatives. I want her to look like me in that way. You know... I want her to receive from my husband as well, because his aspects in this regards... I don't know how to say... I wish she is able to protect herself... I don't want her to get bullied like that... In cases she should be able speak properly where necessary. (P10, mother of daughter, middle SES)



One the other hand, one of them reported that she purposefully avoided to form too detailed, specific representations to adopt her daughter as she is.

I didn't say so much to make D.'s habit look like this... I mean, she should look like this, or look like this, I did not say that it should be this like that or something. We are in the mood to accept her as she is. (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

Furthermore, regarding the prenatal connection with their babies, three mothers reported an initiation of a warm and lovely bond with their unborn babies or their excitement about the development of the fetus.

It was a fun process for me. I think it was nice [laughs]...For example, my husband would speak, and C. would react to him from there lately. He was talking and talking, and he was kicking him like that. When he got older, I would feel his sobbing sounds. C. had turned in the womb very early. His feet were up. He used to squeeze my chest with his feet and stuff. He was a kid who always said I'm here, so we were always on the alert. He was a baby who always made us felt like he was there. (P6, mother of son, high SES)

Another mother (P8) attributed agency and individuality her unborn daughter. Because she got the news of pregnancy after they terminated the supportive treatment for childbearing, she thought that the unborn baby has an agency even in deciding when to exist and to be born.

Anyway, I don't know why but I believed she was holding on to me very tightly. Because pregnancy happened when she wanted it, I always looked at her that way. Not when I want it, but when she wants it, that's exactly what her character is. ... on the other hand, I was thinking about the thing, the date she will be born more or less. It was anticipated on the night of December 31st, I always said, I mean, C. will decide whether she will be a child of 2019 or a child of 2018. It really was like that, so she waited for January 2. (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

As in pregnancy, their postnatal representations also involved the two themes of the feeling of connectedness with the child and recognition of autonomy of the child. Firstly, mothers' narrations of the first encounter and the first postnatal relationship with their newborns mostly involved their feeling of connectedness to the baby. For example, beside the mention of exhaustion and suffering from physical

pain, they reported their feelings of love, enthusiasm, and serenity regarding their first encounter with their newborns.

Similarly, they defined their first postnatal times as a period in which they were always together with their babies and they did not care about anything other than their babies. These mothers mentioned about their admiration for their babies, enjoyment about maintaining the bodily contact with them and their intense desire for understanding and meeting their babies' needs immediately.

You are just breastfeeding, putting him to sleep and here's how it was created. Look at him, to his mouth, and to his ear... How God created it. Here it is what beautiful blessings Allah gives... You look with admiration. You know, to his mouth and nose... you watch him after that so you can't do much for the first two months only at that time until you reach forty days. After that comes an extreme sense of protection. You want to understand him, to feed him, change his diapers. Mommy stuff boosts to the ceiling right away, her hormones. You are always thinking of him. But he is sleeping and you are next to him... I was sitting next to him all the time... I give the breast whenever he wants, I can take out the diaper, and I can let him burp or let out gas. I am with him with all his problems. (P9, mother of son, middle SES)

Some of them described their current relationship with their toddlers as a warm and playful relationship. Three of them emphasized the reciprocal joy, pleasure and love while describing their relationship with their children.

Our relationship, so, you know, I think he got along very well with me. You know what should I say, I think it's a good relationship, I satisfy him and he satisfies me. I think we are compatible. (P9, mother of son, middle SES)

I think we are having fun, depending on the conditions we are in. So the most important criterion for me is to show love and affection. So, for example, here's the organic of this, the alternative thing of that... You know I don't get so attached to these things. I think the most important thing is to love and feel loved. (P6, mother of son, high SES)

Furthermore, breastfeeding was appeared as an area in which mothers reported their experience of close connectedness with their children during their infancy and the transition to toddlerhood. Beside some difficulties at the beginning of the breastfeeding process, they described breastfeeding as a very pleasurable

experience that they experienced the face-to-face and skin-to-skin contact feeling of unity/oneness with their infants. While two of them (P8 and P10) reported their view that breastfeeding plays a role in strengthening the emotional bond between the mother and baby, one of them reported that she perceived her toddler's asking for breastmilk as the sign of love for her.

In other words, coming next to you and saying "...mom, breast feed" is a way of showing his love to you. At that time it was just something to feed him. Now he establishes both his expectation and his connection with you, his dialogue with you. (P6, mother of son, high SES)

The feeling of breastfeeding is a very good feeling. At that moment, the current bond with her is a very different one. This is something I can't describe... You're totally integrated with it. In other words, you don't see anything at that moment. Her hug and suck on you, your eye to eye contact, and her sucking while murmuring. (P10, mother of daughter, middle SES)

Even though the breastfeeding was a pleasurable experience for them, they envisioned weaning as a natural and liberating process that they would manage. Two of them (P8, P9) reported their enjoyment about the baby-led weaning and the happiness about the upcoming weaning process.

So I think C. will leave it on her-own. Because when I go home, C. doesn't stick to my breast anyway. There are some children who immediately cling to the mother because she cannot see the mother all day and cannot get a breast. C. is not like that, she is independent. .. She's already down to this. I welcome this with a little happiness, no lie. You can only breastfeed in the morning and evening, the doctor said. (P8, mother of daughter, high SES)

Well, it will be a great comfort for me. I'm going to relax first. I'll say oh dude... For C., I don't think it's going to be a problem anymore, as he will suck enough. You know, he will not be cut from breast feeding early. (P9, mother of son, middle SES)

Regarding the increase autonomous behavior in their toddler's, they suggested their joy and excitement about their toddlers' autonomous functions such as moving, playing, eating by themselves, staying apart from the mother and forming relationship with others. They interpreted their toddler's autonomous behaviors as

the sign of their healthy development, individual characteristic (being stubborn), or the development of individuality and independence. Along with this positive way of interpretation and accompanying feelings, one of them (P6) also reported her interpretation of her toddler's autonomous behaviors as the loss of previous way of connectedness and express her longing to the early relationship with her infant in pregnancy and infancy. However, these feelings did not cause her to interfere her son's individuation process. Therefore, she was able to express and symbolize her feelings about this perceived separation and loss and prevented these feelings affecting the real relationship with her toddler.

Including this mother, all mothers' narrations involved their supporting-encouraging behaviors in the context of the toddler's developing independent functioning. For example, they were observant of their children's actual, idiosyncratic behaviors and able to follow their children's lead. Furthermore, they allow opportunities for their children developing further independence from them. For example, all four mothers reported that they could manage staying apart from their infants although it sometimes caused the feelings of longing, guilt, and regret in them. They reported a gradual decrease in this kind of feelings and rather an increase in their psychological adaptation, and also feeling of relief and comfort regarding staying apart from their children. They reported that applying for the assistance of the familiar and professional others enabled them to maintain a pleasurable, warm, and also an autonomous relationship with their children.

### 3.2.2 Connected-Non-Autonomous maternal representation

Mothers whose representations indicated a feeling of connectedness with the children but a difficulty in recognizing their children as autonomous beings

constituted this group. They provided elaborated, affectively involved, lengthy, but sometimes confused representations about their children and themselves-as-mothers. Four mothers in the sample provided this kind of maternal representations: P1, mother of daughter, low SES; P3, mother of son, low SES; P4, mother of daughter, low SES and P5, mother of son, low SES.

To start with the pregnancy, they reacted the news of pregnancy with heightened affectivity by indicating that they were very eager and ready to become mother. Some of them mentioned their excitement about development of the fetus and the prenatal connection that they form with their unborn babies. However, they sometimes provided too rigid and distorted representations regarding their unborn babies. For example, while two mothers of sons imagined their unborn babies either as “the sexual others” who will provide care and protection to them (P3 and P5); two mothers of daughters imagined their babies as “the self” who will be very similar to themselves (P1 and P4). To be more precise,

One of them imagined her son as a substitute man who will accompany her mother in the absence of her husband.

I, myself, am from X [a small city in eastern part of Turkey], a daughter of an eastern family. For some reason, male genes outweigh in our country. In other words, I don't know how to say, boys have a more protective, watchful and caring situation. It's like let him grow up as early as it can, and catch up with me, supports his mother. When you go somewhere, you know, when his father is not there, I shouldn't feel the absence of a man next to me, I should have my son with me. Therefore, I had such a request. So, I was bestowed with that (P5, mother of son, low SES)

One of them imagined her son as the man who will provide the care and affection that she expected from her husband.

My son was very nice to me. His father was behaving badly. He was behaving very well... I said I should have a son so have a hope for my life. (P3, mother of son, low SES)

One of them imagined that her daughter will resemble her and she will repeat the close relationship with her mother now with her daughter.

I always wanted to have a daughter because I'm very fond of my mother. I was thinking of my own childhood. I knew that she will look like me. I was a little bit of a thing, I was a mother inclined child. So I knew that S. would be a kid like that too. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

The last one reported that she wanted to have a daughter who will resemble herself in every sense but would have what she did not attained in her life, including university education, art education, and even the love and acceptance by her parents.

I prayed a lot so that she would look like me [laughing] I wanted her to look like me as a face, I looked in the mirror a lot ... I wanted her to look like me in every way. I wanted her to look like me both in the face and in the character. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

From the very beginning, I always wanted to have a daughter... I said so even when I was single. Now we are 3 sisters, my father always wanted a boy ... So, they didn't have a boy. Well my mother was always saying this, I hope my children will not live my destiny. When they get married, I hope their children will be boys, so their husbands wont treat them like that. My father always mistreated my mother when her children were girls. I always said that, if I get married, I will bring a daughter to this family. I said, I will break this order. I said, just as I broke the order of our family, as I said I am the first girl, I said that my first child will be a girl. I immediately informed my mother and father... Now I am looking at my dad, he is overly caring. Also the bond between the two is very nice, I love it very much. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Thus, as if these mothers' conscious or unconscious needs colored their expectations about their unborn infants. Even, these maternal expectations were reflected in mothers' choice of names for their babies, such as a name which indicates the mother's identification with her daughter or a literally the child's subjective meaning for the mother. Thus, even though their narrations indicated an initiation of a close and warm relationship with their unborn babies, their representations were too rigid and distorted to recognize and accept their children as they are.

After the birth, as in the pregnancy, their description of first encounter and first postnatal times mostly indicated a warm, close relationship with their newborns. Moreover, they provided postnatal infant representations which were very consistent with their prenatal expectations. Thus, the mothers-of-sons perceived their sons as male holding or authority figures

He is 'the man'. Man! Man! For example, I say it hurts. Loving like a big man and kissing like that. He is hugging me. I say God, you grew up and caring of me? You know the man like that. I hope it will continue like this. But, now, I see this. Different. If I say it hurts or something, he takes it in his arms and kisses muck muck or like that. (P3, mother of son, low SES)

whereas the mother-of-daughters indicated a pattern of fusion, overidentification with her daughters:

We are not mothers and daughters. I always say that she is my friend she is my very little friend. My youngest friend. Because, well, I went back to my childhood with her... My child, I cannot say that... she is my friend. I say that, the best thing is she brought back my childhood... I go to the park and swing. I want to swing too; I reach out to her with my child, wave it, she looks at me and laugh. So C. very dependent on me. That's why I say, I was reborn together with C... (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

I always say I was born again with her... I always have such dreams. I don't know how to swim either, maybe I'll go with her... because we were born together, we will grow up together, it is a must. I'm doing the same she's doing. My child eats what I eat... I mean, she doesn't eat anything without me or I don't eat anything without her... because we are one, we are together. I can't find a name for that anymore. I guess it'll be a little funny if I say halves of two apples. Well, we are either interlocked, or I want to see it that way... When she cries, I cry too. I say why are you crying. And a mother feeling. I understand and I say her ear hurts. (P4, mother-of-a-daughter, low SES)

M: She looks like me let me tell you so. Just like my mom, she used to say that, you know, your daughter will be like you, you will see. I say "Mom, did you curse me?"... You know I was not able to stay without my mom as well. It really is. You know, when I go to bathroom, C. cries at the door and screams. I can't let her go. Last week I went to stay with my mom. I went to bathroom. C. cries in front of the door. I say, my childhood is alive right now. I used to cry in front of this door too. Just like, mom come out, come out...  
I: What you live with your mom, now you are living with C..  
M: Think, that is to say, so my mother used to cook. I was among with my mother. In between her belly. I used to hug her legs. C. is doing the same to

me now. She just started to do it. I say, my Lord, it is the same, it is the same. (P1, mother of daughter, low SES)

Because they had very concrete, even unmodifiable, representations; some of them sometimes failed to recognize and respond their infant's idiosyncratic signals and needs. For example, because one of them imagined that her daughter would be a powerful, self-sufficient person; she failed to recognize and respond her newborn daughter's developmental needs appropriately.

...The child wakes up when the pacifier comes out of her mouth, cries, so I get up. I lose my sleepiness while I am trying to rock her again to sleep. You know, when mom unable to sleep, of course you're with her whole day, you waste a lot of energy during the day, it ruins you... I said, I will not give the pacifier directly to her mouth, when the pacifier falls off, I was holding her arm until she found the pacifier. My husband was also angry at me for why I was making the child cry...I said no, you won't interfere. Don't interfere with this kid... Don't interfere with my work. Let her cry I already lost my sleep...Now she drops her pacifier, finds it with both hands, puts it in her mouth back and lies down. She got used to it. Kids get used to whatever you teach... If she won't learn, this child will be more addicted. To me or anyone else. She shouldn't be. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

Similarly, another mother who imagined her son as an agreeable, warm man who will be nice to her mother interpreted her son's some exploration and insisting behaviors as the sign of his aggression.

Sometimes he becomes very aggressive. Such a combative. He has vicious movements. He scatters the books, the notebooks. When something is placed properly in front of it, it will not stop like that, he will definitely scatter it, I say "okay, my son..." (P3, mother of son, low SES)

The other one who have a very rigid representation that her son would be a great religious leader in future reported some instances in which they treated their son as if he were already such a figure.

After I found out that I was pregnant, I immediately started to keep a diary. I hope if he becomes a very big person, it will remain as such an encyclopedic thing, like a historical document. It would be nice. (P5, mother of son, low SES)



Even now, we talk to him as if he is great man, so it has to be like that. If you want him to be a great man, you will act like a big man. My husband already calls him as Mr. C... If you want him to be a useless person in a simpler job at work, you behave like that because personality development begins now...  
(P5, mother of son, low SES)

Furthermore, breastfeeding was also appeared as an important source of the feeling of connectedness in these four mothers' narrations. Three of them reported their feeling of pleasure and enjoyment during breastfeeding by suggesting the skin-to-skin, face-to-face contact and feeling of unity with their infants. Moreover, two of them described the breastfeeding as the gift of the God and magical medicine which cure every problem of the child. On the other hand, regarding weaning, two of them presented an unwilling attitude to cease this way of connectedness with their toddlers. For example, one of them reported that she refused to set an upper age limit for breastfeeding.

I wanted to breastfeed so much anyways. I looked a lot and I researched it, the baby finds peace there. Think of it as his home. That's why I say that I will breastfeed even though he is 3 years old. They say too many things to my sister. They say "hey... look how old is she? [the daughter of her sister, she is 4,5.] Cut it", and I say "let it be, she is her mom... She will cut it out whenever she wants. Whenever the kid wants. So I'm not doing anything."  
(P3, mother of son, low SES)

Regarding their children's developing autonomous behaviors, they mostly interpreted these behaviors of their toddlers mostly from a positive light (as the sign of their individual characteristics, developing competence, increased relationality in the mother-child dyad) and expressed their enjoyment and satisfaction about that. However, they sometimes interpreted these behaviors of their children from a more negative light. For example, one mother who imagined her son as the provider of the care and affection to her interpreted her son's walking as the sign of the upcoming separations and avoided to talk about this. Furthermore, as the mothers who took up the childcare by themselves, three of them reported that caring an increasingly

independent child got more difficult and tiring task for them. They attributed this increasing difficulty either the child's actively affecting their daily agenda, messing up the house or being selective after the transition to supplementary food.

Furthermore, although they generally reported their positive emotions regarding their toddlers' developing independence, they sometimes mentioned some negative emotions like anxiety about child's harming themselves (three of them), anxiety about the upcoming separations (one mother), anger about child's messing up the house or interfering her daily agenda (two mothers), and jealousy about her daughter's developing competence (one mother). Furthermore, they sometimes mentioned their restrictive-interfering and pushing behaviors in several contexts like at feeding, exploration, staying apart and forming relationship with others. For example, two of them reported that they have never stayed apart from their children and could not trust anyone who can provide alternative caregiving. As another example, one of them refused to provide secure base to her daughter in the context of exploration with the intend of supporting her self-reliance.

Even they reported some controlling attitudes regarding their children's further personality characteristics and lifestyle. For example, two of them reported that they raised their children in the way that they should not take too much distance from them. For example, they thought their political and religious values starting from their infancy to prevent their children from choosing wrong perspectives when they encounter different views in different contexts like university.

You cannot interfere with his ideas after a certain time, but he needs to see it from you, see and apply it. If the parents are in A, the child will be in A, not in Z ... So we can do nothing but give the basis well. Now we are, always on the foundation of C., as the first three years. We try to pay close attention to them as it ages, he will start school in the next period. At least the foundation, the foundation should be solid, so that it is no longer under the influence of such deceived outside or under the influence of other thoughts ... You currently live in a university environment, you see more at work in the

university environment. We try to avoid the malignancy of such environments. (P5, mother of son, low SES)

For example my sister-in-law does not like X [a political figure], and I raise my child with the love of X. I take it to the X shows, I have X agendas, I show the photos from there so that she can recognize it when she see it, I say look my daughter, this is grandpa... he is sweet. Ohhh are you teaching them! It is none of your business... doesn't get involved. I say it does not concern you, she is my child. (P4, mother of daughter, low SES)

To sum up, the analysis of these mothers' narrations indicated that while they formed a close, warm emotional bond with their children starting from the pregnancy, they had difficulty in representing their children as autonomous beings. Since their representations were too rigid even distorted, they failed to observe their children with a genuine interest, read and respond their idiosyncratic signals appropriately so experience them as they are. Similarly, the dominance of maternal expectations on mothers' perception of their children have also affected their experience and reactions regarding their toddlers' developing autonomous behavior. The development of autonomous behaviors in their toddlers was sometimes interpreted from a more negative point of view, arouse some negative emotions, and some controlling parenting behaviors in them.

### 3.2.3 Non-connected maternal representations

Mothers whose representations indicated a difficulty in terms of the feeling of connectedness with their children were classified in this group. They provided less detailed and affectively less involved prenatal and postnatal representations. Two mothers in the sample provided this type of maternal representations: P2, mother of daughter, high SES and P7, mother of son, high SES.

Firstly, they reported that they reacted the news of pregnancy with the feelings of unreadiness and unreality. While one of them reported that it was a

pregnancy that she planned to terminate, the other one reported that she did not get very happy because she got the news of a sac not a baby. Furthermore, both reported that they did not experience culturally expected emotionality during pregnancy or did not feel an excitement about the development of the fetus.

You know, I did not experience the sensuality of anything during pregnancy, I did not experience emotion like something like that my dear is growing inside me. (P7, mother of son, high SES)

I've never had such sensuality. I was a little more comfortable that way. I have never had such things like that; I would love my stomach, take pictures with hearts or something. Or I am not a mother; let me see something on TV and cry or something. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

They provided limited representations regarding their unborn babies and wanted them to resemble mostly their husbands, thus more a disidentification. They also reported that they did not imagine themselves-as-future-mothers.

I: So what kind of mother did you think you would be, when you were pregnant again?

M: For example, I never thought I would be like this. I thought I'd be comfortable. You don't know more precisely, it's a feeling you don't know. You don't know what will happen. I did not do anything, they used to do what they used to do, they gave birth, and the child was growing up by itself. You don't know, motherhood is done like this and that. You don't know anything. That's why I wasn't thinking of much. What am I going to do, what can I do; like a child will be born and grow up. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)"

I didn't have many dreams about how I would be a mother when I was pregnant. You think about it, you know, it will be born somehow, it will be caesarean or normal, it will be born somehow, but here's what kind of body will remain in me, I have experienced this worry a lot...I didn't have much of a dream about motherhood. Since I did not know how it is going to behave, I never knew what to do. (P7, mother of son, high SES)

Consistent with their experiences in pregnancy, their limited connection with their babies was also apparent in their narrations about the postnatal relationship with their infants. For example, their narrations regarding their first encounter with their newborns involved limited positive affectivity and absence of the mention of a bond

between them and their newborn. They reported that their first encounter with their newborns were not a touchy, emotionally ridden experience for them.

First meeting, as I said, I'm not a very emotional type anyway. So they gave the child, at first, I just gave birth, I mean. They cleaned the child's face and mouth, gave it straight. I looked, I said aa is beautiful isn't it F(the father). F. is crying on the side... I gave that child back like that, then they took it away. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

I was very normal, I was extremely normal. That's why, you know, I shouldn't know if I can cry when I see and get my child. That is to say, it is a baby. I got it, I said how nice it was, I gave it back to the doctor (laughter). So everyone is different. I don't know, for example, you read, observe or see on Instagram or on others. My God, they are so happy. I even saw something in myself for a while or I said, do I feel something missing? I said no, and then it became normal. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

They defined their postnatal times as difficult periods for them either because of having a difficult baby (P7) or not knowing how to initiate a preverbal communication with a newborn (P2).

Yes the moment I gave birth is a very emotional moment but I was not really a mother like and said, I looked at my baby like that, it was worth everything, my dear baby and so on... I mean, I have a friend who has a baby, she puts his baby, sleeps, sleeps until morning, sometimes he does not wake up if he does not wake up, they are called angel babies, you put them asleep, he does not cry, etc. You know, maybe if I had a baby like that, I would say how beautiful or something, but when he slept I was brushing my teeth and doing something, I would take a shower. (P7, mother of son, high SES)

...I feed this child, let it drink, put it to sleep, wake it up or something, what do I do when she is awake. (P2, mother-of-daughter, high SES)"

Moreover, they reported that they still have difficulty about embracing their maternal identity:

...I still felt myself as the elder sister of my daughter. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

Regarding their toddler's developing autonomous behavior, they experienced this situation from different perspectives and reacted differently to this change in their children. One of them generally expressed her joy and excitement about her daughter's increasing mobility and explicit communication abilities. She reported

that by this way, she formed a more joyful and reciprocal relationship with her daughter. Regarding this change in mother-child relationship, she expressed her satisfaction and enjoyment.

Previously, this thing was happening ... what do I do with this child when she is awake. because there is nothing to do. Now, for example, you are playing games, you are doing something ... I like it, I like it even when it reacts ... She brings her toys, which game she wants to play, what game she wants to play - for example, she loves books, she brings the book she wants to read what she wants to see and what she wants to watch. (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

Although she also reported her supportive parenting behaviors, her narration was involved some of her controlling behavior in the context of feeding.

Furthermore, she reported that although she dreams the opposite, she believed that she would be a restrictive mother because of her personality.

M: But I have a cousin, she tells everything to S., my sister, not to me. If she is going out, if she is going to come home at 2 in the morning, she goes to S. But if her lessons are good, everything is fine, if she will come at 8 pm, she will come home to me ... For example, she does not even offer me at 2 am, because I will question her directly: "Where have you been? What were you doing? Who were you with? Why are you staying till this hour? "

I: You say maybe I do it to C.?

M: I hope I won't be like that... though I will do the same again big probably. Late- she cannot stay over with someone else... I hope I won't do this but I am such like that. You know, she will come to me and tell about her boyfriend... (P2, mother of daughter, high SES)

On the other hand, the other mother reported her dissatisfaction about the current independent functioning level of her son. She reported that she was looking forward the child's attaining further developmental milestones which make him function completely independent of his mother. It was remarkable that she interpreted her son's developing independence only from the point of herself. She reported that she has no emotional reaction to her child's experimentation of autonomous behavior, except the feeling very little comfort when her toddler spend time with others.

Frankly it does not act independently that much. Wherever he goes, he wants me, there is not a very different feeling that it feels. I'm just waiting a little bit like this, waiting for his to walk, you know, let's hold his hand a little so we can go out. As I expect him to walk, his current state doesn't make me feel much. (P7, mother of son, high SES)

On the one hand, the last 6 months are a bit different from the first 6 months. At least I can give it to someone else, he can play a little with his father, and he can play a little with his grandmother. After showing the toy, it plays for 10 minutes, but still not much has changed. In terms of his need for attention or difficulty. (P7, mother of son, high SES)

However, even though she expressed her impatience about her son's further independent functioning, she did not report any pushing or restrictive-interfering parental behavior.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Summary of the results

The aim of the present study is to investigate a group of Turkish mothers' reactions to emerging autonomous behaviors in their toddlers in the context of their prenatal and postnatal maternal representations. Analysis of mothers' narrations regarding their reactions to autonomous behaviors in their toddlers yielded 4 main themes: (1) interpretation of autonomous behaviors in toddlers, (2) subjective assessment of caregiving to an increasingly autonomous toddler, (3) emotional reaction to autonomous behaviors and (4) behavioral reaction to autonomous behaviors.

Firstly, most mothers generally interpreted emerging autonomous behaviors in their toddlers from a positive point of view. When they considered the autonomous behaviors from the perspective of their children, most of them pleasantly interpreted various kind of these behaviors either as the sign of their toddlers' natural growth-healthy development, developing competence, individual characteristics (personality traits or gender) or gaining independence. When they considered the development of the autonomous behaviors from the perspective of themselves, most of them happily interpreted these behaviors as opportunities to get some rest or as the signals that they can return to some of their previous life routines soon. Furthermore, most mothers also interpreted the development of autonomous behavior in their toddlers from the perspective of the mother-child relationship. While some of them pleasantly mentioned an increase in reciprocal communication and interpersonal sharing with their toddlers, some mothers mentioned a sense of



separation and increase in interpersonal distance with the feelings of sorrow or anxiety.

In terms of the mothers' subjective assessment of their caregiving experience, some mothers, especially the ones who took up the childcare by themselves, reported an increasing difficulty due to the increased mobility and disobedience behaviors in their toddlers. In terms of emotional reactions, almost all mothers reported the arousal of both positive (joy-pleasure, excitement, and admiration-pride) and negative emotions (sadness/sorrow, anxiety, anger-intolerance, being rejected and jealousy) in them as a response to emergence of various kind of autonomous behaviors in their toddlers. In terms of behavioral reactions, while most of the mothers mentioned their autonomy supportive behaviors in various contexts, some of them reported some of their controlling (interfering-restrictive or pushing) behaviors in certain contexts such as feeding, playing, staying apart from their toddlers, and letting them form relationship with others independently. Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews indicated two themes which underlie the maternal representations: the feeling of connectedness with the child and the recognition of the child as an autonomous being. Based on how these two themes have emerged in mothers' narrations, three different types of maternal representations have been found: Connected-Autonomous, Connected-Non-Autonomous, and Non-Connected.

Results of the present study tentatively suggested that above-mentioned maternal reactions to emerging autonomous behaviors in toddlers have been shaped by mothers' prenatal and postnatal representations. In the following part, the link between this sample of mothers' maternal representations and maternal reactions during this transitional period will be discussed in relation to existing literature.

#### 4.2 Maternal reactions to autonomous behaviors in toddlers in the context of different maternal representations

A growing body of literature indicates that the relationship between the mother and the child starts well before the birth, in the mind of the mother as mental representations (Stern, 1995). Maternal representations in pregnancy are found to be effective on the mother's postnatal perceptions and parenting practices to the individual child (Zeneah et al, 1985; Zeneah et al., 1997; Sokolowski et al., 2007; Dayton et al., 2010; Ammaniti et al., 2013). Previous maternal representation studies which used well-established questionnaires that were developed by pioneers of the field such as WMCI (Zeneah, et al., 1995) and IRMAG-R (Ammaniti & Tambelli, 2010) suggested 3 categories of maternal representations: Balanced, Distorted, Disengaged in WMCI and Integrated/Balanced, Not Integrated/Ambivalent, Restricted/Disinvested in IRMAG-R.

Consistent with the maternal representation categories of above-mentioned measures, the analysis of this sample of Turkish mothers' prenatal and postnatal representations yielded 3 types of maternal representations: Connected-Autonomous, Connected-Non-Autonomous, and Non-Connected. These three types of representations were found parallel with the maternal representation categories of Balanced, Distorted, Disengaged of WMCI and Integrated/Balanced, Not Integrated/Ambivalent, Restricted/Disinvested of IRMAG, respectively.

Firstly, mothers who have Balanced representations reported a positive tie with their infants and showed psychological openness to both positive and negative affective signals and idiosyncratic personality characteristics of their infants (Zeneah et al., 1997; Dayton et al., 2010; Vreeswijk et al., 2012). Similarly, mothers with Integrated/Balanced representations provided coherent, elaborative, affectively rich

representations regarding themselves-as-mothers and their infants but also open to modifications based on the real interaction with their infants (Ammaniti & Tambelli, 2010; Ammaniti et al., 2013). Parallel findings emerged for the group of mothers who were classified as in Connected-Autonomous group in the present study. These mothers' narrations are characterized by the description of a close and warm bond with their children and the recognition of their children as autonomous beings starting from pregnancy to early toddlerhood. Mothers in this group provided clear, detailed, and affectively involved prenatal and postnatal representations regarding their children and themselves-as-mothers.

Secondly, mothers who have Distorted representations are found as showing heightened affective involvement with their infants but also an inability to be open to the actual, idiosyncratic signals that come from their infant or view their infants as the parent (Zeneah et al., 1997; Dayton et al., 2010; Vreeswijk et al., 2012). Similarly, mothers with Not Integrated/Ambivalent representations provided highly detailed, affectively involved but strikingly rigid and conflicted representations regarding themselves-as-mothers and their children (Ammaniti & Tambelli, 2010; Ammaniti et al., 2013). Parallel findings emerged for the group of mothers who were classified Connected-Non-Autonomous in the present study. These mothers' narrations are characterized by their description of a close and warm bond with their children but a difficulty in recognizing their children as autonomous beings. Mothers in this group provided too rigid and distorted representations regarding their children, which prevents them to experience their children as they are. They provided highly elaborated, affectively involved, lengthy, but sometimes confused representations about their children and themselves-as-mothers.

Lastly, mothers with Disengaged representations were found with decreased affective involvement and limited openness to the affective signals that come from their infants (Zeneah et al., 1997; Dayton et al., 2010; Vreeswijk et al., 2012). Similarly, mothers with Restricted/Disinvested group provided representations that were away from their personal and affective experiences and lack from detailed fantasies regarding themselves-as-mothers and their infants (Ammaniti & Tambelli, 2010; Ammaniti et al., 2013). In the present study, mothers who were classified in the Non-Connected group provided these kinds of maternal representations. These mothers' maternal representations are characterized by the lack of the mother's reference to a bond between her and her child. They provided less detailed and affectively less involved prenatal and postnatal representations regarding their children and themselves-as-mothers.

To sum up, the analysis of mothers' narrations regarding their prenatal and postnatal representations indicated two underlying themes: the feeling of a warm connectedness with their children and the recognition of their children as autonomous beings with their individual personality characteristics, apart from their own expectations, fantasies, projections for their children. Based on these two main themes, three types of maternal representations have emerged: Connected-Autonomous, Connected-Non-Autonomous, and Non-Connected. Furthermore, although the sample size of the study is too small to generalize, maternal representation categories that were emerged in this Turkish sample are found conceptually similar to the categories that were reported in the previous literature, predominantly based on Western samples (Vreeswijk et al., 2012). Furthermore, findings of the present study tentatively suggested that maternal representations have influenced mothers' reactions to emerging autonomous behaviors in their toddlers.

#### 4.2.1 Maternal behavioral reactions to autonomous behaviors in toddlers in the context of different maternal representations

Mothers in this sample mostly provided autonomy supportive parental behaviors while mentioning some instances of controlling behaviors in certain contexts. Both autonomy supportive and controlling behaviors reported by mothers are conceptually consistent with the parental behaviors suggested by Western literature. Furthermore, a slight effect of maternal representation style has been observed in mothers' behavioral reactions in the context of toddler's emerging autonomous behaviors.

Firstly, the mothers in Connected-Autonomous group were found very attentive to their toddlers' verbal and non-verbal idiosyncratic signals that indicates their individual needs, preferences, and abilities. They reported instances in which they moderated their parenting behaviors according to these signals. They mostly provided various autonomy supportive behaviors in several contexts such as feeding, clothing, play-exploration, and forming relationship with others.

Secondly, the mothers in Connected-Non-Autonomous group provided very consistent postnatal perceptions of their toddlers with their prenatal representations, such as a role-reversal or overidentification with their toddlers. Although the mothers in this group were very attentive to their toddlers' signals, they sometimes failed to read and respond them appropriately especially if these signals conflicted with their rigid representations for their children. Although they reported considerable amount of autonomy supportive behaviors; they reported some instances of controlling behaviors in certain contexts such as feeding, toilet-training, play-exploration and forming relationship with others.

Lastly, the mothers in Non-Connected group generally reported less affective and behavioral engagement with their toddlers. They reported a few instances of

autonomy supportive and controlling parenting practices although their toddlers' autonomous functioning appeared as a desired quality for them.

These results of the present study are mostly found in line with the findings of previous research on the relationship between maternal representations and parenting behaviors which suggests that mothers who have more Balanced representations showed more positive parenting behaviors compared to mothers with Non-Balanced representations. For instance, in his longitudinal case study, Ammaniti (1991) reported that the mother who represented her infant in detail but also have the openness to transform them was found more sensitive and responsive to the needs of her infant while the mother who have rigid representations of her baby was found incapable of reading and responding her babies' spontaneous affective signals correctly. These results are like the findings of the present study for the Connected-Autonomous and Connected-Non-Autonomous groups, respectively. Mothers in Connected-Non-Autonomous group sometimes failed to read and respond needs of their toddlers especially if they conflicted with these mothers' rigid or distorted representations for their toddlers. Consistent with the findings for the Connected-Autonomous group of this study, Dayton et al. (2011) and Ammaniti et al. (2013) reported that mothers who has Balanced or Integrated/Balanced representations were more joyful, sensitive, and responsive to the needs of their infants compared mothers with non-balanced representations. On the other hand, mothers with non-balanced representations showed more negative parental behaviors in real mother-child interactions. For instance, mothers with disengaged representations showed less sensitivity, encouragement, and guidance (Sokolowski et al., 2007) or more controlling behaviors (Dayton et al., 2010) while mothers with distorted representations showed more hostile parenting (Dayton et al, 2010). These results are

partially supported by the findings of the present study. While mothers with Non-Connected representations reported less engagement and less autonomy supportive or controlling behaviors; mothers with Connected-Non-Autonomous representations reported more controlling behaviors in this study. This inconsistency between the results of the previous literature and present study might be due to small sample size of the present study.

All in all, the present study provided support for the view that mothers who formed detailed representations, described a positive bond with her child but also left space for the child's idiosyncratic behaviors, personality characteristics showed more positive parental behaviors in the context of child's emerging autonomy. On the other hand, parental behaviors of mothers with more rigid or disengaged representations were more affected by their own agenda that they set for their toddlers and themselves rather than interacting with their toddlers by following the toddlers' agenda. Thus, as if there is a continuity between how much mothers let space for the child's individuality, autonomy in their mental representations as early as pregnancy and their parenting behaviors during their toddlers' emerging autonomy. In this regard, it seems that mothers who were able to represent their children as differentiated, independent beings from themselves starting from pregnancy are more likely to experience their children as differentiated, autonomous beings with different minds, needs, preferences, and abilities from their own. Maybe these mothers' higher mentalization capacities underlies both their ability to form affectively involved and detailed representations while acknowledging their babies' separateness from themselves. Moreover, higher level of mentalization capacity in mothers might help them to recognize and respond appropriately both connectedness and autonomy needs of their children. For instance, Arnott & Meins (2008) reported

that mothers who were more willing and able to represent their unborn infants were more likely to appropriately comment on their 6-months-old infants' internal states during a free-play interaction. They argued that mothers who represented their infants as separate entities as early as pregnancy might be more willing to learn about their children's individual needs, preferences, emotional states as they interact with their children after the birth.

From another point of view, the mothers' own childhood experiences with their parents might have affected their own motherhood experiences. Mothers who have experienced a warm, loving relationship with their own parents in which their individuality were recognized, hence developed a differentiated sense of self, might be more likely to pleasantly experience their own children as separate, autonomous beings and provide support their children's further autonomy (Edward, Ruskin & Turrini, 1981; as cited in Hock & Schirtzinger, 1992). On the other side, mothers whose relationship representations with their parents colored by more negativity were found as failing to attain a differentiated sense of self and experienced their children's autonomous behaviors as the rejection and loss of self and showed more controlling parenting behaviors. Thus, maybe higher levels of mentalization capacities, having a differentiated sense of self or positive representation of relationship with parents might influence mothers' representation of their children as autonomous beings and their autonomy supportive behaviors in early toddlerhood in Connected-Autonomous groups. On the contrary, lower levels of mentalization capacities, not having a differentiated sense of self or having negatively colored parental representations might cause mothers to fail to recognize their children's autonomy and show some controlling behaviors in the mothers who were classified as Connected-Non-Autonomous and Non-Connected in this study. How maternal



representations or parenting behaviors might be affected by the above-mentioned maternal variables should be investigated further.

#### 4.2.2 Maternal emotional reactions to autonomous behaviors in toddlers in the context of different maternal representations

Emotional reactions that were reported by this sample of mothers are found parallel with the previous literature on parental emotions of mothers in early toddlerhood, namely: Joy-Pleasure/Coherence, Anger, and Guilt-Separation Distress (Aber et al., 1999; Slade, 1999). Furthermore, the effect of maternal representation style has been observed in mothers' emotional reactions in the context of toddler's emerging autonomous behaviors.

Mothers with Connected-Autonomous representations generally provided positive emotions (joy-pleasure and excitement) in response to emerging autonomous behaviors in their toddlers. On the other side, mothers with Connected-Non-Autonomous representations provided high levels of both positive (Joy-pleasure, pride, and admiration) and negative emotions (anxiety and anger) in response to autonomous behaviors in their toddlers. As the mothers who took up childcare by themselves, they reported an increase in their anxiety about their toddlers' harming themselves and an increase in their anger in response to increased daily hassles, as the child increasingly more autonomous. Thus, as Aber et al. (1999) reported a significant increase in the mother's experience of anger in relation to the increased daily hassles, some mothers in this group also provided support for the change in mothers' experience of anger as their toddlers become more autonomous. Lastly, the mothers with Non-Connected representations reported autonomous behaviors in their toddlers as a desired quality. While one of them reported her joy-pleasure in response

to her toddler's increasing autonomous behaviors, the other one reported her dissatisfaction about her toddler's current level of autonomous functioning.

On the other side, all mothers reported a degree of maternal separation anxiety and accompanying feelings of longing, guilt, and regret regarding separations from their toddlers. However, while most of them could manage these negative feelings and stay apart from their infants, two of them suffered from separation anxiety so intense that in no case they could be separated from their toddlers. They reported their belief that mothers are irreplaceable figures in childcare and their toddlers are still in constant need of their mothers. Maybe as Levy (1970) suggested, they reversed their need for their toddlers as the need of their toddlers for them.

When considering the maternal separation anxiety by taking the maternal education level, employment preference, and socioeconomic status into account; although the sample size is too small to generalize, the findings of the present study provides support for the previous literature which suggests that mothers who are highly educated, preferred to be employed, and classified as high SES are more inclined to report lower levels of maternal separation anxiety (DeMeis, Hock & McBride, 1986; Hsu, 2004; Cooklin, et al., 2014). Furthermore, in this sample, mothers' having and accepting a reliable other, mostly maternal grandmothers, in childcare creates more opportunities for separation-reunion episodes for the mother-child dyad (Houndoumadi, 1996). Frequent cycles of separation-reunion might create opportunities for the mothers to gain more psychological adaptation to regulate their negative emotions during separations and enable them to maintain balance between proximity and distance.

#### 4.3 Cultural, intracultural, and gender-based differences in maternal reactions to autonomous behaviors in their toddlers

Turkey is suggested as a heterogeneous culture in terms of the value given to independence and interdependence of the individuals by different socioeconomic groups of the society (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). These different values were also reflected in parental goals and practices (Yağmurlu et al., 2009; Nacak et al., 2011; Corapci et al.; 2018). Although the present study was not designed to investigate the effect of socioeconomic status, the results of the present study raised a question on the effects of mother's socioeconomic level on their maternal representations and reactions to autonomous behaviors in their toddlers.

All mothers from low socioeconomic status were classified in the Connected-Non-Autonomous group. Their rigid and distorted representations sometimes were found to give rise to some controlling behaviors in the context of their toddlers' emerging autonomy. Above and beyond these mothers' representation categories, the socioeconomic context that these mothers live in might influence their parental experiences. For instance, having less education, less satisfying employment conditions, and less access to familial and professional others in childcare might have affected their parental behaviors and emotions. Maybe in such a context, motherhood appeared as a valuable source of self-worth and life-satisfaction for them so that they showed overvaluation and overinvolvement in their relationship with their children (Wisman & Goldenberg, 2005; as cited in Taubman-Ben-Ari, & Katz-Ben-Ami, 2008), which also results in more negative reactions such as anger-intolerance about their extensive mothering role and more controlling behaviors in childcare. Moreover, mothers in this group are the ones who spends their whole days with their toddlers in isolation, without any contact with another adult during daytime. On the

other hand, mothers in the other two groups are highly educated and willfully employed mothers who can allow themselves to take a break from mothering tasks during daytime and interact their toddlers with a fresh eye when they come back home. In this regard, maybe these mother's social isolation and being surrounded with extensive mothering tasks during a whole day contributed their more negative emotions and some controlling behaviors in interaction with their toddlers.

Lastly, the sample of the present study consisted of equal numbers of mothers-of-daughters and mothers-of-sons to gain access to the maternal narratives around the gender of their toddlers. Although the representation of the gender and gender-based differences in autonomy socialization are huge research areas to study these issues on their own rights, the findings of the present study suggested some gender-based differences in maternal representations and reactions to autonomous behaviors in toddlers. Only one mother predominantly attributed her son's autonomous behaviors to his male gender. On the other hand, most mothers' representations are colored by their infants' gender such that regardless of socioeconomic status, most mothers perceived daughters as more sympathetic, loving, and affectionate children whom they can form closer relationships because of being same sex. Furthermore, mothers with Connected-Non-Autonomous representations provided more gendered projections compared to the other two group. Consistent with Chodorow (1999)'s argument, while mothers-of daughters indicated an overidentification with their daughters, mothers-of-sons experienced their sons as the other who will provide the functions of caring and protection to them.

#### 4.4 Strengths of the study

Firstly, this study was the first attempt to investigate maternal reactions to emergence of autonomous behaviors in early toddlerhood in Turkish cultural context. No previous study has been identified which addresses this issue from the perspective of the mother. Moreover, it was the first qualitative attempt to uncover maternal experiences during the child's transitions from the state of dependence to the state of independence. Furthermore, there are very few studies which investigate maternal representations in the Turkish culture (Ilıcalı & Fişek, 2004; Buldur & Fişek, 2009; Sümer et al., 2016). In this sense, this study contributed to explore maternal representations of first-time Turkish mothers and how these representations shaped their later parenting experiences.

A qualitative research method might be useful to identify internal subjective experiences of mothers during this period. These findings may shed light to further studies that take this period as a focus of interest and can be used as building blocks to form hypothesis. Additionally, although the sample size is very limited to draw any conclusion, the diverse nature of this sample enabled to question the effect of some child and contextual variables that would contribute to maternal experience in early years of mother-child interaction. Thus, future research might investigate the role of child gender, temperament, and maternal SES in mothers' subjective experience in this transitional period.

#### 4.5 Limitations and future research

The main limitation of the present study is the small sample size. Thus, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution. Future research with larger and more representative samples is recommended to investigate how mothers react to their

toddlers' developing autonomous behavior in the context of their prenatal and postnatal representations.

In this study, we derived information about prenatal and postnatal maternal representations and maternal reactions to autonomous behaviors in their toddlers via utilizing the same research method, in-depth interviews. Future research which investigates maternal reactions towards autonomous behaviors in toddlers can use observational settings in addition to maternal representations. Furthermore, to understand the maternal experience in more detail; the effects of their representations of the relationship with their own parents and with their partners can be investigated further. The links between mothers' satisfaction level in these relationships and the real relationship with their children should be investigated further.

#### 4.6 Implications

The critical role of the mother in the early years of the human life has been widely documented. However, the mother's subjective experiences during this period of life appeared as a neglected area. As the child grows and experiences different stages of life which involves different tasks, the mother also goes through the different stages of her motherhood experience. In the present study, a sample of mothers' subjective experiences starting from pregnancy to transition to toddlerhood is aimed to be studied and results suggested that the above-mentioned life period involves many transformations in the mothers' life. While some of them were able to adaptively cope with these changes and their mothering role within a supportive environment; some mothers, especially the ones who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, were found in need of the presence of others both to be assisted in childcare and to maintain their psychological well-being. In this regard, maybe the mother support

groups headed by a professional would be beneficial for these mothers both to share their personal experiences and to have reliable others to consult about their difficulties during this time. Furthermore, another finding of the present study is the link between the prenatal and postnatal representations and parenting behaviors of mothers in early childhood. Based on this finding, some preventive works on early motherhood experience which targets the maternal representations as early as pregnancy can be implemented.



## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:

- Age:
- Level of education:
- Year of marriage:
- Occupation:
- Age of child:
- Gender of child:
- Husband's level of education:
- Husband's occupation:
- Mother/Father alive:

#### PART I: Mother's Experience of Pregnancy and Prenatal Representations

1. How did you notice your pregnancy? How did you feel? (If not mentioned, ask the questions below briefly.)
  - Reaction to the timing of pregnancy?
  - Planned or Unplanned?
  - Husband's reaction?
  - Extended family members' reaction?
2. How did you experience your pregnancy? Is there anything that was difficult for you?
3. Did you know the sex of the fetus? If yes → How did you feel when you learn about that? (If not mentioned, ask the questions below briefly.)
4. What is your expectation about the sex of the fetus? Why did you prefer a son or daughter?
5. What is the reaction of your husband and extended family members to the sex of the fetus?
6. What kind of a baby you were dreaming of? (If needed: from the movements in the womb, what kind of baby you thought you would meet after birth?)
7. Whom did you want your baby to resemble, in what ways? For instance, while you were fantasizing about your baby, who would you expect your baby to resemble physically and in character?
8. What were your anxieties and fears about the baby?
9. How did you decide the name of your baby?
10. What is your imagination about yourself-as-mother?
11. What are your anxieties and fears about motherhood?

#### PART II: Mother's Experiences after Birth and Postnatal Representations

12. How was your delivery? (If not mentioned, is it easy or difficult for you?)
13. Pregnancy was ended with birth. What is your experience of ending of pregnancy?
14. How was your experience of first postnatal times? (If not mentioned, how was it to be with your baby?)
15. How was your experience of breastfeeding? Did you enjoy it? (If not mentioned, asked the questions below briefly.)



- (If still breastfeeding →) What is your current experience of breastfeeding?
  - (If still breastfeeding →) How long do you plan to continue to breastfeed?
  - (If weaned →) When and how it happened? What is the experience of baby/mother?
16. What kind of a baby was he/she as a 6-months-old?

### PART III: Mother-child Relationship in Toddlerhood and Maternal Reactions to Autonomous Behaviors in Toddler

17. Your child is X months old now. What kind of a child now? How do you describe his/her character?
18. How do you describe your child as a girl/boy?
19. Who do you think your child resemble? What do you think and feel about his/her resemblance to that person?
20. Is your baby congruous with his/her name?
21. It is very normal for mothers to have fears and concerns in every stage of early childhood. What were your fears and anxieties during the last 6 months?
22. How do you describe your relationship with your child?
23. X (Name of the child) seemed to start moving gradually now. He/she was in your womb, then in your lap, now he/she is crawling/walking. How does it feel to you?
24. How do you feel and think when your child is doing something by his/her own?
25. Have you ever stayed apart from your child? (If yes, ask the questions below. )
- How do you feel when you stay apart from your child?
  - How do you think your child feels then?
26. How do you feel when other people (your husband, mother...) engage with your child?
27. How do you understand what your child wants or needs? Is there any example that comes to your mind?
28. How do you express your demand to your child? Is there any example that comes to your mind?
29. Is there any situation that your and your child's desire was conflicting? Is there any example that comes to your mind? What do you do in such situations?
30. What are your imaginations/expectation about your child as an adult? (Do you imagine his/her going to school, his/her adolescence...)
31. What kind of a male/female adolescent do you think your baby will be?
32. What kind of changes happened in your life when you have a child?

### PART IV: Mother's Parental Representations

33. How do you define your mother (the person who provided mothering) as-a-mother? (If not mentioned, ask the questions below briefly.)
- What was your memories about your mother?
  - What kind of a baby/child were you?
34. How was your relationship with your mother in your childhood and now?
35. Is there anything you modeled your mother as a mother?
36. Is there anything that you did not want to model your mother as a mother?
37. Is there any other mother that you modeled in your own motherhood? What did you model? Why is it important?
38. How do you think having a child affected your relationship with your own mother?
39. How do you define your father as father?

## PART V: Perceived Maternal Efficacy

40. Having a child for the first time is not an easy thing for a woman, there are many things to get used to. What kind of a mother do you perceive yourself?
- What are things that you think you are doing well?
  - What are things that you think you have difficulties in?
  - What do you think you need to be a mother as you wish (based on the definitions the mother gives)?
41. Finally, what would you like to share with the new mothers? Is there anything that you have learned from your own experience that would help the new mothers?



## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (TURKISH)

#### DEMOGRAFİK BİLGİLER:

- Yaş:
- Öğrenim durumunuz:
- Kaç yıllık evlisiniz:
- Mesleğiniz:
- Çocuğunuz kaç aylık:
- Çocuğunuzun cinsiyeti:
- Eşinizin öğrenim durumu:
- Eşinizin mesleği:
- Anne/Babanız hayatta mı:

#### BÖLÜM I: Annenin Hamilelik Deneyimi ve Doğum Öncesi Annelik Temsilleri

1. Hamile olduğunuzu nasıl öğrendiniz/fark ettiniz? Nasıl hissettiniz? (Eğer, annenin anlatımında yoksa aşağıdakiler kısaca sorulacak.)
  - Zamanlaması nasıl geldi size?
  - Planlı bir hamilelik miydi?
  - Eşiniz nasıl tepki verdi?
  - Büyük aile/yakın çevre nasıl karşıladı?
2. Hamilelik süreciniz nasıl geçti? Sizi zorlayan bir şey oldu mu?
3. Çocuğunuzun cinsiyetini doğumdan önce biliyor muydunuz? (Evetse → Cinsiyetini öğrenince nasıl hissettiniz? (Eğer annenin anlatımında yoksa aşağıdakiler kısaca sorulacak)
4. Cinsiyetini öğrenmeden önce sizin gönlünüzden ne geçiyordu? Neden bir kız/oğlan çocuk istemiştiniz?
5. Eşiniz ve büyük ailenizin tepkisi nasıldı?
6. Nasıl bir bebek olacağını hayal ediyordunuz? (Gerekirse: yani bebeğinizin karnınızdaki hareketlerinden../elinizi karnınıza koyup../doğumdan sonra nasıl bir bebekle karşılaşacağınızı düşünüyordunuz..)
7. Bebeğinizin hangi yönleriyle, kime benzemesini istiyordunuz? Örneğin; zihninizde bebekle ilgili hayaller kurarken fiziksel ve huy itibariyle kime benzemesini istiyordunuz?
8. Bebekle ilgili kaygılarınız korkularınız nelerdi?
9. Bebeğinizin ismine nasıl karar verdiniz?
10. Nasıl bir anne olacağınızı hayal ediyordunuz?
11. Annelik konusunda sizi endişelendiren, gözünüzü korkutan, çekindiğiniz konular var mıydı?

#### BÖLÜM 2: Annenin Doğum Sonrası Deneyimleri ve Annelik Temsilleri

12. Nasıl bir doğum olmuştu? (Eğer annenin anlatımında yoksa: sizin için zor bir doğum mu yoksa kolay bir doğum mu olmuştu?)

13. Doğumla birlikte hamilelik sona erdi. Hamileliğin bitişi nasıldı?
14. Doğum sonrası ilk zamanlar nasıldı? (Eğer annenin anlatımında yoksa: bebeğinizle birlikte olmak nasıldı?)
15. Emzirmek nasıldı? Hoşunuza gitti mi emzirmek? (Eğer annenin anlatımında yoksa aşağıdakiler kısaca sorulacak.)
  - (Eğer hala emiyorsa→)Şimdi nasıl bir şey haline geldi emzirmek?
  - (Eğer hala emiyorsa→)Ne kadar süre emzirmeyi düşünüyorsunuz? Bebeğinizi süttten kesecek olmak size nasıl geliyor/bebeğiniz için nasıl bir deneyim olacak?
  - (Eğer memeden kesildiye→): Ne zaman, ne oldu da kesildi? Sizin için/bebeğiniz için nasıl bir deneyimdi?
16. İlk 6 ayında nasıl bir bebektir?

### BÖLÜM III: Annenin Yürümeye Başlayan Çocukluk Döneminde Çocuğu ile İlişkisi ve Çocukta Gelişen Özerk Davranışlara Tepkisi

17. Çocuğunuz şu an X ay civarında, sizce şimdi nasıl bir çocuk? Ne tür huyları var?
18. Çocuğunuz bir kız/oğlan olarak nasıl tarif edersiniz?
19. Huyları açısından birine benziyor mu? Kime benziyor? Size nasıl geliyor o kişilere benzemesi?
20. İsmi ile uyumlu bir bebek mi?
21. Erken çocukluk döneminde annelerin her aşamaya ilişkin korku ve kaygılarının olması çok normal. Sizin doğum sonrası ilk korkularınız kaygılarınız nelerdi, bu son 6 aya dair korku ve kaygılarınız nelerdi?
22. Çocuğunuzla aranızdaki ilişkiyi nasıl tarif edersiniz?
23. X (Çocuğun adı) artık yaşı itibariyle ufak ufak hareketlenmeye başlamış. En başta karnınızdaydı, sonra kucağınızda, şimdiyse emekliyor/yürüyor. Bunlar size nasıl hissettiriyor?
24. Çocuğunuzun kendi başına bir şey yaptığını gördüğünüz zaman içinizde neler uyanıyor, nasıl hissediyorsunuz?
25. Çocuğunuzla ayrı kaldığınız durumlar oluyor mu? (Evetse→aşağıdakiler sorulacak.)
  - Ayrı kalmak size nasıl hissettiriyor?
  - Sizce çocuğunuz nasıl hissettiriyor?
26. Başkaları (eşiniz, anneniz, vb.) çocuğunuzla ilgilendiğinde nasıl hissediyorsunuz?
27. Siz çocuğunuzun ne istediğini veya neye ihtiyacı olduğunu nasıl anlarsınız? Aklınıza gelen örnekler var mı?
28. Çocuğunuzun sizin ne istediğinizi nasıl anlatırsınız? Aklınıza gelen örnekler var mı?
29. İkinizin farklı şeyler istediği oluyor mu sizce? Böyle bir örnek geliyor mu aklınıza? Bu gibi durumlarda ne yapıyorsunuz?
30. Çocuğunuzun büyüdüğünü, düşündüğünüzde nasıl biri olmasını istiyorsunuz/bekliyorsunuz? (okula gittiğini, ergenliğini vs. hayal edebiliyor musunuz?)
31. Çocuğunuzun nasıl bir genç kız/delikanlı olacağını düşünüyorsunuz?
32. Çocuk sahibi olmanın hayatınıza ne tür etkileri oldu?

#### BÖLÜM IV: Annenin Ebeveynlerini Temsili

33. Sizin anneniz (ya da bakım sunan kişi kimse) nasıl bir anneydi? (Eğer annenin anlatımında yoksa aşağıdakiler kısaca sorulacak.)
- Annenizle neler yaptığınızı anımsıyorsunuz?
  - Siz nasıl bir bebekmişsiniz/çocukmuşsunuz?
34. Siz küçükken annenizle nasıl bir ilişkiniz vardı, şimdi nasıl oldu?
35. Kendi annenizin anneliğinden örnek aldığınız şeyler var mı?
36. Annem şunu pek iyi yapmıyordu, onun gibi olmayacağım dediğiniz şeyler var mıydı?
37. Kendinize anneniz dışında örnek aldığınız anneler var mıydı? Nelerini örnek alırdınız? Bu (bahsettiği şey) sizce neden önemli?
38. Çocuk sahibi olmak annenizle ilişkinizi nasıl etkiledi?
39. Babanızı nasıl bir baba olarak tarif edersiniz?

#### BÖLÜM V: Algılanan Annelik Yeterliliği

40. İlk defa çocuk sahibi olmak bir kadın için kolay bir şey değil, alışılması gereken pek çok durum söz konusu. Siz kendinizi nasıl bir anne olarak görüyorsunuz?
- Neleri iyi yaptığınızı düşünüyorsunuz?
  - Nelerde zorlandığınızı düşünüyorsunuz?
  - (Verdiği tanımlar üzerinden) istediğiniz gibi bir anne olabilmek için sizce nelere ihtiyacınız var?
41. Son olarak, kendi annelik deneyiminizden edindiğiniz, işe yaradığını düşündüğünüz, yeni anne olacak kişilerle paylaşmak isteyeceğiniz neler olurdu?

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